

# Cybercolumn by Berry D. Simpson: Circle Bluff\_51704

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## CYBERCOLUMN: Circle Bluff

**By Berry D. Simpson**

We correctly analyzed our mistake. We'd started up the bluff too soon instead of searching downriver for the trail. We knew to correct our mistake we should keep moving up in elevation, but we also suspected we might be on the wrong bluff or might be making a long circuitous route that would sweep us past our target—the Circle Bluff lookout point.

We were lost in that we hadn't yet found our trail, but we were never so lost we couldn't find our way home. I was a little worried that we might waste all afternoon on this one hill trying to find a way down off the bluff, and I would feel bad about that, since Cyndi and I talked another family into hiking with us when they could have gone swimming with everyone else.

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What we needed was a trail map. Even more, we needed a topographical map so we could find our location and correct our path. In fact, before we left camp, we studied the trail map posted on the dining hall wall and

listened intently as the camp supervisor explained to us how to find the trail. We thought we had enough information.

As it turned out, we spent an hour scrambling up the wrong hill, walking stooped like Groucho Marx under giant cedar branches, scrambling over rocks and through thorn bushes. We couldn't find the trail.

Eventually, we discovered a steep ravine. Knowing this would lead us back down to the river, and since the creek bottom was a solid slab of rock and easier hiking than the bushwhacking we'd been doing for the past hour, we decided to take it down to the river and back to camp.

But Cyndi wanted to try one more time to find the trail.

Since she has a better intuitive sense of direction than I do (I am more of a map reader), I thought she might be onto something. We all sat down while she hiked up the other side of the ravine, where she found the trail we'd been looking for almost immediately. We followed her voice up to the trail and returned to our original goal of hiking to the top of Circle Bluff. The rest of the afternoon was easy.

Wishing for a trail map reminded me of a story told by C.S. Lewis about a man who said he'd felt closest to God when out alone in the desert at night, and that experience was so much more real than all of Lewis' talk. He said, "To anyone who's met the real thing, all your formulas and dogmas seem so petty and pedantic and unreal."

Lewis compared the personal experience of the presence of God and the subsequent study of religion, to a man who experiences the Atlantic Ocean for himself and then studies a map of the ocean. In turning from the ocean to the map he's turning from something real to something less real. However, since his map was drawn from the personal experiences of thousands of ocean-goers, it contains a mass of observations unachievable by any one person.

A man's personal experience is valuable if all he wants to do is reproduce his particular part of the ocean, but a map is more useful when he wants to go further than a mere walk on the beach.

Lewis said theology is like that map. It isn't the same as God himself, but it's based on the experiences of thousands of people who really were in touch with God.

I thought about our hike and what a comfort it was to finally see the trail created by so many feet over many years. It felt good, even peaceful, to realize we didn't have to keep blazing our way through the cedar trees but could now fall in line with all those who'd gone before. It wasn't easy. It was still a difficult climb on a long, rocky trail. But our pathway was now obvious and clear, and we had no more fears of getting lost. Lewis would've said hiking and sailing and finding God were alike: None was very safe without a map.

Personally, when I read Lewis and learn he's already passed by the way I'm traveling, I'm comforted to fall in line and follow his trail. It isn't easy. It's still rocky and steep, but a clear path toward understanding God.

Maps aren't the only answer, however. We could've stayed back at camp and studied the trail map all afternoon until we had it memorized, but we'd never have experienced the thrill of seeing the entire river valley, including the headwaters of the East Frio River, without doing the hard work.

And our Christian walk is often hard and rocky and steep, but we have the map provided to us by God himself in the Bible, and we have well-worn paths in front of us created by the feet of countless fellow searchers. But we won't experience the breathtaking view of his presence unless we do the hard work. It is for us to start hiking.

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