

Maps and Perspectives

I WONDER IF YOU, LIKE ME, have wondered about airplane flight paths. When I look at a map online, the routes always appear curved.

It doesn't seem to make sense that a flight from Chicago to Japan would cross over part of Alaska. On a flat map, the most direct route looks like a straight line across the Pacific Ocean.

Here's another surprising thing: I just opened Google Maps and checked Greenland. On that map, Greenland looks bigger than the entire United States!

All of this comes down to perspective. Flat maps distort reality. It feels wrong that the shortest path from Chicago to Japan goes through Alaska, or that Greenland appears so enormous.

The issue is that we're trying to represent a ball on a flat, rectangular surface, and that creates distortions. Most online maps use the Mercator projection—a method of projecting the Earth onto a flat plane. It works well for navigation and zoomed-in views because it preserves angles (streets still meet at roughly 90 degrees, for example), and it's fairly accurate near the equator. Problems arise near the poles and when measuring large distances across the globe.

If you take a physical globe and stretch a string between Chicago and Tokyo, you'll see that the shortest route really

does arc over Alaska. On that same globe, Greenland is only about one-quarter the size of the contiguous United States.

It's our perspective that's off. We are trying to picture something in a way that doesn't work very well.

This often reminds me of God's plan—something I've spent a lot of time reflecting on in recent years given situations in my life I have faced and continue to face. I imagine most of us have these situations in our lives.

God's perspective is vastly different from mine. He sees all of time, space, and all of history at once, while I can only see my small slice of it.

That doesn't make my limited view any easier. Life can still feel incredibly difficult from where I stand. But it does give me faith that God's perspective is far broader and wiser than my own.

And that is where I place my trust.

The next time you look at a flat map, take a moment to notice Greenland. Remember that our view from this perspective is distorted. Even when we can't see the fuller picture, we can have faith that a truer perspective exists. **B**



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