

## Lessons from my Sat nav

In Sat-Nav years, mine is very old. I got it second hand from my brother- who may have bought it new- but most likely spotted it on ebay one day when he was trawling for hoover bags and got it thinking it was a Good Idea. He had it for a while, but eventually upgraded. I didn't have a Sat-Nav before then, and being very, very geographically challenged, I was extremely grateful when he gave it to me.

Since this time, my brother has upgraded his Sat-Nav several times. In consequence, he has offered me a few which are much newer and posher than mine. One I remember was very fancy, one of the best known brands, but I like mine. Its simple to use. I know exactly how to get it to work; I know it takes ages to find satellites, and so on. Most of all though, it (eventually) gets me where I need to go.

I never drive if I get the opportunity to be a passenger, so I have seen and heard lots of much more modern Sat-Navs in action. They offer continual advice, 'keep right', 'turn left in 100 yards, turn left in 95 yards, 90 yards, 89 yards...you get the idea.

Mine does not do this.

Born a (slightly reluctant) Londoner, I have an enduring love of Cornwall, particularly the Lizard. This is a Long Way from where I live, though. The extent of my knowledge of the journey there is that I come off the M25 on to the M3 for a while and then at some point have to go on either the A39 or the A339. I think it is the A39. Then there comes a point when my Sat-Nav will tell me to go one of two ways, which means I either will or will not travel through Truro, which doesn't matter. These are the facts I know about driving to Cornwall. But let's face it, this level of knowledge is never going to be enough to get me to my favourite county in time to tuck into a clotted cream tea before the shops close.

I need my Sat-Nav.

The reason I mention Cornwall is precisely because it is a long way from home. I remember driving down there last year, with my Sat-Nav poised to help me. I hoped it would do the same as other Sat-Navs, namely, offer me a constant stream of soothing reassurance that I was on the right path.

It didn't. I got one instruction and followed it, and drove. Half an hour went by in silence, so I glanced at the screen, seems okay. Another half hour went by & I checked if it was still plugged in. It was. But by now I was beginning to think, 'why isn't it saying anything? Am I still on the right road? Have I gone wrong? Did I not hear an instruction because I was too busy thinking of something else?' But in the middle of a road with which I was not familiar, I didn't seem to have much option other than to continue to drive.

Eventually I got quite worried, even to the point where I wouldn't have minded it saying 'recalculating' in the slightly smug tone it uses sometimes. At least that would have shown me that I was not on my journey alone and completely unguided.

Sometime later and still nothing. Then a thought occurred and my blood ran cold. 'What if its broken? Please, Lord, don't let it be broken.' Even more time went by and still ear-shattering silence from my Sat-Nav. I began to feel panicky. Some people, I realise, might think I'm exaggerating, and that this kind of thing is an adventure. These are people like my brother, who have some sense of direction and who probably don't need a Sat-Nav anyway. Those who are relatively sure they will eventually recognise where they are. I, on the other hand, can go down the same road ten times and to me it can look different each time. Equally I can go down ten different roads and they all look the same. So for me, this kind of situation is not an adventure. It is a reason to panic.

But back the journey to Cornwall. After about an hour and a half, I was getting more and more wound up and stressed. But then, suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere, clear as a bell ringing out:

'In 500 yards, exit left.'

Hallelujah!!!

Relief flooded through me. I began to breathe again. My Sat-Nav was alive! I was not lost! I was still stressed and needed to calm down, but I knew I had come through to the next part of my journey, and my Sat-Nav would guide me afresh.

I learned a few things from that experience, which kind of mirror how I experience my Christian journey sometimes.

Firstly, it occurred to me how much the previous hour and a half or so had tested my nerve. I needed to trust my Sat-Nav, because it was the only thing guiding me. Initially that was easy enough, because it spoke to me, but then it went quiet and I had to carry on driving on the strength of the initial instruction only. And the further I drove, and the more time that elapsed since the instruction, the further away from me my guide on the journey seemed. Almost as if it was still in Surrey while I was approaching Somerset. **But this was a subjective assessment based on my emotions. The objective reality was that it was on the passenger seat beside me all the time.**

Similarly spiritually, my emotions are not a reliable gauge of the presence of God in my life. Just as my Sat-Nav was in the car all the time when I had the very palpable sense of being far removed from its help and direction, God is with me (and you) always. Whether we feel close to him or far away, burdened by a sense of our sin or rejoicing in our salvation - it makes no difference. He is there.

Secondly, my Sat-Nav was not only in the car with me the whole time, it was working the whole time. It didn't go to sleep/break and luckily wake up/mend itself just in time to get me on to whichever one of the A39 or A339 is in fact the correct road. It knew all the time where I was and told me to exit left in plenty of time for me to do it. Similarly, God is not just with me. He is actively with me, like the Sat-Nav, knowing where I am even when he is not speaking, but ready to speak when needed, ready to protect me from going wrong.

Thirdly, the awful silence was in fact needful. It focussed me and concerned me enough to make me listen, hard and consistently. And then when the Sat-Nav spoke I heard it because by then I so desperate for it to speak I would have heard it whisper, and hung on its every word. In contrast, noises that are constant and repetitious I eventually start to ignore. My car gives a long beep if I turn my engine off and then open my door. Every time. This is to remind me to turn my lights off. But it has become white noise to me, and now has no impact on me remembering to turn my lights off. My AA call outs for a flat battery would bear me out on this. But the silence was important for another reason too. The Sat-Nav didn't speak because it didn't need to. I hadn't gone wrong. And although it would have been nice to hear the comforting voice giving me an instruction to let me know I was not 'alone', if the Sat-Nav *had* told me to do anything, it would have led me wrong, and my worst fear been realised. I would have been lost. Similarly, though the sense of experiencing 'silence from heaven' is really hard for all of us, maybe it too serves a purpose, honing our listening skills, feeding our hunger to hear the voice of God. Sometimes I ask God what I should do, and get nothing. And it is frustrating, and sometimes discouraging. But on these occasions maybe we are not given a new instruction because we should keep doing what we were told to do the last time we knew clearly that God spoke to us, and carry on till he says different. Going with the Sat-Nav analogy again, if I had lost my nerve, decided the Sat-Nav was broken or had forgotten about me, come off the road and taken the decision to try and find the way myself, I would certainly have been lost. **But holding my nerve, trusting, was really, really hard.**

As a side thought. I think too often we bash ourselves up that we are not trusting God enough. So I went back for a moment to my journey and asked myself: Did I trust my Sat-Nav? Based on my frank admission

of my emotions most people would say no. But I think I did. On that journey, this is what that trust looked like:

***Scared though I was that I might be lost, I kept driving in the direction that my Sat-Nav initially told me to go, and didn't deviate, even when it didn't speak to me for over an hour and a half.***

In my walk with God, I think often trust has looked much the same. I can't say in all honesty that I am never unsure, never afraid. But part of trust for me is remembering my emotions are not reliable guides, and therefore not allowing them to be the basis of decisions I make.

I should probably get a new Sat-Nav. As I said, mine is old. So old, its charger is one of those bigger USB fitting ones, that you can't get anymore. I can't unplug it, because the aperture is slightly warped and therefore if I got it out I wouldn't be able to get it back in again. Also, as we've established, it doesn't talk to me as much as I would like. But will I get a new one?

No.

Why? Because I have proved the one I have. It is true that there are newer, fancier, better ones, but at the bottom level, I won't get a new Sat-Nav because I know the Sat-Nav I have will get me where I need to go. I don't know that about the others.

And likewise, like so many others, I've proved Jesus. He is trustworthy and sure, the only reliable guide in my life. Whilst I will put it off as long as possible, eventually my Sat-Nav will break and I will have to replace it.

I'll never need to do that with Jesus.