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The Truth, Frontwards and Backwards



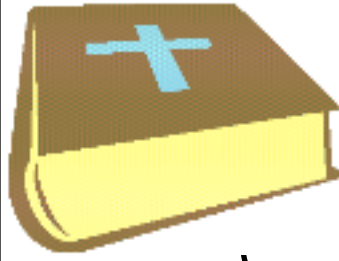
“!NAGIRROC YAW GNORW OT LIAH,” screamed the headline in the New York Post (HAIL TO WRONG WAY CORRIGAN!).

It was July 1938 and America’s emotions were sky-high over the exploits of incorrigible Douglas Corrigan, a 31-year-old pilot with a dream and more than a dash of audacity. One foggy morning, he took off from Brooklyn on a non-stop trip to California. Twenty-eight hours and 13 minutes later, he landed in Ireland — which was in completely the opposite direction! He crossed the Atlantic with just two chocolate bars, two packages of fig bars and some water.

“Just got in from New York,” he said as he got out of his plane.

“Where am I?” In deep trouble, as it turned out. When Irish customs officers threatened to jail him for his unauthorized flight, Corrigan pleaded innocence. He told them heavy fog in New York had made visibility impossible, forcing him to use only his compass for navigation. Further, he said it was 26 hours into his flight before the sun came out and revealed he was over an ocean. Only then, said the pilot, did he realize he’d been following the wrong end of his compass needle, heading east instead of west. He said he had little fuel left and no choice but to head for the nearest shoreline.

When the press ran the story, Corrigan became an instant hero among people demoralized by the Great Depression. A ticker-tape parade in his honour drew a million fans, more than had turned out to



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cheer Charles Lindbergh after the very first transatlantic flight in 1927. That must’ve astonished Corrigan who idolized Lindbergh and had helped install the wing and instrument panel on his hero’s plane.

Later, during the early 1930s, Corrigan had flown across the country, paying for gas by stopping near small towns to offer residents rides. He eventually paid \$310 for a monoplane he called *Sunshine* and worked hard to make it fit for a trip across the Atlantic. But in 1936 and again in 1937, aviation officials denied him permission.

A talented pilot who had a history of flying without the right paperwork, Corrigan almost certainly knew what he was doing when pointed his plane toward the Atlantic. But he never admitted it, not even in his autobiography, or when he took *Sunshine* on a national tour in 1988 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his daring flight. Did he truly intend to reach California? “Sure,” he used to say. “Well, at least I’ve told that story so many times that now I believe it myself.”

We’re all pretty good at lying to ourselves, even when we know the truth at the deepest level. That’s especially so when it comes to the sin in our lives. We can dismiss it or deflect it, even deny it, but we can’t dodge its effects forever. We’re flawed and broken people who persistently fly in the face of God’s authority and land in trouble, sometimes with few earthly consequences and sometimes with fatal ones.

So often, we minimize and excuse our behaviour when we go our own way, often with the ardent support of those who are amused by our reckless behaviour. But unlike the Irish, God won’t be placated by charm or chutzpah, not because he’s the big killjoy in the sky, but because so many of the things that seem so harmless on the surface hold incredible power to hurt us or others.

That’s not to say we should always play it safe. In fact, there will be many times when God calls us to pilot a course way outside convention and our comfort zone to live a radical, far-reaching faith that brings life and definition to our dreams. But he’s not interested in show-offs and spiritual barnstormers interested only in the spotlight. After all, he’s the one who determines the mission in submission and the ender in surrender. He knows and wants what’s best. Trust him.

Even if you’re heading in the wrong direction, you can end up in the right place. But only if you let him turn your life, knowing he’ll get you where you need to be. There’s nothing backward about that.