



## Young and Foolish

**B**efore I was old enough to have my own bicycle, I took advantage of every opportunity to ride those belonging to others. One fringe benefit of our family visiting another was that I would be able—depending on the benevolence of the resident kids—to ride their bikes.

Jerry, the son of our friends in Shell Rock, Iowa, had a bike that was a favorite of mine to ride. It was great fun to wheel it around the wide, tree-lined streets of the small town, around and around the block by the adjacent cemetery. There was only one problem: if I sat on the seat, my feet wouldn't reach the pedals. So the only way for me to ride the bike was to do so standing on the pedals, leaning from side to side to avoid the center bar. In fact, the only way I was even able to get on the bike was to launch myself from the edge of their rather large front porch.

The problem with riding a bike in such a fashion is that you have very little control over the vehicle. If you hit a curb wrong, skid on a patch of mud, or otherwise get into trouble, about all you can do is let yourself tip over sideways.

Sometimes you land on your feet; most times, however, you land with your shoulder hitting the sidewalk.

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John Mark had a solid, Christian upbringing. His mother, Mary, was an important figure in the early church and, in fact, a group worshipped in her home in Jerusalem. It was to this home that Peter went after the angel of the Lord supernaturally rescued him from prison.

Mark's family was influential, as well as wealthy. Barnabas, the land-owner who became for awhile the apostle Paul's ministry partner, was related. Mark had a good pedigree, and it is not hard to imagine his youthful enthusiasm when it was proposed that he accompany Paul and his cousin Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.  
*Acts 13:2-5*

How different this must have been for the young man—how exciting to sail the Mediterranean, landing at the exotic island of Cyprus. Surely his youthful vigor and enthusiasm helped sustain him through the tougher moments of the journey.

But something happened between Paphos, on Cyprus, and Perga, which was on the mainland in Pamphylia. Suddenly, John Mark left the mission and returned to his home in Jerusalem.

Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.  
*Acts 13:13*

How do we know that Mark did not leave the mission on agreeable terms?

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there

occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.  
*Acts 15:36-40*

Whatever John Mark's reason for leaving, Paul was of the opinion that he had let them down, that he had abandoned the work he had set out to perform.

Why *do* we fall down?

In a perfect world we would be born with every bit of wisdom and knowledge we would need for any circumstance. But, as we all know, this world is not perfect. We gain experience and wisdom only over time, as we mature.

The person who has been riding a bike every day for forty years will stay upright more consistently than the one who is just beginning. The venerable Christian, who has been walking consistently with the Lord for decades, will fall down less often than the one who just met Him yesterday.

Then again, we can gain experience *by* falling down. The scars of failure can often be the best teachers. If we are paying attention when we blow it, chances are better that we may not blow it again. It's a risky business, however, learning only from the mistakes we make. The better plan is to learn, from the beginning, from the One who has all the right answers.

How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By keeping it according to Your word.  
*Psalms 119:9*

Most of us live only within the level of consciousness—consciously serving and consciously devoted to God. This shows immaturity and the fact that we are not yet living the real Christian life. Maturity is produced in the life of a child of God on the unconscious level, until we become so totally surrendered to God that we are not even aware of being used by Him. When we are consciously aware of being used as broken bread and poured-out wine, we have yet another level to reach—a level where all awareness of ourselves and of what God is doing through us is completely eliminated. A saint is never consciously a saint—a saint is consciously dependent on God.

*Oswald Chambers*

