**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.

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**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 are far more likely to have a bumper sticker on your car if you live in the south than you are here in our neck of the woods. In fact, we have the lowest percentage of people with bumper stickers in the country. Also, more women have bumper stickers on their cars than men…that one surprised me.

(picture) And here’s a little state by state information about bumper stickers.

* 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… Go Backstreet Boys!
* But if you live in Illinois, like we do, the most common bumper sticker is political. No wonder so many of us are a bit cranky! ☺

Actually, I think this research must be old because here in Illinois, this is becoming the most popular bumper sticker… *(picture of COMMUNITY decal on car window)* And if you think this isn’t a bumper sticker because you call it a window decal, well, 97% of psychologists would say that you’re living in denial. It’s true. Just embrace it.

**Bumper Sticker Sayings**

Over the last few weeks we’ve been talking about Bumper Sticker Theology. Each week we’ve examined a common phrase that Christians tend to use and asked, **“Is it Biblically sound or just sound Biblical?”** On the surface these beliefs can *seem* harmless, but if they take root, they can become incredibly dangerous, and today’s truism might be the most problematic of all of them. This morning we are looking at the saying: **“God is my co-pilot.”**

Now, at first, maybe that doesn’t sound too bad. It’s kind of like I am saying, “As I’m piloting the plane of my life, God is 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 nice little co-pilot hat, is by your side ready to give insight when you need it. Again, doesn’t sound *too* 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 particularly helpful way to view our relationship with God.

Years ago, I 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. The enemy of the great things are actually the good things. The bad things are easy to see and avoid. But the good things? We can spend lots of energy on good things that keep us 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, perhaps, 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 have taken stop us from the great things God has for us.

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

To illustrate what I mean, this morning we’re going to take a look at a guy, a good guy, who has 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 essentially 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.”

And I have to chuckle at the young guy’s response. He asks, “Ok… but which ones in particular?” *(“’Which ones?’ the man asked.” Matthew 19:18a)* It’s like the young man is asking, “I know God gave us 10, but are we really supposed to keep *all* of them?” I mean, what did he think Jesus would say? Did he think Jesus would respond with: “Oh, just keep 1, 5, 7 and 9. The even numbered ones are just filler.”

*(Matthew 19:18b-20)* Jesus does actually 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, “Well, that’s perfect! I’ve not done any of those things!”

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

Now 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…like “make it rain” rich. He had a lot to hold on to, and so Matthew says he turned away sad and left.

There is something fascinating happening here that I want you to notice. In Jesus’ first response, he lists some of the 10 commandments, and the guy says, “I have 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. Why would Jesus do that?

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 is. God is 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 would see something like this…Ok, maybe not *exactly* like this. Actually if you board a plane and see something like this in cockpit, get off that plane as quick as you can…

When this young guy approaches Jesus and asks what must he do to inherit eternal life, he is 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 first lists a few things and the guy is feeling pretty good. He’s thinking, “Great! Those are things I have already given to you!”

But remember, then the guy asks: ***“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 the guy just say, “Awesome! Thanks Jesus – I nailed it. I’m going to go on my merry way.”

Do you know why I think he asked, “What else must I do?” 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 came to offer.

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

When asked, “What else must I do?” Jesus essentially responds: 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 great thing – full, abundant life. You need to give me the steering wheel of your entire life.

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

Maybe for you it’s the same thing this young guy struggled with - maybe it’s **money**. And let’s be real, money is just a thing. It’s not good or bad. It’s when we grasp it for security or strive to accumulate it for power that it becomes our “thing.”

Maybe for you it’s **success** that you think will bring your purpose and meaning. This could be success at work, success with friendships, success at home.

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

Or maybe it’s just **pleasure**. In the midst of a life that can be difficult, you just want an escape. You run to travel, sex, food, entertainment, alcohol or something else to try and escape if only for just 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 harp on men, let me say this to you, guys – I see a lot of you, and you are good men. I know you want to know God, that you love those around you, that you work hard. But like the young guy that approached Jesus, a lot of us are confused because we’ve done a lot of good things in our lives - taken steps, followed the rules, and allowed God to have a say. And yet we are still asking, “What else must I do to get this *real life* that Jesus has for me?”

Do you know what we all need to do? **If God is 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 copilot seat of our lives. Throughout the pages of Scripture, he makes this abundantly clear. 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)***

Wow. That’s pretty direct, isn’t it? Jesus doesn’t seem interested in being the backup pilot. What Jesus is describing here isn’t like signing up for a book club. He’s talking about surrendering our entire lives – climbing up 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 must 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 keep in mind that, at this point in history, the cross was not a nice, comforting metaphor by any stretch. There was no fancy cross jewelry or student pastors 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” type 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.

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

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 fully believe that completely surrendering ourselves to God is really what’s best for us.

* 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 worked so meticulously on?

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

* When God invites us to be a people of generosity, he knows that living a life with open hands, seeing everything that 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 life 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, but because he knows that when we put the weight and expectation *of* God on anything other *than* God, that thing will eventually crumble beneath that weight. That putting him first and surrendering completely to him really is just a better way to live.

So what does it look like to move out of the captain’s seat and give the steering wheel to God? It all comes down to this word: surrender. It begins by seeing everything we are and everything we have – every skill, talent, and resource - as a gift from God that is his to use. After all, who would have a better idea of how to use these resources than the One who gave them to us in the first place?

**Story**

It is difficult to truly hand over the steering wheel of our lives. It can be frightening to fully surrender our plans, our skills, and our lives – but what awaits us on the other side is better than we could imagine. One person who understands this deeply 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 think we need to do. I think we all, together – need to learn to let go of the steering wheel. And this isn’t some invitation to “Let go and let God.” That’s just another bumper sticker cliche. The point isn’t to passively sit back and say, “Well, whatever God wants to happen will happen.” No, we’re still 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 the point is that we need to get out of the driver’s seat. We need to loosen our grip of the steering wheel and give it to God. He is God and we are not, and that is very, very good news.

*(Begin underscore and put steering wheel down)* In light of that, I want to invite you to try something. I want everyone in this room to close your eyes and pretend that you’re gripping a steering wheel with both of your hands. Go ahead. Grip it tight like you’re trying to drive through a blizzard in the middle of the night. Grip it so hard that your knuckles start to turn white. Now, I want you to ask yourself, “What is the thing that I’ve 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 maybe I need to surrender it again? What areas of my life have I insisted that I be in the driver’s seat for that I need to invite God to take complete control of?”

Perhaps you’ve been in the pilot’s seat 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 to surrender to Jesus in the here and now - letting him steer our entire life. With your eyes still closed, picturing whatever that thing is that you’ve been gripping; 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. Envision him lovingly remind you that he’s ultimately 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 that God sees us and loves us with an unthinkable love.

Let’s pray.

**Communion Idea**

Keep your hands up, facing upward on your lap. In a moment we’re going to celebrate communion together, and every week we’re intentional about saying that we “receive” communion together – not take. We don’t take communion; we receive it because it’s a gift given freely. But here’s the thing about receiving – we can’t really do it if our hands are clenched tightly around the steering wheel of our life.

When the ushers come, I invite you to receive the bread – his body, and a cup of juice – his blood, as we celebrate together the sacrifice of Jesus he freed us from sin, death, and destruction. He is the one who gives us peace with God and peace with us. The truth is, we don't need a co-pilot - we need Jesus, the pilot who can rescue us and bring us home. He’s not our co-pilot, he’s the Creator of the Universe.

So let’s pray and then we’ll receive Communion together.