

The mysterious powers of a magnetic field have been known for about a thousand years, and are fascinating to us even today. Most of us have at one time or another played with a magnet and something that contains iron, watching the attraction as the object is brought near. The permanent storage device that is used on this computer, the hard drive, makes a very practical use of these powers. The earth's magnetic field is perhaps the most well known manifestation, as we use it often to guide us in our travels. My father is one of those who had a compass installed on the dash of the car so that we could always tell which way we were going.

The earth's field is generated by currents of electrical activity deep within the heart of the planet, and as such the exact position of "magnetic north" tends to drift around a little. Any really good map that you get has "true north" (the axis of the earth's spin) marked, as well as what is called the magnetic declination. The latter helps you correct your compass reading so that you can find the North Pole.

The compass is a great tool for us to use, but you must be aware not only of the seemingly unfair trick of the movement of the earth's magnetic poles, but other interfering factors as well. My friend Dave is really into this idea of direction, but instead of placing a compass on the dashboard of his truck, he found a tiny one that could be attached to his watchband. He was very pleased with this arrangement and was eager to test it out as he drove around. He found himself rather frustrated, however, when the compass kept telling him that north was to the left, no matter which direction the truck was pointed. He finally realized that the compass wouldn't work in the truck so close to the metal door, which of course had a lot of iron in it. To get the true direction, he had to get out of the truck and away from any interfering magnetic fields or shielding factors.

We are all seeking the true direction to take in life, and like my friend we all find ourselves too easily distracted by other things that attract or repel us. Like the North Star, we need to anchor ourselves to something that doesn't wander or drift. (Actually true north drifts around in a 23,000 year cycle, so in 11,500 years the north star will be significantly off). We need something that we can absolutely depend upon.

But there are so many competing influences. Many are attractive in nature. The advertising industry uses this to our advantage. They package their product with glitter and pizzazz and tell us that we simply can't live without it. The latest product is always what we want. Just look at kids in a toy store around Christmas time, especially! They run from one item to another, and end up wanting them all. Or take girl watchers at the beach: they strain their eye and neck muscles swiveling from one to another. I remember one of our elders in a sort of Freudian slip comment that he loved to go to the beach and watch the waves walk by! And none of us are immune from these attractive effects.

Other influences put pressure on us and try to push us around. We feel the tensions as we become enmeshed in a mental tug-of-war, with everything pulling at us. We eventually tear apart if we aren't strong enough to gain control. We find this control very difficult; for instance, as our minds drift as we attempt to pray. Peer pressure is also responsible for many of our problems; but we should only really care what God thinks of us. We must grow up so that we are not, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:14, "infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."

The human leadership of the church should help us here, but we know that they have their failings just like ourselves. If we follow without real awareness, we can end up on a wild goose chase. There always seem to be different cliques within the body, each with their own different "fad". The ancients had a different god for every situation, which Paul encountered in Athens when he even found an idol to the "unknown god." We must simply be true to God and his Word and do all that we can through His power to keep us on track.

In the defense world, radar is used to find targets and "lock-on" to them so that they can be destroyed. The target, of course, wants to escape and releases false targets to misdirect the incoming missiles. There is a never-ending effort to find ways to make sure the real target is hit and not the decoys. We must make this same continual effort to lock-on to God, who never drifts or changes His nature. We must clear out all of the other influences and distractions and keep our direction True.