

Where do you live? For much of my life, I've lived in Colorado, here in the U.S. Although I was born and raised on the rather flat High Plains of Colorado, many folks immediately connect the very idea of Colorado with the majestic Rocky Mountains. In fact, the official state song of Colorado is John Denver's famous song titled "Rocky Mountain High!" And why not? The Rockies are stunningly beautiful...captivating...fun!

And you know what? Some folks in Colorado work for many years to ascend to the top of all the fifty-or-so "Fourteeners" in the Colorado Rockies—those are the mountains over 14,000 feet in elevation. Winter and summer sports abound. Skiing. Camping. Hiking. Fishing. All part of the Colorado charm!

A feature of Colorado that has always captivated me is the "Continental Divide of the Americas"...that's a geographic line that marks the watersheds to the oceans, the drainage paths of water to the seas. The Continental Divide runs all the way from Alaska in the far north to the very southern tip of South America.

So, what does that truly mean? It means that one Colorado rainstorm that straddles the Continental Divide can have some of its rainwater run westward—ultimately ending up in the Pacific Ocean—and the rest of its rainwater drain eastward...to the Atlantic Ocean! Wow, imagine that! A mountain rainstorm can have water starting from the exact same source and have completely different geographical journeys ahead!

One of the most unique places at the Continental Divide is what's called Triple Divide Peak in Glacier National Park in the state of Montana. That's because that peak is also part of the Northern Divide, which means that the watershed at Triple Divide Peak can be either to the Pacific Ocean...or to the Atlantic Ocean at the Gulf of Mexico...or to the Arctic Ocean by way of Hudson Bay in Canada! So, here's the unique peculiarity: the summit of that peak is the only oceanic *triple* divide point in the entire world!

Now, there *are* some places where fresh water doesn't end up in an ocean—those geographic areas are called *closed basins*. Actually, the formal word is *endorheic basins*, but "closed" really captures the idea. For example, take Lake Tahoe, a large, gorgeous lake straddling California and Nevada in the U.S. The water finding its way into Lake Tahoe evaporates or seeps into rock—not reaching an ocean at all! Another prominent example of a closed basin is the Caspian Sea, the largest inland body of water in the world, roughly five times larger than Lake Superior. Several countries border the Caspian, like Russia and Iran.

One of the key reasons that the realities of the Continental Divide has captivated me is this feature: that the source of something fluid doesn't necessarily determine the journey or path it ultimately ends up on. You know, like a storm high up in the Colorado Rockies where some of the water will journey towards the Pacific and the rest of the storm's water will journey towards the Atlantic, many hundreds of miles away.

But here's the deal. Years ago, we were taking a family vacation from Denver to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. Now, most of that drive isn't mountainous at all: it's super flat! But as we were driving—far from mountains I typically associated with the Continental Divide—an official road sign at a very slight swell in the highway indicated we were crossing the Continental Divide! I was blown away. You see, in flatter areas, people can be crossing a Continental Divide and never even know it—if someone doesn't tell them! And here's the point: that's true for physical geography—and that's true for key facets of life!

For example, take work life and careers. I have engaged with college students for decades, consistently encouraging them to become the competent knowledge-worker that will honor and align with their giftings from God. And their corresponding choices of majors and summer jobs and certifications help start vectoring their journey that follows.

In fact, that pre-graduation vectoring in specific directions can and often does matter greatly in their journeys later in life. Yeah, what are seemingly a number of rather small decisions add up to a complete package that dramatically helps determine the journey that follows.

Then comes the first job (yay!)—the start and promise of a full career! Now, we are really deep into a set of Continental-Divide issues! Like these: is the business or nonprofit that the graduate is considering

ethical or immoral? Is it known for competence or not? Is it average or excellent in delivering value? Is its organizational culture strong or weak? Is the employee training good or poor? The fact is, we all know it's not rocket science to know that a person's first career job can be a major vectoring experience in life. It's always a unique journey—not only right then, but also in defining later potential paths.

The obstacles for grads are clear—is there sufficient research and the necessary discernment to determine just which future journeys are desirable? After all, I'm sure many people starting work at the high-flying Enron in Houston just before the year 2000 were rejoicing at the expected journey ahead. But Enron's now-famous bad deeds emerged...and the journey for Enron employees and stockholders turned ugly.

But here's the common problem for all of us: many Continental-Divide issues that come our way are far more like my flat Wyoming-highway encounter—when it didn't look like or seem like a Continental-Divide area at all! How about a couple of examples? Take the year 1998, say, when a product manager stayed with the huge retailer Sears instead of taking a job with Amazon? Or how about 2001, when a manager stayed with Blockbuster after a Netflix executive offered them a job, a new journey?

Other types of Continental-Divide career issues aren't just about a new employer: how about a person lagging in learning digital skills in their industry instead of taking a future-grabbing attitude in making their digital skills world-class? That happened for many in the last 20 years. So how about that for *us*...now?

Then, how about the Continental-Divide issues of intimate mentors and close friendships? We know that can help “make or break” teenagers...but who or what do *we ourselves* hang with? Do we hang with the folks that lift us up for God's glory? Or is that key friendship that seems innocuous actually leading you to a worse journey...or even a closed basin whose end is an evaporation rather than great rewards?

'Course, it's always easier to see Continental-Divide or closed basin issues like this more clearly in the lives of *others* than it is in our own lives! Poor employer selections. Bad choices in skills development. Unfruitful friendships. Hey, all of us are susceptible to a poor choice now and then, a choice that can easily lead to an undesirable detour in our journeys. But let's get to a really important vulnerability—our faith journey...

Sure, as believers, we all know that it's clearly Jesus over Mohammed...Jesus over Buddha...Jesus over atheism. But let's be honest about some of the journeys of various people who claim Christ...pitfalls that some easily fall into when relying on false signposts of seductive cultural trends, poor advice, or—quite often—mistaken trajectories easily absorbed from our mentors, churches, and denominations. Of course, the only completely reliable signpost is Christ, the very Word of God! But merely claiming Christ as the capital-S Source at the summit is insufficient—the proof is in our fruits, the actual journey we are on and that we complete! Let's take just a few examples of journey-choices, with our guidance being Scripture.

Maybe we're focused on obeying laws as our key measure of Christianity. Yes...are we Moses-ites or Jesus-ites? Maybe we're taking God's grace for granted, and not pressing into, as the Apostle Paul says, “keeping in step with Spirit” in our “upward call in Christ Jesus.” Perhaps, as Paul frames it, we're in a “ministry of condemnation which leads to death” instead of a “ministry of reconciliation.” Yeah, is our journey's key purpose really to condemn others? Or maybe we're organizing “closed basins” for an elite few—a select group of Christians—instead of loving all of our neighbors in every nation with Great-Commission witness. Yes, is our journey taking Paul at his word that “God our Savior...desires all people to be saved?”

The truth is, for two millennia Christians have often joined hands, even fellowshiped, at such key divides. But all those people claiming Christ have then taken conflictive journeys, some of which, candidly, bore little fruit...or even bad fruit! And sadly, some approaches are deliberate, self-fulfilling closed basins!

Here's the key: we are often right at a divide with fellow Christians, and we can be taking a significantly different journey with significantly different impact and significantly different rewards from Jesus. That's exhilarating...but also sobering! If you are tracking with God's true purposes, great! If you've been wrong, the divide—and a fresh choice—is here and now. So, what will your fruit be...at your journey's end?

A&A: Application & Action

1. Can you name a specific career or work mentor who truly helped you keep on the right journey when you were facing a significant Continental-Divide issue? Be specific. Did you or have you expressed gratitude to that person?

2. Can you name a specific Christian—a parent, a pastor, a mentor—who truly helped you keep on the right journey when you were facing a significant Continental-Divide issue relating to your Christian walk? Be specific. Did you or have you expressed gratitude to that person?

3. The last hundred years or so, many have called for Christians to be more ecumenical, binding together in unity in the name of Christ, bridging across differences to common purposes. Some have taken action in that direction.

But many who claim Christ clearly don't elevate certain Scriptural truth in ways that others consider essential...or they blend the Bible with other sources...or they unashamedly interpret key passages differently than others. Those can be and often are "Continental Divide" issues. What's your position on ecumenicalism, especially in light of the key issues of importance in your Christian journey? Discuss.