

## Automatic Pilot

SOMETIMES A NEWS STORY CAPTIVATES A NATION. Such has been the case recently. You've probably heard much about the Lear Jet that crashed on a Monday morning, killing all six occupants. One of the passengers was someone most of us "knew": Payne Stewart, the professional golfer. We knew him, of course, through the media, and especially because of his practice of wearing knickers on the golf course. Most recently, we knew him as the champion of the U.S. Open golf tournament, one of golf's most prestigious events. At age 42, his death, along with his co-passengers, was tragic.

THERE IS ANOTHER DIMENSION TO THE STORY, though, that really captured our attention. The plane literally flew itself for most of the journey from Florida to South Dakota. After climbing to their cruising altitude of 42,000 feet, the pilot engaged the plane's automatic pilot. Sometime after that, something happened. Air control authorities never heard from anyone on board again.

FOR THE NEXT FEW HOURS, THE PLANE continued flying in a straight line. The controls had, after all, been turned over to automatic pilot. Likely, the people aboard lost consciousness due to a loss of cabin pressure; perhaps they were dead before the plane crashed. But until the plane used up its fuel, it continued on the course on which it had been set. It was an eerie sight to the Air Force fighter pilots who followed the jet, knowing that the plane was flying itself to an appointment with death.

AUTOMATIC PILOT HAS BENEFICIAL PURPOSES, under ordinary circumstances. It allows the pilot to "lock in" the flight plan they'll be following for the next little while, so his mind can be occupied with other matters. The time will come, of course, when this mechanism must be disengaged, and the human mind will once again take the controls. If that fails to happen, as it did in this tragic case, the plane will simply follow its course, regardless of where it may lead.

ON A LIGHTER NOTE, I ONCE READ about an older couple who fulfilled their long-time dream by purchasing a large and elaborate motor home. They planned to travel the country, stopping at all the national parks and camping wherever they pleased. As they were traveling between parks one day, the husband asked the wife to drive so he could go to the back for a nap. A little later, the motor home ran off the road and crashed; fortunately no one was injured. In interviewing the woman, the police learned that she had put the camper on cruise control so she could go to the restroom. She thought this would work like a plane's automatic pilot!

THE MODERN LUXURIES OF DRIVING do present dangers to long-distance drivers. Take a driver who has put his car on cruise control, add several hours of road-weariness, a stereo playing a soft and relaxing tune, and plush leather seating -- you've got a driver who might not be fully in control of his car. The car will go where it is pointed; but is the driver constantly aware of that direction?

AUTOMATION CAN NEVER REPLACE the need for human attentiveness. It is a lesson that most of us who drive have learned on more than one occasion. Sadly, some have had to learn in costly situations.

THINK NOW ABOUT THE "CONTROLS" of our lives. Is it possible for us to lock in our direction of living in a manner akin to automatic pilot? Would such a practice have potentially disastrous consequences?

I'M CONVINCED THAT MANY PEOPLE HAVE given over the control of their lives to other people or forces around them. I see it, for example, in many young people. In their quest to be a part of a particular group or club, they blindly accept the standards that the others have. If the other people in that group think it's cool to wear this, or drink or smoke that, then that's what they think is cool, too. They've locked in their lives on "automatic pilot", but the destination is not what they imagine.

THE TENDENCY IS NOT RESTRICTED to young people. I witness just as many adults -- of all ages -  
- who have adopted the standards and values of the group with which they wish to become identified.  
But have they looked ahead to see where these coordinates will lead them?

"EXAMINE YOURSELVES AS TO WHETHER you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you are disqualified." So said the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:5. It is a good warning. It reminds us that many people are not in the habit of examining themselves. They assume everything is fine. But one day they awake to the fact that their destination is not where they wish to be!

STEPHEN COVEY MAKES MUCH OF THIS PRINCIPLE in his book, "The 7 Habits Of Highly Effective People". One of his foundational principles is "Begin with the end in mind." Ask yourself: Where do I want to be when I reach the end? As Covey observes, many are so busy climbing the ladder of success that they realize only when they reach the top that their ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

JESUS TOLD OF A MAN WHOSE LIFE WAS ON automatic pilot. His focus was on riches and wealth. He worked hard, and he finally made it big. He was just about to settle back and enjoy the fruits of his labors when his life abruptly ended. God's pronouncement on this man's life? "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" Jesus summarized the principle: "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21)

WHY IS IT SO HARD FOR OLD DOGS to learn new tricks? Why is it so difficult to break old habits and adopt new ways of thinking? Simply because it is easier to continue doing what we've always done. Even though we know it may produce bad results in the end, we continue on, never making needed adjustments to the controls. We make no effort to quit smoking, though we know the health hazards are real. We continue neglecting our spouse, though we know our marriage desperately needs work. We continue spending too little time with the children, though it's obvious they're growing up and away. We have put our lives on automatic pilot, and the crash is sure to come!

I DON'T AGREE WITH THE BUMPER STICKERS that say "God is my co-pilot". Instead, they ought to read, "God is my pilot". "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5,6) Instead of placing your life on automatic pilot, allow God to take the controls. He knows these skies; He should -- He made them! And His desire is to take you to the best destination, a place where you will enjoy peace and joy forever!

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE about turning your life over to God? Get in touch with us, and let's talk. We'll point you to beautiful truths we've discovered in God's word. We want to hear from you!

<< << << << << << << << <<

Copyright, 1999, Timothy D. Hall. All scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New King James Version (Copyright, 1990, Thomas Nelson, Inc.).

"HEM-Lines" is produced by the Central Church of Christ, 2722 Oakland Avenue, Johnson City, Tennessee, 37601, and is written by Tim Hall, minister. Permission to reproduce and/or use the messages for non-commercial purposes is freely granted provided the messages are not altered.