**Bumper Sticker Theology – Week 4 – God Is My Copilot**

**Message Big Idea:** If God is your copilot, switch seats!

**Scripture:** Galatians 2:20; Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 8:34-36, Exodus 19:1-20:21

**Note:** As an “improved” option, the TP could have a toy steering wheel as a prop.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction: Bumper Sticker Perceptions**

Did you know that what you display on the bumper of your car actually says a lot about you?

The good people at Cheap Car Insurance dot net, who I understand to be the leaders in bumper sticker research, surveyed over 2,000 people to discover some very insightful bumper sticker trends.

For example, (picture) you’re far more likely to have a bumper sticker on your car if you live in the south than you are here in our part of the country. In fact, we have the lowest percentage of people with bumper stickers in the US. Also… more women have bumper stickers on their cars than men… that actually surprised me.

(picture) That’s not all… they actually break down state-by-state information about bumper stickers… like this:

* If you live in Wisconsin, your bumper sticker likely has something to do with your family like, *“My child is an honor student at Badger Elementary School.”*
* If you live in Missouri, you tend to put a bumper sticker on your car to represent your favorite band… I guess you should dig out your old Nsync stuff ☺
* But if you live in Illinois, like us, the most common bumper sticker’s political. No wonder there’s so many instances of road rage in Chicago!

**Bumper Sticker Sayings**

Now maybe you’re wondering why I’m talking about bumper stickers. Well over the last few weeks we’ve been talking about something we call **Bumper Sticker Theology**.

On the surface the beliefs behind this “theology” *seems* harmless, but if those beliefs take root in our lives, they can become incredibly dangerous. So each week we’ve examined one of these common phrases that Christians tend to use and we’ve asked ourselves, **“Is it Biblically sound or does it just sound Biblical?”**

And this morning we’re looking at maybe one of the most dangerous sayings: **“God is my co-pilot.”** How many of you have heard that one before? Yeah, that’s what I thought.

Now, at first, this saying doesn’t sound bad, does it? It’s kind of like saying, *“As I’m piloting the plane of my life, God’s sitting right next to me - giving me instructions and guidance on where to go, what to do, and how to live my life.”*

You can almost picture it, right? You’re flying a massive 747 and Jesus… with his cute little co-pilot hat… is by your side, ready to give insight on demand.

Doesn’t *sound* awful, right? But that’s what makes this saying so dangerous! It *sounds* pretty good, it *sounds* like a person who takes their relationship with God seriously. Yet, at the end of the day it isn’t a healthy way to view our relationship with God.

You know, I once read a leadership book that made the claim that the enemy of the great things in our lives aren’t the bad things… the things that are obviously wrong. Instead, the enemy of the great things is actually the good things. You see the bad things are easy to see and avoid. But the good things… we can spend tons of energy on good things that keep us from the great things God has for us.

God as your co-pilot might seem like a good thing… especially when you look back at where you’ve come from – where… maybe God wasn’t even allowed on the plane! We can look at our lives and be excited about how far we’ve come.

But I want to encourage us to not let the good steps we’ve taken stop us from the great things God has for us.

**Word: Matthew 19:16-22**

To illustrate what I mean we’re going to take a look at a guy… a good guy… who put God in the co-pilot seat. If you brought your Bible, or use the Bible app, we’ll be starting in Matthew 19, verse 16.

*(Matthew 19:16)* Here’s what’s going on. A young guy comes up to Jesus and basically asks him, *“What can I do to assure myself eternal life?”* He wants to make sure he’s in the clear, that’s he’s done what God expects of him.

Jesus responds with an answer that any young Jewish man would have known quite well in 1st century Palestine. *(“If you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments.” Matthew 19:17b)* Jesus simply says, *“Keep the commandments.”*

The young man asks, *“Ok… but which ones?”* *(“’Which ones?’ the man asked.” Matthew 19:18a)* It’s almost like the he’s asking, *“I know God gave us 10, but are we really supposed to keep* ***all*** *of them?”*

Sounds crazy, right? I mean, what did he think Jesus was going to say? Did he think Jesus would say: *“Well… just keep 1, 5, 7 and 9. The even numbered ones are just filler.”*

*(Matthew 19:18b-20)* Well Jesus does go on to list some of the commandments: *“Don’t kill anyone, don’t cheat on your wife, don’t lie…”* To which the young guy responds with, *“Awesome! I haven’t done any of those!”*

Little did he know that Jesus was gently leading him toward the *one thing* Jesus knew this guy was holding on to. Jesus says:

***“If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give that money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me.” –Matthew 19:21***

For some people, this may have been an easy thing to do… but not for this guy. *(Matthew 19:22)* Matthew tells us that this guy was rich – like, really rich. He had a lot to hold on to, and so Matthew says he turned away sad and left.

Now there’s something fascinating happening here I want you to notice. In Jesus’ first response, he lists some of the 10 commandments, and the guy says, *“I’ve done all of those things!”* But then Jesus goes on to give him something that ***isn’t*** in the 10 commandments – to sell all of his stuff.

But why would Jesus do that?

Well a lesson we see time and time again throughout the Bible is that God isn’t interested only in how we manage our outward obedience, as important as that may be. God’s ultimately interested in our heart… our whole heart. He wants all of us – not just our actions.

Think about it like this *(grab toy steering wheel and/or picture on screen).* In the cockpit of a plane, you’d see something like this… Ok, maybe not *exactly* like this. Actually if you board a plane and see something like this in the cockpit, get off that plane as quick as you can…

Anyways… when this young guy approaches Jesus and asks what he has to do to inherit eternal life, he’s basically asking, *“What do I need to let go of so I can fully follow you, so that I can have real… abundant life?”* Jesus lists off a few things and the guy’s feeling pretty good.

But remember, the guy goes on to ask: ***“What else must I do?” –Matthew 19:20b***

Let’s pause here for a second and think about this: Why did he ask that? I mean, Jesus has already given him a list and the guy checked off all the boxes. Why didn’t he just say, *“Awesome! Thanks Jesus – I nailed it.”* And then go on his merry way.

Well do you know what I think? I think he asked the question because he *knew* something wasn’t right. He knew something was off. He knew he wasn’t experiencing the true life that Jesus offers.

In effect, he knew that he was still gripping the steering wheel of his own life… that he was the one in charge. So when he asked Jesus what was missing… Jesus went right after this guy’s heart.

When asked, *“What else must I do?”* Jesus basically tells him: *you need to* ***let go of that steering wheel***. You need to let go of that thing, even if it’s a good thing, that’s getting in the way of the greatest thing – full… abundant life. You need to give me the steering wheel of your entire life.

And so let me just stop here and ask you, what are *you* holding on to? What’s the good thing… or maybe not so good thing… that’s getting in the way of the great thing God has for you?

Maybe it’s the same thing this young guy struggled with - **money**. But let’s be real, money’s just a thing, right? It’s not good or bad. The problem comes when we grasp it for security or strive to accumulate it for power… then it becomes a “thing.”

Or maybe it’s **success** that you think will bring you purpose and meaning. It could be success at work, success with friendships, or success at home.

Maybe it’s trying to **get everyone to like you**? You’re endlessly seeking the approval of others and your mind’s constantly distracted by the goal of pleasing people.

Or maybe it’s just… **pleasure**. In the midst of the difficulties of life, you want an escape. So you chase after sex, food, entertainment, alcohol or something else to try and escape if only for a moment.

Maybe it’s **perfectionism**. You can’t accept any of your flaws or let go of any of your mistakes.

And today… on Father’s Day… a day where it can be really easy to slam all the guys in the room… let me say this to you: guys – I know a lot of you… and you’re good men. I know you want to know God, that you love those around you, and that you work hard.

But just like the young guy that approached Jesus, a lot of us are confused because we’ve done good things in our lives:

* Taken steps,
* Followed the rules,
* And allowed God to have a say.

Yet we’re still asking, *“What else, God? What else must I do to get the* ***real life*** *that Jesus has for me?”*

Well let me share the truth with you this Father’s Day… the truth about what we all need to do. **If God’s our co-pilot, we need to switch seats.**

**Truth: If God Is Your Co-Pilot, Switch Seats**

The truth we all need to come face-to-face with this morning is that God has never been content to sit in the co-pilot seat of our lives. Throughout the pages of Scripture he makes this abundantly clear. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says it this way:

***“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.” –Mark 8:34b-35 (NLT)***

That’s pretty direct, isn’t it? Jesus isn’t interested in being the backup pilot. What Jesus is describing here isn’t like joining a book club. He’s talking about surrendering our entire lives – climbing out of the captain’s seat and giving the steering wheel completely to him.

Jesus is saying that, in order to truly follow him… to really be his disciple - we have to be prepared to completely shift the center of gravity in our lives from a concern about **“me”** and **“my needs”** to fully surrender to the will of God. Simply put – to take hold of God’s kingdom… we need to let go of our own.

And remember, at this point in history, the cross wasn’t a cute, comforting metaphor. There wasn’t fancy cross jewelry or hipsters with cross tattoos. Hearing this invitation would’ve had an intense and immediate impact in the hearts of those who heard it.

*“Taking up a cross”* implied an *“all in… no going back”* kind of commitment - one far different than what many of us are used to hearing. Jesus was making sure that what he was asking was painfully clear – **total and complete surrender**.

To be fair, this is way easier said than done. A lot of us are okay with the idea of God as a tag-a-long… as long as he doesn’t disrupt our existing plans. But this idea of total surrender, of fully and completely *“giving up our own way”* – well, that can be much more difficult to do.

Even if we’re open to the idea of total surrender, it can feel daunting to try and figure out how to actually *live* that out.

And the reason I think we resist giving up the steering wheel of our lives ultimately comes down to trust. At some level, we struggle to believe that completely surrendering ourselves to God is really in our best interest.

* What if God asks me to do something I don’t want to do?
* What if he leads me to places I’d rather not go?
* What about the blueprint for my life that I’ve meticulously crafted?

I think many of us, deep down, believe that God’s trying to keep us from the good stuff of life… but nothing could be further from the truth.

* When God invites us to be people of generosity, he knows that living life with open hands… seeing everything we have as a gift from him… is simply a better way to live.
* When God invites us to bear one another’s burdens, he knows that living in true, authentic community is so much better than a life of isolation.
* When God invites us to put him first in our life above everything else… it’s not because he’s needy or lonely… instead it’s because he knows that when we put the weight and expectation *of* God on anything other *than* God, that thing will eventually crumble beneath the weight. He knows that putting him first and surrendering completely to him is just a better way to live.

So if it’s easier said than done… then what does it look like to move out of the captain’s seat and give the steering wheel to God?

Well it all comes down to one word: **Surrender**. It begins by seeing everything we are and everything we have – every

* Skill,
* Talent,
* And resource… as a gift from God… that’s his to use.

After all, who’d have a better idea of how to use these resources than the One who gave them to us in the first place?

**Story**

Listen it’s difficult to truly hand over the steering wheel of our lives. It can be scary to fully surrender our plans, our skills… and our lives – but the life that awaits us is so much better than we could imagine. One person who understands this is my friend Patrick. Here’s his story.

**Video: Patrick O’Connell**

**Challenge: Let Go**

*(Could use steering wheel prop here again)* Here’s what I want to challenge us to do. I think all of us… together – need to learn to let go of the steering wheel. Understand, this isn’t some invitation to *“Let go and let God.”* That’s just another bumper sticker cliché. The point isn’t to passively sit back and say, *“Well, whatever God wants to happen will happen.”*

No… we’re called to *join* God in the work of helping people find their way back to God… of bringing hope and healing to a hurting world. God designed us to actively live in partnership with him, but we need to get out of the driver’s seat. We need to loosen our grip on the steering wheel and give it to God. He’s God and we aren’t, and that’s very good news.

*(Begin underscore and put steering wheel down)* In light of that, I want to invite you to try something with me this morning. I want to ask everyone to close your eyes and pretend you’re gripping a steering wheel with both hands.

Go ahead. Grip it tight like you’re driving through a blizzard in the middle of the night. Grip it until your knuckles turn white.

Now, I want you to ask yourself, *“What have I been holding on to? What* ***person, idea, goal, or possession*** *have I been clinging to… grasping at… that I need to fully surrender to God – maybe for the first time, or for the hundredth? What areas of my life have I insisted on being in the driver’s seat for that I need to let God take complete control of?”*

Maybe you’ve been in the pilot’s seat for too long, and it’s time to fully surrender. Maybe it’s time to give up control. It’s one thing to surrender to Jesus for our eternity, to trust him with our afterlife. It’s another thing entirely to surrender to Jesus in the here and now - letting him steer our entire life.

With your eyes closed, picturing whatever that thing is that you’ve been holding on to; I want you to let go of the steering wheel. Open your hands fully, leaving them open on your lap and picture Jesus taking that steering wheel from you.

Envision him lovingly reminding you that he’s in control and knows your heart and what you need. He’s a good Father who knows us better than we know ourselves. We can surrender with peace and confidence because God sees us and loves us with an unfathomable love.

Let’s pray.

**Communion Idea**

Keep your hands facing upward on your lap. In a moment we’re going to celebrate communion together. Communion is a gift that’s given freely to all of us to remember Jesus… his sacrifice and his love. But it’s hard to focus on Jesus when our hands are clenched tightly around the steering wheel of life.

In a moment, I’m going to invite you to come forward down the center aisle and take communion… take the bread – that represents Jesus body, and dip it in the juice – that represents his blood. Together, let’s celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus… celebrate the reality that he freed us from sin and death.

He’s the one who gives us peace with God. The truth is, we don't need a co-pilot - we need Jesus… the one who can rescue us and bring us home. He’s not our co-pilot; he’s the Creator of everything.

Let’s take Communion together.