

NAVIGATING the STORMS of LIFE



Gary Inrig



introduction

Navigating the Storms of Life

t times when things are going well, life is smooth sailing. At other times we are faced with stormy seas and feel hopelessly adrift. The stormtossed occasions make us wonder where our lives are going, or how to take the next step with restored confidence. But I think you'll be encouraged by this excerpt from *True North*

by pastor Gary Inrig whose insights on the life of Job help us fix our eyes on the right reference point so that when life's waves toss us back and forth, we can find our course with confidence.

Mart DeHaan

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one

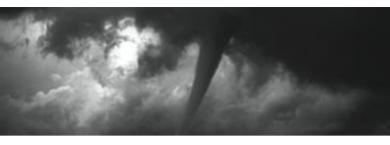
Finding True North

he only hope a sailor has of surviving a storm and navigating an ocean is to have a fixed reference point that enables him to discover where he is and where he is heading. The first navigators kept in sight of land, using familiar landmarks. When mariners dared to push beyond the sight of land, they still needed to find a fixed point of reference. So they looked to the heavens. As knowledge grew and celestial navigation developed, the primary reference point for navigators in the Northern Hemisphere became the North Star, Polaris.

Modern technology has changed the process. Sextants and compasses have given way to electronic navigation and the Global Positioning System (GPS). But the principle remains the same. The reference points for the GPS are a network of satellites that send out signals, which a receiver then uses to compute latitude, longitude, and even altitude. Those satellites have precisely fixed and reliable orbits.

Our North Star is the triune God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. We possess the words and works of Jesus in the Bible. In it we can hear his voice. We stand at the cross and wonder at the depth of his love. We stand before the open tomb and recognize his power. We have his Spirit living within us to personalize his presence. He is the fixed point, the North Star, or, to use his description of himself, "the bright Morning Star" (REVELATION 22:16).

Our North Star enables us to live well. This is true whether we are in relatively familiar waters with familiar landmarks comfortably in sight or we find ourselves in uncharted waters with nothing visible on the horizon. It is our focus on Christ that will keep us on course. That can easily sound like a pious platitude, but in the middle of a storm it becomes an urgent necessity.



two

Storms Hit Unexpected People

o one is exempt from the storms of life, not even the most righteous people, the most faithful ones, or the most devoted biblical characters. The opening words of the book of Job introduce us to a life well lived and a man whom God marked out for his upright character (JOB 1:1–5). Whatever else is true of the biblical character named Job, he was not an ordinary man, and his was not an ordinary life. And profound as the book is, it does

not attempt to answer all of our questions about the mystery of evil.

There is much that we do not know about Job. We are not told when he lived, how he was connected to the people of Israel, or even who wrote the book attributed to his name. But the message the Holy Spirit intends us to learn from Job's story does not depend on these things. It does, however, require us to consider carefully the information we are given about the man described in these opening verses. As we read his story, we must recognize that he is an exception, not the norm.

→ Certain aspects of **the story of Job** indicate that he lived between 1000–2000 BC. For one, he lived to be 140 years old, indicating a time near the days of Abraham. Later chapters also mention animals we are unfamiliar with (40:15–19; 41:1–34). This leads many scholars to believe that this was an ancient song or poem that scribes eventually recorded.

Job's Character Examined

Job was a person of impeccable character, a man of integrity, "blameless and upright." This was not just the human author's opinion. Remarkably, it was the opinion of God, who challenged Satan with Job's character: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (JOB 1:8). No higher affirmation can be imagined.

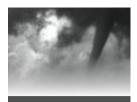
"The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding" (JOB 28:28). Job was a sinful human being, but he towered above his contemporaries in the integrity of his inner life.

Job was also a person of substance. Job, in the currency of his day, was a successful and prosperous man. Family was considered wealth, and a man with seven sons was rich indeed. Seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred working teams of oxen, five hundred donkeys, a large retinue of servants—these were all marks of power and prominence. Job was a man to be reckoned with; a man who was not only personally prosperous but who also wielded great economic influence in his region. He was not merely successful; he was "the greatest man among all the people of the East" (Job 1:3).

Job was a man with a vigorous and authentic spiritual life, combined with a deep concern for his family. His wealth had not made him self-indulgent or self-sufficient. He was a man of prayer who upheld his children before the Lord (Job 1:5). Job did not take his wealth for granted and forget God. Nor did he believe his children were entitled to live the good life, indifferent to God. We begin with a clear picture of the man at the center of the action. He was the kind of person people admired and God marked out as special.

Then, suddenly, unpredictably, everything changed. Job's life was torn apart, and he had no way of knowing why. He was living at ground level as one disaster after another tore apart his carefully constructed life.

As readers, we are given the advantage of seeing Job's life from a heavenly perspective. But as we live our own lives, we live where Job did, at ground level, unable to see things from above. And that is the heart of the life of faith—trusting when and where we do not see or understand.



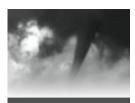
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Job's Avalanche of Troubles

Round one of Job's troubles began with the sudden arrival of one of his servants with the report that all of Job's oxen and donkeys had been stolen and the rest of his servants killed (JOB 1:13–16). It isn't clear whether this was an act of war or a brutal robbery, but it's an act that combined terror with massive personal and financial losses. Job barely had time to catch his breath when the second blow fell. This time it was some kind of natural disaster, perhaps a massive lightning strike that caused a fire to destroy his sheep and his shepherds. But once again, Job

had no time for the bad news to sink in before more troubling news arrived. The raiding parties of the Chaldeans had swept down, stolen Job's camels, and killed his herdsmen (JOB 1:17). Once again, he had no opportunity to process the information. Another messenger arrived with far worse news. Of all the news Job received, none was worse than this. A tornadolike wind had taken the lives of all of his children (JOB 1:18–19). Combined with the other messages, this made Job's life a waking nightmare. His prosperity, his security, his lifestyle, his social standing, and his family had vanished in a moment's time. Within minutes, he had been transformed from the greatest man of the East to the most desolate man on Earth. Harsh as Job's nightmare day was, however, this was only round one.

Round two of trouble targeted Job's personal health and well-being (JoB 2:7–9). The specifics of Job's disease aren't clear, but his condition was extremely painful and socially isolating. He was reduced to a beggar-like existence, sitting on a garbage heap, surrounded by broken pottery and the ashes of burned-out fires. He had lost everything of value to him: family, health, property, social standing. Even his wife, traumatized by her grief, was in no condition to give him support. Nothing in life made sense to Job at that moment, although something of value did remain—his view of God. It had been threatened, but not lost. In fact, as we shall



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see, it was Job's focus on God that enabled him to navigate the storm.

Not many have experienced what Job did. But we can identify with the feeling of being far out at sea in a lifethreatening storm with no familiar landmarks in sight. As I write this, I am about to visit a young woman whose husband suddenly collapsed during a workout, leaving her a widow with two small children. Her clearly envisioned future has come to a sudden and painful end. How do I go on? That becomes the fundamental question when we are faced

with situations we can hardly imagine and cannot change. The book of Job is intended to help us answer that question, but not in a theoretical way. Although the book confronts us with the problem of evil, it does not intend to give us a philosophical resolution. Instead, it challenges us, in the face of unexplained and unexplainable tragedies, to fix our eyes on God.



three

Behind the "Seens" of Life

The Cosmic Conflict

God claims every inch of the universe, and that claim is attacked and challenged by Satan. Behind the "seen" of human history and our lives is a cosmic conflict between God and the evil one. It's not really a contest. Satan is in no way God's equal or even his rival, although he bitterly opposes all that God does. We are rarely aware of how that invisible drama touches our lives, but the truth is that our lives are part of a bigger story than we can imagine. And the unique thing the book of

Job does is to allow us to stand in the throne room of heaven and understand the heavenly backdrop to earthly events. We are allowed to see what Job never saw and to know what he was never told. The story unfolds in dramatic form, and we need to be careful about pressing the details in a way Scripture doesn't intend. What is clear is that our world is the stage for the enduring conflict between God and Satan; that's the bigger story. Job's story calls us to recognize the mystery of life, and reminds us that many of the explanations we attempt to give are profoundly shortsighted (Job 1:6–12).

We are told very little in the Bible about how the heavenly realm operates. But the book of Job presents us with a remarkable (and rare) glimpse behind the scenes: Angelic beings came into God's presence, and Satan was with them—but not as one loyal to God. Elsewhere in Scripture we meet Satan as "the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night" (REVELATION 12:10). It seems that Satan has access to the presence of God, where he opposes God's work by attacking and accusing God's people. Why God permits this we are not told.

That same verse, **Revelation 12:10**, tells us that Satan will be cast out of heaven just before the final events of the tribulation period.

However, it was in that setting that God took the initiative by issuing a challenge to Satan: "Where

have you come from?" The Lord was not asking for information; he was calling Satan to account. Satan's response was ambiguous: "I've been wandering around the earth, everywhere in general and nowhere in particular." This was met by the Lord's direct challenge—an amazing affirmation of Job: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him: he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (JOB 1:8). We should not pass over this too quickly. There is a profound fact about human existence found in these words. God's purpose is to magnify his worth and glory in and through his people. Of all the features of his creation he



Of all the features of his creation he could use to shame Satan, the Lord chose someone who feared him. The importance of this for every single Christ-follower cannot be exaggerated.

could use to shame Satan, the Lord chose someone who feared him. The importance of this for every single Christ-follower cannot be exaggerated. We bear the name and reputation of our God, not only before the world but also before the "principalities and powers" (see EPHESIANS 3:10 NKJV).

If God's purpose is to magnify his glory, Satan's

purpose is to defame God and to deface God's glory. Satan's counterchallenge strikes at the heart of a believer's relation to God. You can hear the sneer of contempt in his words (read Job 1:9–11). Satan's words are a tremendous insult to God. In effect he is saying that God is not worth serving simply on the basis of who he is. Instead, Satan implies that God needs to buy the loyalty of Job and the rest of mankind, and that the only reason anyone would choose to worship God is self-interest.

The central question of the book of Job is not, Why do the righteous suffer? but, Why do the righteous

serve God? Human beings are sinful, and the corrupt motives of people say more about us than about God. Nevertheless, Satan raises an issue that every Christian must deal with: Why do I follow Christ? Do I love God for his gifts or for himself? Would I still love him if he asked me to or made me walk the path of suffering and sacrifice?

Warren Wiersbe sums up this issue well: "Satan's accusation cuts at the very heart of worship and virtue. Is God worthy to be loved and obeyed even if He does not bless us materially and



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protect us from pain? Can God win the heart of man totally apart from His gifts? In other words, the very character of God is what is at stake in this struggle." God's glory is at stake in the way we respond to situations that enter our lives. The issues we face are often far bigger than our own peace and happiness.

Suffering Has a Place

Suffering falls within the sweep of God's sovereignty. How a sovereign, all-powerful God relates to the suffering of a fallen world is an enormous mystery. Yet Job did not make the mistake of assuming that if he could not understand it, God must not have anything to do with it. Job did not deny the truth of God's ultimate sovereignty because of his frail understanding. Neither must we. Satan does what he does, but not outside the boundaries of God's control. The evil one is not free to act autonomously. He could touch Job only with God's permission (Job 2:5–6).

(A) We should not assume that we must understand God and all of his ways. Several places in Scripture remind us that as creatures, it is beyond our ability to fully understand the Creator (SEE ISAIAH 55:8–9; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:25).

Our God remains sovereign even in the inexplicable events of life. One important message from Job's story is that *there is such a thing as undeserved suffering*. Some suffering is due to God's

punishment and some to the consequences of sin in our lives. But not all suffering is the result of personal sin. That is a concept Job's friends utterly failed to grasp in the central section of the book (chs. 4-37). Their theology—whatever a person reaps, he has sown is as clear as ice and twice as cold. They were sure that Job must have committed some deep, hidden sin to experience such dire consequences, and they were relentless in their accusations. But they were



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wrong. The opening chapter makes it clear that Job's sufferings occur not because he is sinful but because he is righteous. There is mystery here, and that is precisely the point. We are not in possession of all the facts, and we need to be humble before claiming to know the mind of God.

The *why* of his suffering remains a mystery to Job, as ours often does to us. But I am sure of two things. First, suffering is not always a consequence of direct personal sin, but it is always the result of living in a fallen world. None of us are exempt from the effects of that fallenness.

Second, suffering may be undeserved, but it

is never purposeless. Job says it beautifully: "He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). God uses even undeserved suffering to refine us and to produce in us a growing likeness to Jesus, all for his glory and for the good of others.

Suffering presents us with mystery. As Job pours out his feelings and thoughts, it becomes clear that he thinks God is, for some unexplained reason, angry with him (JoB 3–31). He is wrong. In fact, God is proud of him. Throughout their discourse, Job and his friends see his situation as a problem to be

solved. Only in the end does Job realize that it is a mystery. A mystery not to be unraveled, but one that must be surrendered to an all-wise, all-powerful God.

It has helped me immeasurably to realize that my fundamental concern in stormy times must not be, How can I get out of this? but, What can I get out of this? That is not passive resignation. Job struggles mightily to understand and barrages heaven with his



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questions. God actually approves his desperate quest for answers even as he rebukes the rigid orthodoxy of Job's friends: "You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has" (JoB 42:7). But in the end, Job is reduced to silence before the mystery of God's sovereign purposes. And Job's final response to his suffering? Job holds his course, even in the midst of catastrophic storms. How? He has a North Star, and he takes his bearings from a reference point that is fixed and certain.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 41.



four

Navigational Tools for Life

A Chart of the Triune God

Job does not come to these crises unequipped. He knows God. Job's stability is drawn from a lifetime of worshiping and walking with God. When Job's nightmare day comes to an end and he finds himself stripped of everything he valued, his words are profound: "'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.' In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (Job 1:20–22). It is impossible not to be moved by Job's response. He makes no effort to choke

off his emotions. Through tears, Job maintained his focus on the Lord. His response of worship is not empty ritual but the practiced response of a man who has learned to walk with his God. Job felt the storm in all its intensity, but he chose to focus on the Star, not the storm, to see above the horizon to the living God. He was deeply aware of God's grace ("the LORD gave") and his sovereignty ("the LORD has taken away"), and he chose to praise God, even in the midst of his pain. These are not trite words; they are not pious words



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he was expected to say. This was the resolve of his deepest being.

As chapters 3 to 31 in the book of Job reveal, Job had a passionate trust in God. But when he entered the crucible of grief, these chapters describe the depth of his struggle to maintain his confidence in both God's goodness, as well as his control. If Job's immediate recourse was confidence in God's control, his ultimate resolution was trust in God's character.

In the powerful conclusion of the book, Job meets the living God (JoB 38–42). He receives no explanations for what has happened. Instead, he meets God and is

overpowered by his wisdom, his power, his grace, and his care. Job's ultimate answer was not philosophical or theological but personal. He finds himself humbled and repentant before the God of glory and grace: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (JOB 42:5–6). In God's presence, Job's view of God and himself changed. There is much that has

not taken place: God has not explained Job's pain. He has not answered his questions. He didn't defend himself or his actions. He has not unraveled the mystery of evil. But God did reveal himself and called for Job to trust God's wisdom. The Lord was more concerned with Job's trust than he was to satisfy Job's curiosity.

The story of Job offers a powerful truth. We need to fill our minds with thoughts of God that are worthy of him. All unworthy ideas get us dangerously off course. At the heart of his ordeal, Job cried out

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in words of faith and hope: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own

eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (JOB 19:25–27). What a powerful example.

The God-given Navigational Tool: The Bible

Life in the modern world is like trying to navigate an uncharted, rapidly changing, unpredictable ocean. We have sailed off the edge of our best maps. The first need is to have a fixed, unchanging reference point. That North Star is our triune God, made known in the Lord Jesus Christ. Navigation, however, requires much more than a fixed reference point. We may know how to find the North Star in the night skies, but we don't have the slightest idea how to find our location by using it. Even if we did, we would need the appropriate tool to enable us to bring the North Star down to our horizon.

A Christian knows that the Bible is the Godgiven navigational tool to enable us to reach our God-intended destination, which is likeness to Jesus, for the glory of God and the good of others. But we need more than knowledge that the Bible is our spiritual sextant. We need to know how to use it properly. The great example of the proper attitude toward and use of Scripture is found in the Lord Jesus. Jesus's approach to Scripture must shape our use of and attitude to the Bible. One of the constant themes of the Gospels is the centrality of Scripture in the life of the Lord. The Bible filled his teaching,

directed his choices, and foretold his sufferings. He steered his life by Scripture, and that is never more clearly seen than in his encounter with Satan at the outset of His public ministry (LUKE 4:1–13).

The greatest privilege of life is to become a Christfollower, a person living by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The greatest purpose in life is to become like Christ, living a fully developing, fully human life, imitating Christ.

,) There are many ways in which we cannot become like the Lord Jesus, for he is the God-man, and the temptation of Christ reveals his unique nature as the Son of God. At the same time, the temptation was possible only because the Lord Jesus had taken an authentic human nature, and in his victory over temptation he employed the very same resource—Scripture—we, his followers, possess.

The account of the Lord's victory over Satan's seduction (see MATTHEW 4:1-11) is rich with lessons for every Christ-follower. But three lessons have special significance when it comes to navigating life in an unpredictable world.

Navigating life requires a deep confidence in the Bible.

When the devil attempts to entice Jesus, his response is not defensive or philosophical; it is utterly scriptural. Jesus answers Satan's temptations by quoting the Bible. It is significant that Satan makes no effort to dispute the Bible. He may misuse it, but he never counters the Lord's response when Jesus stands upon the authority of the Bible.

The Lord Jesus obviously had an authority not possessed by any human being. In the Sermon on the Mount, he proclaims authoritatively, "You have heard that it was said... but I tell you..." (MATTHEW 5:21-22). His is not the authority of a rabbi or the voice of tradition or official position. He speaks as the Son of God, possessing unique power and authority over every created being. But he does not argue his case or even declare the truth in his own name. Rather, his continued response is to quote Scripture. "It is

written" (LUKE 4:4), he declared, repeating God's revelation in simplicity and brevity. Nothing could be clearer than the fact that, for Jesus, Scripture is the final court of appeal.

Few things are more important for a Christ-follower to consider than the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Scriptures and his profound respect for its authority. At every major point in his ministry, the Scriptures are there. He defines his ministry by quoting



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the words of Isaiah 61 as his personal manifesto (LUKE 4:16–21). He builds his most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, around a clarification of the true meaning of Scripture (MATTHEW 5–7). He condemns the Jewish leaders, not because they value Scripture too highly but because they are ignorant of its clear message (JOHN 5:39–40, 46) or because they have encrusted it with layers of tradition that cover its true meaning (MATTHEW 15:1–9). He declares that the Bible is of enduring authority, an authority that reaches to its smallest part (MATTHEW 5:17–20). Indeed, "Scripture cannot be set aside" (JOHN 10:35).

The Lord Jesus lived, loved, and was loyal to God's revelation in Scripture. It was his guidebook for life, his protection in spiritual warfare, his authority in teaching, and his directive for his ministry. He obeyed its commands, and he honored its meaning with his teaching. The implications are obvious and essential. If our Lord and Savior shaped his life by Scripture, how could we imagine we need it less than he did? If we call him Lord and Teacher, how can we have a lower view of Scripture than he did? If we are his followers, how can we rely on it less than he did? We are no match for the wiles and seductions of Satan, but Scripture retains its power as the sword of the Spirit, able to put our enemy on the defensive.

"Rely on your instruments" is one of the first lessons pilots learn. Christ-followers need to learn the same lesson from the Lord Jesus. Our instincts, our intuitions, our desires speak to us loudly. It is tempting to do our own thing, to steer by the moral seat of our pants. But such a lifestyle is not only foolish; it is disloyal to our Lord.

2 Navigating life requires a working knowledge of the Bible.

The Lord Jesus not only valued Scripture, he also knew it and used it. The passages he quotes from the book of Deuteronomy show his deep familiarity with Scripture. His respect for the Bible is also shown by his refusal to allow Satan to misuse the Bible. Scripture has a meaning intended by its divine Author; therefore, the text must be handled properly, not manipulating it to speak our truths rather than God's truth. Near the end of his earthly ministry, he prays for us as his people: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (JOHN 17:17). The great need is for Christ-followers to handle Scripture properly. It is impossible to be deeply affected by what you do not know.

A) Many of the Pharisees of Jesus's day had **memorized** most or all of the Torah (first five books of Scripture). We don't know if Jesus had it all committed to memory, but we do know that at the age of 12 he was found discussing the Scriptures in the Temple, and "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers" (LUKE 2:47).

We must handle the Bible with the respect it deserves. As Paul exhorts Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 TIMOTHY 2:15). A navigator who tries to manipulate his instruments into giving him a reading he desires rather than the reading that reflects reality is a fool. The first



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question we must ask when reading Scripture is, What does this passage mean? What is the author saying under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Then, and only then, when we are confident that we have faithfully understood the meaning of the text, should we ask, What does this then mean to me? The meaning of Scripture must always determine its significance to our lives. Otherwise we shift the authority to ourselves, and we merely use the Bible to validate our own opinions.

3 Navigating life requires a lifestyle of obedience.

The goal of confidence in the Bible as God's revelation and of knowledge of the Bible is conformity to the truths of the Bible. It does no good to have accurate navigational instruments and readings that we don't follow. The Lord Jesus declared his life principle in these pithy words: "My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (JOHN 17:4). At every point, Jesus's life was shaped and directed by the will of his Father. He navigated life by his Father's guidance.

The Bible is the Christian's sextant. It takes the fixed point of the triune God, the North Star, and brings it down to the horizon to locate us in time and space. It spells out for us, sometimes in direct commands and sometimes in stories, but more often in overarching principles, what it means (and sometimes what it doesn't mean) to live as a follower of Christ. It reveals where we are, often with painful precision, by convicting us of sin. It points us where we need to go by showing us the



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marriage to which we need to aspire, the character we need to pursue, the behaviors we need to avoid, the habits we need to develop. It holds before us our ultimate destination, which makes the whole journey worthwhile, and inspires us to keep on keeping on.



It is not enough to know the Bible or merely to be inspired by it; we need to steer by it. The Bible does its God-appointed work only as it becomes the active navigational tool in our lives. By revealing God to us, especially in the person of Jesus, it gives us the point by which we find our bearings and move forward. Only a fool would carefully calculate his headings and then throw them overboard and do what comes naturally. That is why James warns us: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (JAMES 1:22). Some time ago the expression "Don't leave home without it" was made famous by a certain credit card company. For Christians, intent on navigating a chaotic world successfully, the phrase takes on new meaning. The indispensable navigational tool for life is God's Word, the Bible.

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