

# G P S

## For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

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### When You Took the Wrong Road

In February I wrote about the junctions in life's road. Life is full of those decision times when we must choose to go one way or the other. We have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to guide us, but many times we decide to go a way that seems best to us and we make an unwise choice. Those choices may last a short time or they may affect the rest of our lives. How do we handle these unwise choices?

It is never too late to do right. We all start life on the wrong road. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one, to his own way" (Isa 53:6). As soon as we realized the broad road leads to destruction and that God has provided the right, howbeit narrow road, we turned to Him from idols to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Conviction, repentance, and trust in Christ moved us from the wrong to the right path. That is basically the formula that we use in all the lesser changes in life. We must realize from God's Word that we made a mistake, let godly sorrow work repentance, then go in the right direction from that point.

The junction in the road where we made the poor choice is long behind us now and we can't go back to that time. We have to look ahead to that opportunity God gives to turn in the better direction. We ought to say, "If the Lord wills we shall live and do this or that. . . Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jas 4:15, 17). There is another junction in the road up ahead and this time we will trust the Lord's direction. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov 3:6).

1) Is it a bad moral choice you made or are making? Do you know that such a thing is sin before God? These wrong choices can be corrected immediately. "Godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted" (2 Cor 7:10). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9).

Your bad choice may be an offense to a brother or sister in Christ. This may not seem so burdensome as the moral sin, but it is a sin nonetheless. "Leave your gift before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother" (Matt 5:24). These wrong choices, whether morally corrupt or simply offensive, can and ought to be remedied quickly. It is never too late to do right.

2) Some decisions have longer effects and cannot always be totally reconciled, at least not quickly. A choice of occupation may have come to a dead end or placed you in a compromising position. It may take time to prepare yourself for another profession. Perhaps you realize that you were not the best parent to your young children and they are older now and not prepared as they should be for life. You can still be a good parent. Read Proverbs often and ask the Lord to give you godly wisdom for each situation.

3) Some decisions we live with all our lives but make the best of them by God's grace. A child out of wedlock, finding yourself married to a person you thought was a believer but is not, or that marriage ending in divorce. Sometimes the church you have known all your life or for many years is no longer following God's Word and you are forced to make a change you did not want to have to make. Sometimes it will be God's will to remain in a difficult situation such as staying with a lost spouse if that person is pleased to dwell with you (1 Cor 7:13). You can still have a godly effect on your adult child though he has not yet surrendered to God. You are still the parent God has given him. Above all, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet 5:6-7).

"No human hand has ever drawn an absolutely straight line. That is the ideal of the mathematician, but all ours are crooked. But we may indefinitely diminish the magnitude of the curves."

Alexander Maclaren, *The Acts*, 159.

## Further Thoughts on the Wrong Road from the Life of John Mark

John Mark made a bad decision early in his ministry with Paul and Barnabas. “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:13), “returned” is from the ordinary word meaning to leave. John Mark was a Judean and Jerusalem was his home. Compared to the rural countryside of Pamphylia, John was a city boy. Even in the company of uncle Barnabas and the apostle Paul, he felt very uncomfortable when they landed on the Galatian continent. The very place is called Attalia in Acts 14:25. Today it is called Antalya, a very pretty vacation spot. It was not so pretty to John Mark.

John (sometimes called John, sometimes Mark, or “John called Mark” in 15:37) had a privileged youth to this point. He was probably the young man who followed Jesus and the disciples to the garden of Gethsemane and then fled from the soldiers (recorded only in Mark 14:51) and it is also possible that the last supper was eaten in his parents’ house. His later stature as a Bible writer and traveler testifies to his familiarity to all the believers.

There have been various views as to why John returned home rather than go on with Paul and Barnabas. Fear, of course, would be one of them. This area, after all, is where Paul will be stoned and left for dead. Perhaps he was homesick on this first missionary journey away from home. We’ve all felt that during our first year at college or when we moved away from home. Many feel John could have been jealous for uncle Barnabas (the word is “cousin” or “kin”) because during this trip Barnabas, who is always named first to this point, now takes a back seat to Paul. It is Barnabas who later defends Mark to Paul. Regardless (and Luke sees no reason to explain it further), John Mark made a decision that will impact his life and ministry for a great while to come. He probably had many sleepless nights thinking over his decision.

The issue is taken up in Acts 15:36-41 when Barnabas wants to take John Mark with them on a second journey but Paul will have none of it. Barnabas was “determined” (from *bouleuō*, to be resolute) to take John but Paul did not think it was good, (he insisted *mē axioō*, it was unfit) and that John must not go because he “departed” (here the word is from *apostasia*) and basically quit. Now we see that John Mark’s bad

decision is causing division among other brethren. This is always the case that our unwise decisions affect many others for a good while to come. Aren’t we glad that all of our decisions aren’t written in the Bible as Mark’s was for all to see! Yet they are known and accounted for by God.

Luke records that the “contention became so sharp that they [Paul and Barnabas] parted from one another.” This division will last for the rest of their lives in a physical way, though Paul and Barnabas, as adults should, will patch things up spiritually between themselves. Paul will mention Barnabas positively five times in his epistles, three time in Galatians. This present contention will also affect Silas and Judas, Timothy, Luke, and Titus, as well as the churches where he could have ministered. It is amazing how many others we affect in our lives by the decisions we make, whether good or bad or just unwise.

The good news is that the life and ministry of John Mark was far from over. Though Paul “chose” Silas (who will appear only in the second journey of Paul), Barnabas “took” Mark and returned to Cyprus, his home territory (Acts 15:39; 4:36). Tradition has it that Mark will later travel with Peter (1 Peter 5:13) but most of all that God will use Mark to write the second gospel. This is a testimony that it is never too late to do right. “The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (Exod 34:7).

On another side, it is also disputed whether Barnabas responded properly toward Mark or whether Paul did. Barnabas seems more loving and forgiving and that is natural for those with closer family ties. On the other hand, Paul seems to be more practical and more consistent with his principles. Sometimes it takes both kinds of friends to set us on the right path again. Sometimes we ourselves can be too soft on those who need correction, and at other times we can be too severe and unforgiving toward those who have hurt us. As we have seen, in the end God will bring us all together if we have a heart for His heart. In Col 4:10, John Mark is with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment. Later, in 2 Tim 4:11 in the Mamertine prison, Paul asks Timothy to “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” How that must have stirred Mark’s heart. Let us do that quickly with our wounded and discouraged brethren, God has done it long before.