

# Spare Tire or Steering Wheel

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I'd like to begin today by talking about two items that one might find in a car. The first is a spare tire. A spare tire is rarely used by any individual person, but when it is needed, it is essential to have in an emergency situation when you get a flat tire. Most people will go months or even years without even checking on their spare, but it is highly recommended that you double check the pressure every once in a while, to make sure it's ready to go.

The second car item I'd like to talk about is the steering wheel. Every single time you get in the car to drive, you will use your steering wheel (let's leave self-driving cars out of this). You can't drive the car without it. The steering wheel allows you to get where you need to go, and if you take your hands off of it for a few seconds, you'll crash.

So, what is religion ... what is the Word ... what is the LORD for you? Is He a spare tire, or is He the steering wheel? The selected readings today offer some examples of the varying degrees to which we can bring the Lord into life. The purpose of today's message is to help you consider the current state of your connection, and to encourage you to make it stronger. I'd like to invite you to imagine your best religious life. If you could have your best relationship with the Lord, what would it look like? As you begin to ponder that, let's jump into our stories.

Our first story today featured the Israelites, not long after taking the Promised Land. Contrary to instructions from the LORD, they hadn't conquered all of the enemies within the land—maybe this was out of laziness (they did as much as they felt like), or maybe it's because they didn't think the enemies were so bad. Eventually, they stop walking in the Lord's commandments and follow other gods. Because of this they step outside of the Lord's protection, their enemies attack and enslave them, and the children of Israel groan or otherwise cry out to Jehovah. The Lord then hears their cries and sends a "judge" or military leader to save them. The book of Judges is a perfect picture of us when the Lord is our spare tire.

We treat the Lord like a spare tire when we go to Him in times of emergency, when we are enduring a difficult life situation and we recognize in that moment of duress and humility that we need the Lord. But as long as life is going well, we kind of forget about Him—we've got it all under control.

We also treat the Lord like a spare tire when we go to church on Sunday and then forget about the Lord, church, and religion for the rest of the week. It's like looking in your trunk, checking the tire pressure, and then covering up your spare tire again. Again, as long as the car is driving well, you don't need your spare tire, and as long as life is going well, you don't really *NEED* the Lord.

Does the Lord want to be our spare tire? Well, yes! Absolutely! Even if the only time we remember the Lord is in an emergency or to check the air pressure once a week on Sundays, the Lord will be there for us. Look at the stories of the Israelites in Judges and beyond ... the Lord was there for them when they

called on Him. The Lord is there for us when we call on Him. As the Lord said to the Laodiceans in Revelation, “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to them.”

The Lord doesn’t want to ONLY be our spare tire, He wants to be in our lives all the time as our steering wheel, so that we are holding on to Him, never letting go because He is the one getting us to heaven. It’s not because He needs us. No. It’s because the best way for the Lord to fill us with happiness is by being connected to Him

Here’s the thing though, it’s kind of hard to remember the Lord *all the time*, am I right? Life is fast, and life is busy. It’s all too easy to get caught up in tasks at hand and interactions with people in the present. And then beyond our current affairs, we have our planning for the future and our considerations of the past. And when we want a break from all of that past, present, and future business, we might just want to scroll on the phone a little bit or read some news.

It’s true—we all have all sorts of business going on. But how we spend or make use of our consciousness and our time comes down to priorities. See, we *do* have to make choices about how we spend our time and what we do with our headspace. Are we prioritizing time for the Lord, or have we relegated Him to the trunk, or did we put Him in the garage? Prioritization is a matter of choice.

There’s one little problem with all this priority talk, though. What if we KNOW we should give the Lord more time in our heads and in our hearts, and we should be remembering to pray and read the Word and all that ... and we WANT to ... but we just kind of *forget* to. As a pastor, am I allowed to admit that this is where I’m at in my relationship with the Lord? No? Ok, then I won’t admit it. But for others who struggle with this conundrum, we can find some ideas in the Lord’s Word to help us remember Him.

As we noticed from the book of Judges, the Israelites were forgetful people, and that’s why the Lord gave them certain laws or rules that would help them remember to follow the rules.

One of those reminders was to attach tassels or a sort of fringe on the four corners of their robe. These tassels served as a reminder that they should be following the commandments. We can think of the tassels as the very edge of the external clothing of a person’s life—the very natural external actions and words and comings and goings and tasks and minutia of our lives. The strand of blue in the tassel was there to represent the truth found in the literal stories of the Lord’s Word.

There were other physical reminders for the Israelites as well. They were to write down the words of the Lord, put them in little boxes, and then wear those boxes on their foreheads and arms, and they would also put those boxes at the entrance to their homes so that they could observe them coming and going. Spiritually speaking, placing these memorials on the body and in the home represent bringing the Lord’s Word into our thoughts and actions, so that it can lead us to spiritual life. The way that we work as humans is that, if we want to become spiritual, we can’t just jump right into being a “spiritual” person. We actually NEED to start with our external. We *must* begin with our thoughts, words, actions, daily schedules, interactions with family, friends, and enemies. If we want a spiritual connection with the Lord, we must start with a natural connection.

And how does one bring the Lord into life for this natural connection? How does one make the Lord the steering wheel? The number one way, of course, is by following the commandments—walk in all the ways He has commanded you. The difficulty here, is that we can keep the commandments without really remembering the Lord. We can do that with selfish intentions, outwardly obedient but inwardly desiring attention and praise. And so, the goal is to actually remember the LORD.

And this is where these physical reminders that the Lord commanded the Israelites can actually come in handy for us as well. Now I'm not saying we should all start wearing frontlets, arm wraps, and tassels (though, frankly, if that is what it takes for us to remember Him, we shouldn't rule it out). What I am recommending is to put reminders for yourself *in* your daily life to bring the Lord *into* your life. For example, keep the Lord's Word on your bedside table or where you drink your morning coffee so that you read it a little. Wear a religious symbol as a reminder that He came into this world so that we can be free, and that He lives in your heart. Put up the classic post-it notes with quotes from the Word or with little reminders to bring the Lord into your life.

Prayers are a really useful way to keep the Lord in mind. A prayer doesn't have to be on the knees while setting a 5-minute timer. Having trouble with negative thoughts toward someone? "Lord, help me with my thoughts." Something good happens to you? "Lord, thank you for Your blessings." Wondering what to do with your life? "Lord, what should I do with my life?" Having trouble remembering to pray? "Lord, help me remember to pray."

And, by the way, the Lord's Word *is* powerful. When Jesus healed the woman with the 12-year flow of blood, she was healed by touching just the hem of His garment—the very edge. The hem here is a symbol for the border of the Lord's Word—the stories in their literal form. But it wasn't just touching the hem that healed her, it was the fact that she believed so strongly that touching the hem would actually heal her. In a similar manner, praying and reading the Word are good, but do you really *BELIEVE* that the Lord helps you when you try to connect with Him in that way? The more you do it, and the more you believe it, the more powerful they are.

Speaking of prayers and our connection with the Lord's Word, here's an idea: you might try memorizing a few short quotes that can be applied in certain situations. For example: when you wake up in the morning, recite just one sentence like: *This is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it* (Ps 118). When you go to sleep, you could try this: *I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety* (Ps 4). When you wash your hands or bathe: *Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good* (Is 1). When you eat: *You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing* (Ps 145). Those are just a few ideas to draw your attention to the Lord.

A final quote and a final thought for you. In the book *Doctrine of Life*, the first words in that work are "All religion is of life." Does your life reflect your religion? Is the Lord in your life? Remember that question from earlier: If you could have your best relationship with the Lord, what would it look like? And a follow up question to that: What's really stopping you? So, go get some tassels and post-it notes, and put some reminders for yourself to make the Lord your steering wheel.

### Readings:

Judges 2:17-18. But the Children of Israel bowed down to [other gods]. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so. And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

Num 15:37-41. Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God."

Deut 11:13-21 'And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.' Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

AE 1042 [6]. As truth from celestial good, which is the truth of the sense of the letter of the Word, is signified by "scarlet," it was used for remembrances, as that: The sons of Israel should make for themselves a train on the borders of their garment, and should put upon the train of the border a cord of blue, that by it they might remember all the commandments of Jehovah and do them (Num. 15:38-39).

AC 7847. 'The doorposts' [symbolize] truths of the natural; and from the meaning of 'the lintel' is the forms of good belonging to it. The reason why the doorposts and lintel have this meaning is that 'the house' means the actual person or his mind, and parts forming the door mean the things that serve to lead into it. The "posts" and the "lintel" have a like signification to the forehead and hands with a person. In the spiritual sense the "lintel and posts" denote the goods and truths of the natural through which there is introduction to spiritual things

Life 1. All religion is of the life, and the life of religion is to do that which is good. Every person who has religion knows and acknowledges that those who lead a good life are saved, and that those who lead an evil life are damned; for they know and acknowledge that people who live aright think aright, not only about God but also about their neighbor; but not so the person whose life is evil. The life of a person is their love, and that which they love, they not only like to be doing, but also like to be thinking. The reason therefore why we say that the life is to do that which is good is that doing what is good acts as a one with thinking what is good, for if in a person these two things do not act as a one, they are not of their life.