



Joy Riding

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Do you remember your first time behind the wheel? Your first drive on an open deserted road or out on the freeway? May- be you've lived through teaching a teenager how to drive? I spend a good deal of time in my car and can't help but think of all the analogies between driving cars and our lives.

Here are just a few...

WHERE'S YOUR FOCUS? What would happen if you drove looking mainly in the rearview mirror? You might run a red light, not see someone approaching from the side or miss a turn. You would certainly not be the safest driver. Yet, how many people are too focused on their past...whether it's a past failure or success? Both are risky and potentially paralyzing. Though there is value in glancing at and learning from our past, the present and future are where we are and where we are going.

VEERING OFF COURSE: Imagine you are driving on a very straight road and your steering wheel turns just slightly to the left? Initially, this may not be a problem, but if you do not straighten the wheel out you will eventually find yourself in the next lane with oncoming traffic and eventually off the road. The results could be devastating, yet it all started by veering off ever so slightly and, most importantly, not making a quick correction. In life, we all veer off course at times. The question is...how quickly do we get back on course?

Sometimes we may rationalize or minimize this "veering off course". But, if we don't straighten out, we continue further off our path, making it harder to get back on track. The signs of being off course can start with a sense of imbalance. This can be our internal equilibrium trying to get us back on track. We can be blinded, distracted or simply ignore these warning signs. It's important to listen and recognize when we are too close to the problem to see it clearly. The results can include problems in relationships, work, finances, etc.

Maybe our view is distorted from dead bugs, chips and cracks in our way. These distortions happen gradually and we fail to recognize how much they are affecting our perspective. When was the last time you stopped to really clean off your "windshield" or repair the chips and cracks that can distort your perspective and take you off course?

ALIGNMENT AND BALANCE: In life, if you find yourself veering off course regularly or you find yourself pulled towards one habit or tendency. You try to stay focused and make good choices but, for some reason, you just keep leaning towards the side. When our cars do this, we find that we have to tighten our grip on the steering wheel and constantly correct for the natural lean towards one side or the other. Hopefully, we recognize this is an alignment problem and take our vehicles in for repairs. I suppose we could continue to ignore this and waste effort keeping our steering wheel adjusted for

the alignment problems, but that's not a solution. In our lives, when we notice a tendency to repeatedly make poor choices and go back to old dysfunctional behaviors, it's important to recognize that, in a sense, we're out of alignment. Instead of spinning our wheels faster and tightening our grip, we need to seek out and accept help from others.

When our cars are checked for problems, they often check to make sure our tires are balanced. If even one tire is low, our ride is bumpy and we get bad gas mileage. In fact, alignment problems can cause extra wear on one or more tires and contribute to the problems. In the same way, unbalance in our lives can cause a misalignment in our behaviors and our behaviors can cause an imbalance in our lives. So, how balanced are you between work, family, health, etc.? Be careful because sometimes, when we are off balance in one area, we overcompensate in another area or find ourselves easily distracted by what we think will give us balance.

RECALCULATING: Recently I found myself at an intersection, distracted by yard sale signs pointing in every direction. Mind you, I don't "need" anything but I love looking. I followed signs as they lead me down streets that swerved deeper into neighborhoods. Sometimes, after getting all caught up in other people's "stuff", it was hard to get back on the path towards home. I even asked my phone GPS to direct me towards home but it was confused too and kept stating, "Recalculating". At one point, after wandering from sale to sale, I found myself in a completely different area than I thought and almost didn't recognize the turn to my own house.

How often do we find ourselves chasing after "stuff" we don't need? Swerving off our path into unknown territory? Going around in circles? We can lose sight of where we are and miss the obvious. We may find ourselves dragging more and more stuff (physical and metaphorical) around in our lives leaving us with fewer resources to take care of ourselves.

WHAT'S YOUR DESTINATION? So, where are we and where are we going? That's the most basic question that must be answered. With GPS maps on most of our phones, we have become more effective at finding our way around. To know how to successfully reach our destination, it must first establish our current location. In our lives, it's important to stop and assess where we are once in a while. Once we assess where we've been, and where we are, it's easier to see a clear strategy on how to more effectively get where we want to go.

There's a saying, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Do you have your goals and dreams mapped out or written down to help you stay on track? Have you shared your plans with others? This can be really helpful in the event that we get "lost" because it's only natural that there will be detours at times. Maybe we'll have to change our destination, but having a plan helps to keep us from getting completely lost and helps us enjoy our journey more.

GIVING UP CONTROL: Recently, I embarked on a plan to teach my teen daughter how to drive. I watched closely to see if she paid attention to the side view mirrors, the rearview mirror, and watched far enough ahead to anticipate potential danger. As I sat in the passenger side (gripping my seat) I realized that my life was in her hands. I had no control over how fast she drove, when she started to slow down or stop, if she used her turn signals, or anything else. I really had NO control.

I learned a lot about myself during this journey. I learned that handing over control is not easy! I also learned that I have to lead by example. Suddenly, I was under a microscope as she learned and watched me more. Part of that included teaching her how to anticipate potential danger. When behind the wheel, we have control over our own car but there are literally millions of other cars on the road that we have no control over. That helped me realize something critical from the Serenity Prayer, "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference". I realize that I have control over myself... only. I may influence those I share the road with, but I have no control over them. So, on the road of life, I need to be courteous and responsible, also watching out for those who are not so courteous or kind. And I need to set a good example.

There are a lot of other things to do intentionally to be a responsible driver and person.

- Stop and look carefully before moving forward, turning or backing up
- Frequently check to see that those around me are still in my line of sight
- Glance at the past, keeping focus on the future while enjoying the present
- Recognize that you hold only your own steering wheel Slow down and apply the brakes, when needed
- Get regular check up's and tune up's
- Fuel yourself with healthy food so I can get better "mileage"
- Keep your eyes on both the short- and long-term goals

Some final questions to consider:

- Do you know where you are at this juncture in your life? Do you know where you are going and how you will get there?
- Are you staying on course with your goals and dreams? Instead of running on empty, are you taking good care of yourself and staying well fueled?
- I hope we can answer "Yes" to these questions. And I hope we are taking the time to enjoy the ride on our life's journey.

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