

**Text:** [Acts 16:9-15](#)

**Date:** May 22, 2022

**Title:** “Jesus, Take the Wheel?”

**Theme:** The Spirit will guide our work if we’re willing to set aside our own agendas and follow

## 1

You know the phrase “Jesus, take the wheel”?

It became popular largely because of a Carrie Underwood song about a dozen years ago

The song itself is literally about avoiding a car crash on an icy road

I’ll hear people use this phrase – sometimes seriously, sometimes humorously - to describe that moment when they needed to “let go and let God”

The problem with “Jesus, take the wheel” though, is that it takes for granted the idea we should have been in charge to begin with

Is what we’re really saying that the only time we’ll let the Spirit of God set the agenda is when we find that our own plan isn’t working out?

It’s like the guy who gets in over his head on a DIY project and finally decides,

“Wow! I’ve really screwed this up.

I need to hire a professional to bail me out”

## 2

We LIKE to be in charge of our own lives

We might occasionally talk about being led by God in a certain direction

But I think most of us are pretty firmly convinced that WE should be in charge

“I’ll call you when I’ve really screwed things up, Jesus”

That’s our reality

Unfortunately, that’s not really a biblical way of approaching life

Remember Israel in the wilderness, how they were led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night?

### 3

Now, don't get me wrong – people in the Bible have their own agendas too  
In the book of Acts, we get the sense that the apostle Paul had an agenda  
He says at the end of chapter 15, “let's go back to all the places we  
preached before, and visit with them to see how they're doing” (Acts  
15:35)

If you read Acts, Paul was constantly on the move, preaching from town to  
town, sharing the good news about Jesus  
He always had a plan

And so, after he had passed through a lot of the towns he'd visited before  
He began to think about NEW places to visit  
Then, at the beginning of chapter 16 – just prior to today's reading - we find  
these strange-sounding verses:

<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions traveled throughout the regions of Phrygia  
and Galatia because the Holy Spirit kept them from speaking the  
word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they approached the province of  
Mysia, they tried to enter the province of Bithynia, but the Spirit of  
Jesus wouldn't let them.

I don't think I know of any other passages of scripture like this – where  
someone wants to do good in God's name, and the Spirit is just like:  
NOPE. ABSOLUTELY NOT.

Now, I'm not 100% sure what that looked like  
If it was that circumstances simply weren't working out right  
Or if Paul had an uneasy feeling in his gut about it  
Or if he'd heard something about resistance to the gospel there that made  
him think twice  
But whatever happened, the Spirit held him back from going where he  
wanted

### 4

Have you ever had that experience?  
Where you are convinced that the right thing to do is move in this direction  
And then you keep finding that your path is blocked

You encounter one problem after another  
Until you finally pause to ask, "is this what I'm supposed to do?"  
"God, did I mishear you?"  
Sometimes, THAT'S our "Jesus take the wheel" kind of moment  
That moment where we just don't know how to move forward and so we  
pray for further guidance from the Spirit

And maybe that's unavoidable, because  
Perhaps God's voice is too hard for us to hear EXCEPT by trial and error  
So perhaps the only thing we can do is to pursue our own plan for a while,  
even if it's just to prove that it's NOT what we're intended to do

But isn't that frustrating?  
Wouldn't we all hope to have a more affirmative direction from the start?  
It's annoying to me that God always seems to want to take us places by the  
scenic route instead of just leading us there directly  
Who's got the time for all that?

Have you ever driven a stretch of highway where there was maybe a sign  
for a scenic overlook, or a weird roadside attraction, or something  
else that interests you, where you always say,  
"Some day, when I'm not in a hurry, I'm going to stop"  
Am I the only one who thinks this?  
But do you ever stop? No.  
Because you're ALWAYS in a hurry.  
Someone's always expecting you. You're always running late.  
There's NEVER time.

And yet, this seems to be God's way  
To take the most confusing, convoluted path to the place where we are  
going  
To pause at every weird little museum. Every roadside hotdog stand.  
In a way that always seems to get us there later than we wanted.  
With very little affirmative guidance

## 5

Except here. In the scripture we read today, Paul gets some very explicit guidance in the form of a vision – a dream where the apostle sees a Macedonian – that is, a Greek – man calling out to him for help  
And then Paul says: “OK, now I understand what I’m supposed to do”

This is another annoying thing about the way the Spirit of God guides us: Sometimes there’s simply no way to understand the challenges and difficulties that end up being obstacles in our path UNTIL and UNLESS we get some clearer direction from God  
Now, suddenly, Paul’s earlier problems in traveling to Asia and Bithynia make sense  
The frustrations make sense.  
God didn’t let me go THERE because God really needed me to go HERE  
Got it.

We can spend a lot of time worrying about the time we’ve wasted in getting where we were going  
Wishing we had the years back for all the side roads and diversions we took

But that requires us to look at our lives from a certain perspective – namely, That WE are the ones who are and OUGHT to be driving  
And that if WE had been in charge, we could have gotten there a lot faster

Again, it’s proof that we’re not really all that interested in “Jesus, take the wheel”  
It’s more like, “Jesus, get up, you’re sitting in my seat.”

## 6

To truly let God be in control is to be surprised – all the time.  
And so, I have to give Paul credit for one more thing we read here:

He knew enough to not take his vision SO seriously that he missed what God actually wanted from him  
I mean, he went to Macedonia looking to help a MAN  
That was the clear direction from the Spirit

But yet, the first PERSON – the first PEOPLE he encountered were  
WOMEN

Women who had faithfully gathered at the river to pray together  
Which leads us to assume that in this town, there was no synagogue  
And perhaps not even ten male Jews to allow for a minyan – the minimum  
number of male believers to convene a service of prayer  
Yet, that didn't stop Paul from sharing the gospel

And so Lydia, presumably a gifted and wealthy person –  
We know this because she had her own business selling luxury goods –  
Purple cloth was an expensive, luxury item –  
Lydia becomes not only the very first convert in Europe, but a key leader in  
the church at Philippi

Paul had the good sense to see that once he let Jesus take control,  
He needed to be ready for whatever came next  
Again, to his credit, he didn't try to re-claim control for himself  
He didn't complain or wonder where this MAN was who was asking for help  
But instead he understood that what God wants is to have us keep our ears  
and hearts open to the leading of the Spirit  
And so when he had the opportunity to share the gospel with a group of  
women, he did

“Jesus take the wheel” isn't meant to be our cry when things are going  
wrong – when we've failed and need to call down divine intervention  
It's meant to be our response EVERY time we realize that we've made  
things more about what WE want than about what God wants –  
every time that we've decided we are more interested in getting there  
quickly than seeing everything God's calling us to see

The Spirit is ready to guide us – if we're willing to lay aside our own agendas.

It's not about allowing God to play a role in our lives ONLY when we feel like we've screwed things up, or are about to

Instead, it's about listening for God's direction – ALL the time

Trusting that we will get to the places where we need to be – according to God's timing

And trusting that we'll meet the people we need to meet – according to God's purpose

The Work of the Spirit is to guide

Our work is to lay aside our agendas and follow.

Amen.

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