

**PowerPlus Youth Camp 2009**  
**Bible Study Session One**

**“A Soup Can, Some Dental Floss, and a Coke Tab”**  
**(Exodus 35:30-36:7)**

**I. Introduction**

Janusz Korczak (*YAH-nush COR-zawk*) was a Polish Jew born in Warsaw in 1878. At the age of 20, after his father died, he began to write stories and enter them in literary contests. He used the winnings to support his mother, sister, and grandmother. He began studying medicine at the University of Warsaw and became a pediatrician in 1904. He also wrote a hugely popular children’s book called Child of the Drawing Room in 1905.

Moved by the needs of children in Warsaw without parents, in 1912, Korczak designed and built the Krochmalna (*crock-MAL-na*) Street orphanage in Warsaw. Here he cared for hundreds of Jewish children for more than 25 years. Even though most people have never heard of Janusz Korczak, he had an enormous impact on hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of lonely children. He serves as a reminder that you do not have to be rich, famous, or brilliant to make a difference in this world. All you have to have is a willingness to use all that you have to serve other people.

There is another example of a little-known man who used the gifts and abilities that God had given him to serve. His name was Bezalel and his story can be found in the Old Testament book of Exodus. Before we look at Bezalel’s contribution in service to God, we need to know what was going on before he got his chance to serve.

According to Exodus 19:1, three months after leaving behind the slavery of Egypt the people of Israel found themselves at the base of Mt. Sinai in the Egyptian desert. God called Moses up on the mountain and gave him the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law. God also gave Moses *extremely* detailed instructions about how to build the Tabernacle, a mobile worship tent the Israelites used in the wilderness (Exodus 25-27). This was to be the place where God would meet with His people during their journey to the Promised Land of Canaan. It is obvious that meeting with His people was important to God because of how intricate the directions for the construction of the Tabernacle were.

In this passage of Scripture, Moses shared these commands with the people. He was acting as the “General Contractor” who passed along God’s instructions to the people, complete with exact dimensions, materials to be used, and individuals who would be involved in the construction.

One of the most important people that God wanted on the project was an ordinary, run-of-the-mill guy named Bezalel...

**II. Scripture: Exodus 35:30-36:7**

**III. Sometimes, other people may know God has called us before we do.**

God’s first mention of the Tabernacle was when Moses was up on Mt. Sinai for the very first time for forty days and forty nights by himself (25:8). God gave Moses all the minute details of how the Tabernacle would look and how it would be built. Then, for the first time, God mentioned the name “Bezalel” to Moses as the man that He had “called by name” to build it (31:2).

A lot of things happened between the first time that God mentioned Bezalel and when Moses actually informed Bezalel that he had been chosen (Exodus 31-35). For example, the people built a Golden Calf to worship, God wanted to destroy them, and Moses interceded. In his own anger, Moses smashed the stone tablets that contained the Ten Commandments (Exodus 32). When he went back up on the mountain, Moses asked to see God's face. God refused, but allowed Moses to see him from behind as He passed. Moses hid with his face against the mountain and was able to catch just a glimpse of God (Exodus 33). Moses went *back up* on Mt. Sinai and received a second set of stone tablets. This time, when Moses went back down to the camp, his face was glowing because he had been in the presence of God for *another* forty days and forty nights (Exodus 34).

In other words, Moses knew that God had placed His hand on Bezalel long before Bezalel did. It was not until after being on the mountain for the second period of forty days and nights that Moses announced God's plan for Bezalel. Moses knew for almost two months before Bezalel did!

God might not be the only One who knows what you are capable of accomplishing. Thankfully, He places people in our lives who believe in us even when we might not believe in ourselves. Whether it is our parents, our Pastor, our Youth Minister, or our friends, most of us have at least one person who sees great potential in us, even if we don't.

(Illustration: At this point, you may consider telling a story about someone who believed in you and guided you to be where you are today. Maybe there is someone in your past who helped point you in the direction of ministry or who encouraged you to follow God's calling on your life. Be open and honest and tell the students about someone who made an impact on your life.)

Part of the reason that has given us one another is to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24). Who is that person in your life? Who can you encourage to follow God's call in their lives? For Bezalel, the person who revealed God's plan to him was Moses.

#### **IV. When God calls us, He equips us to do more than we thought we could.**

Apparently, God had been preparing Bezalel for his entire life for this one, special assignment. God had given him the power of the Spirit of God and had filled him with the "understanding" and "knowledge" in working with metals, stone, and wood. The Hebrew word for "skill" that is used over and over again in this passage is the Hebrew word for "wisdom" (*hokema*). Bezalel was not just a handyman, but *wise* handyman!

(Illustration: From 1985-1992, one of the regular Monday night shows on ABC was "MacGyver." It followed the adventures of a resourceful secret agent named Angus MacGyver. One of the trademarks of the show was MacGyver finding himself in a life-threatening situation and having only a few minutes to create a contraption that would allow him to live. One of his primary pieces of equipment was his trusty Swiss army knife, which he always carried with him. So there MacGyver would sit: trapped in an oil tanker with a ticking bomb and all that he had at his disposal was a soup can, some dental floss, and a Coke tab. Somehow, though, MacGyver would be able to build a device that would disarm the bomb, open the tanker, and rescue everyone involved.)

Bezalel sounds like an ancient "MacGyver," who could design and build just about anything. He could work with gold, silver, and bronze. He could cut stones so that they could be pieced together with other stones. He was even a good whittler.

You have to wonder, though, if Bezalel ever thought he would have to “teach” others how to do what he could do (35:34). Any mechanic will tell you there is a big difference in working on a car and trying to explain to someone who doesn’t know anything about cars what he has just done.

Furthermore, did Bezalel ever, in his wildest dreams, think that he would be sewing blue, purple, and scarlet material together? (“He joined five curtains to one another and the other five curtains he joined to one another.” Exodus 36:10). You normally wouldn’t expect to see a brawny carpenter or stone cutter with a needle and thread sewing brightly colored fabric. Yet this is exactly what God had called and equipped Bezalel to do for His glory (Exodus 35:35).

God doesn’t just call us to do what we are able to do, but those things we haven’t even considered. He specializes in calling us to do those things we think we *can’t* do because He gains more glory when we actually do them. When we completely hand over every part of our lives to God, He can use us to do things that we didn’t even think possible. Why wouldn’t we want to see what God could do with us if we let Him? It shouldn’t be because we are afraid because they will be the things He has created us to do.

Bezalel learned God’s plans for him were much larger than any plans that he had for himself. If we yield ourselves completely to God’s plan for us, we will discover the same thing.

## **V. God allows our personal creativity to be part of our calling.**

There is a key word in the passage that points to the fact that even though God had given specific instructions, He still let Bezalel put his fingerprint on the work. In Exodus 35:33, Moses tells the people that God had given Bezalel “wisdom” and skill “so as to perform in every *inventive* work.” In other words, even though God was seriously concerned about the larger elements of the Tabernacle being exactly how He wanted them to be, He was willing to let Bezalel take some liberties with the smaller stuff.

God was, in effect, saying, “In those places where I didn’t give you specifics, Bezalel, let your imagination do the crafting.” To use a musical analogy, God said, “I’ll provide the song, Bezalel, you provide the lyrics.” God gave Bezalel the outline and let him fill in the blanks.

This relates a key truth about God’s calling upon our lives: God does not call us with the intention of squashing our personality but of bringing out His best in us. God gives us a direction and guides our steps, but in those places that He is not clear about how we are to take those steps, He gives us broad latitude in how we take them. Ultimately, it comes down to the one part of individuality that God is always pleased to see us express: creativity.

Is it not obvious that God Himself is creative? All that we have to do is look at the huge variations in how people look, how they talk, and their personalities. Think about all the crazy looking animals that exist in the world.

(Illustration: When European scientists first discovered the Platypus in Australia in 1709, they sent sketches of the odd looking animal back to England. British scientists refused to believe that such an animal existed and thought that the entire story was an elaborate hoax!)

Consider all of the different climates and types of lands in the world, and even in the state of Texas: deserts, beaches, plains, mountains, forests. The raging rivers, the quiet canyons, and gentle summer rains all point to the indisputable truth that God is not only all powerful, but all creative.

If we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), then doesn't it stand to reason that we are creative, too? God gave you what you have and put you where you are so that He could express His creativity through you. Sing something, play something, build something, say something, paint something, sculpt something, carve something...do whatever it is that you do well and do it for the glory of God.

## **VI. When we fulfill God's calling, there is always more than enough.**

As soon as Moses began telling the Israelites about God's plan for them to build the Tabernacle, he also told them that it was only going to be built with freely-given donations of money and time that the people gave (Exodus 35:5, 10). It was going to be a group effort consisting *not* just of the peoples' gold, silver, fabric, wood, oil, and stones, but of their time, abilities, and talents. Let us be clear about this: God was not just asking them to give their money and stuff, but *themselves* to the work.

With work on the Tabernacle underway, and in what must have been an unprecedented event for a faith-based organization, Moses had to tell the people, "Stop giving! We have more than we know how to use!" Moses had to issue a command actually *restraining* the people from bringing anything else to be used on the sanctuary! What?! Are you kidding?!

Yet why does this have to be such a rare occasion? Why is it that so many churches have to limp along in their finances and programs? What was going on at the base of that mountain that isn't going on today?

Could it be that they had plenty because everyone was doing what they had been called to do? Exodus 36:2 states that "everyone *whose heart stirred him* to come to the work to perform it" came and did it. They gave, they worked, and they served. Yet, again, if we can conclude that God is still in the business of "stirring hearts" to serve Him, why are there so many needs that aren't being met? Could it be that we have grown so accustomed *not* to responding that we don't even listen anymore?

What if every person in this room said: "God is stirring me to do \_\_\_\_\_ at my church and I am ready to embrace it with passion!" Do you think that your church would be lacking in anything? Do you think *you* would be lacking in anything as you fulfilled God's direction for your life?

## **VII. Closing Illustration:** The rest of Janusz Korczak's story

In 1940, after the Nazis had taken control of Warsaw, Poland, they created the Warsaw Ghetto. All the children of the Krochmalna (*crock-MAL-na*) Street orphanage were transported to live inside it. Although he was given the opportunity to escape living in the ghetto, Janusz Korczak refused to leave "his children." He chose to live with them inside the ghetto for two years.

On August 5, 1942, Nazi soldiers gathered up 192 of Korczak's orphans to transport them by train to the Treblinka extermination camp. A Nazi guard who had read Korczak's children's book as a child offered him one more chance to escape the train ride to certain death. Janusz Korczak refused for the last time, boarded the train with the children, and was never heard from again.

Maybe one person *can* make a difference in the lives of others. Maybe *you* can make a difference by using what God has given you to serve Him and touch the lives of other people.

**PowerPlus Youth Camp 2009**  
**Bible Study Session Two**

**“Put Me In, Coach!”**  
**(Acts 9:10-19)**

**I. Introduction**

On October 13, 2007, in the small football stadium of Sul Ross State University located in the west Texas town of Alpine, the football team celebrated a hard-fought victory over Texas Lutheran. The game had gone into triple overtime, but the Sul Ross State Lobos had triumphed over the Texas Lutheran Bulldogs with a field goal and had won the game 45-42. Jumping up and down in celebration on the field with the rest of his teammates was a linebacker named Mike Flynt. He had been playing left end on the field goal play that had won the game and had kept the man lined up across from him from getting into the backfield and disrupting the kick.

The thing that was different about Mike Flynt, though, was that he was 59 years old. Other than a 60-year-old in Ashland, Ohio that went in for one snap late in a blowout game, Mike Flynt is the oldest player to step on the field in NCAA football history.

Mike was talking with some of his buddies at a class reunion and told them about the greatest regret of his life: getting kicked off of the Sul Ross football team for fighting in 1971. His buddies basically dared him to see if he was still eligible to play. After checking and finding out that he was still eligible, Mike Flynt walked onto the team 37 years after he had been released. He was still in good health, having worked on several coaching staffs and in the fitness industry since he finished at Sul Ross.

When Flynt played in his first game, the one against Texas Lutheran, he was a grandfather, a card-carrying member of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), eight years older than his head coach, and had two children older than any of his teammates. He played in all six of the remaining games of the season, finished his “senior year” of eligibility, and went back to his life in the sports marketing world.

Mike Flynt is just one example of a man who spent his entire life waiting for his call to go into the game. Even at 59 years old, when the coach called on the guy with the number “49” on his jersey, Mike took his place on the line.

There was a man in the New Testament named Ananias who was much like Mike Flynt. He had spent his life waiting to be used by God, and when the “Coach” called his name, Ananias was ready to go into the game. By doing the one thing God asked him to do, he was able to change the course of human history.

**II. Scripture: Acts 9:10-19**

**III. When God calls us to do something, it might not always make sense.**

In the early days of Christianity, a zealous Jewish leader named Saul was “Christian Enemy #1.” He absolutely HATED followers of Jesus and wanted to do everything that he could to snuff out the new movement called “Christianity.” Since he himself was a righteous Pharisee and would

never do anything against the Law of God, he would just issue orders for other people to do it for him so that he could remain “clean.”

One of these orders was about one of the early apostles named Stephen. Acts 8:1 states that Saul was in “heartly agreement” that Stephen should be stoned to death. Following Stephen’s death, Saul launched a one-man war against Christians and “began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). He was ruthless, merciless, and determined to put a stop to the spread of Christianity.

In Acts 9, Saul won approval from the High Priest to go to the city of Damascus, arrest any Christians, and bring them back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). Damascus, in the province of Syria, was about 180 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Saul had succeeded in pushing the Christian church underground in Judea and Samaria and was now trying to stop it from spreading north.

While traveling to Damascus, the risen Christ met Saul, called him to faith, and sent him on to Damascus (9:1-9). It is an amazing story of Jesus calling a man who was an enemy of the faith to come to faith. Jesus had plans for Saul to take the gospel to the world, but first, He had to get Saul’s attention. Jesus did this on the road to Damascus by surprising Saul, blinding him, and demanding that Saul follow His instructions. Blinded, in shock, and probably scared silly, Saul did as he was told and went into Damascus.

At this point in the story, God called upon one His followers named Ananias. As we just read, God told Ananias to go to a certain street in Damascus (Straight Street) to the house of a man named Judas. God also told Ananias that at this house he would find a man named Saul who was praying and who was expecting Ananias to come.

Knowing Saul’s reputation but not about his conversion experience, you can understand Ananias’ hesitancy. Did God really want Ananias to go and look for the greatest enemy of Christians when the greatest enemy of Christians was looking for him so that he could arrest him and take him back to Jerusalem? How did that make any sense?

Illustration: It would be like God saying to you, “Hey, (insert your name here) guess what I want you to do? I want you to get on a plane and fly to Afghanistan. When you get to Afghanistan, I want you to go into the mountains and start asking around for Osama bin Laden. He has come to Christ and is waiting for YOU to come and pray with him. Now go!”

To his credit, though, Ananias didn’t say, “No way, God!” nor “Are you kidding me? I’ll do anything you want me to do, but I’m not doing THAT!” Instead, he carefully and respectfully voiced his concern to God about the task he has been given. He began to realize that God’s plans don’t always make sense to us, but He still expects us to follow His directions.

More examples: What did 75-year old Abram think when God said, “Pack your stuff and start walking” (Genesis 12:1)? What about 80-year old Moses when God said, “You are the one that will lead my people out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10)? What about when God picked David to be the next King of Israel and told Samuel, “I want the runt of the eight sons” (1 Samuel 16:12)? What must have a teenage girl named Mary thought when God said to her, “I have chosen you to be the mother of my Son” (Luke 1:41).

You may not know what *you* are doing, but God always knows what *He* is doing. If He calls you to do something, even if it doesn’t make sense to you, it makes perfect sense to Him. You may not know why He picked you, but He always has a purpose in mind. Ananias’ responded to God exactly how we should every single time He calls us: “Here I am, Lord.” (9:10)

#### **IV. God's calling for us can be both confirmed and confirming.**

What an act of faith it must have been for Ananias to walk through the city, find Judas' house, take a deep breath, then knock on the door! He must have been like an athlete pumping himself/herself up before a big game. Can't you just see him standing outside saying to himself, "Come on, Ananias! You can do this! You can do this!"

Yet when he took the leap of faith, he found everything exactly as the Lord had told him it would be. He found the street, he found the house, and he found Saul waiting on him. God's calling of Ananias was confirmed, and Ananias did exactly what God had told him to do. Ananias learned an important truth about following God's call: whether we hold up our end of the deal or not, God will *always* hold up His end. God does not lie or change his mind (Numbers 23:19) and the decisions that the Lord makes are always right (Hosea 14:9). Ananias' faith *must* have increased as he was obedient to God's call, found that God kept His word, and that he had played an important role in fulfilling God's plan. We are never told that God ever called Ananias to do anything again, but it had to have been easier for him to respond the second time.

Yet another aspect of Ananias' ministry was to confirm Saul's experience. Between his experience on the road and Ananias' visit, though there is no record of it in Acts, God had appeared to Saul to tell him that Ananias was going to come and help him (9:12). Saul must have been sitting scared at Judas' house waiting and wondering if everything that had happened to him was just a bad dream or if he had really met Jesus Christ. If Saul needed any further evidence that God had called him, he must have found it in Ananias' visit.

How great must it have been for Saul to hear the words, "Brother Saul" from Ananias? Had anyone ever been so kind to Saul? Furthermore, Ananias did for Saul exactly what God had told him Ananias would do: Ananias confirmed Saul's experience on the road, laid his hands on him, and helped Saul regain his sight. Great joy must certainly have filled the house of Judas that day!

So Ananias' calling was confirmed by Saul and Saul's calling was confirmed by Ananias. Isn't that the way it is supposed to work among believers—you supporting and affirming my calling and me doing the same for yours? Isn't part of God's plan for us to "encourage one another and build up one another" (Ephesians 5:11). God has given us other believers to help us find our gifts and our calling, and then to walk down the road together as we pursue it. What a privilege to affirm the calling of others and to have ours affirmed by them!

#### **V. Being the "right person" means being the right kind of person.**

The tradition of the Catholic church holds that Ananias was one of the original 70 disciples that Jesus sent out to spread the gospel during his ministry (Luke 10:1). There is no way of confirming this, and it is a possibility. More likely, though, is the theory that he was one of the Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost and was among the 3,000 who came to faith in Christ that day (Acts 2). Regardless of when he came to faith in Christ, he is called a "disciple" ("follower") of Jesus in Acts 9:10, right before the description of God calling him.

The greatest affirmation of Ananias, however, came from Saul/Paul himself in his great Jerusalem sermon in Acts 22. At this point in Saul's life, his name had been changed to Paul and he had been on three missionary journeys throughout Asia and Greece. He had gone back to Jerusalem and was teaching in the Temple courts when some Jews from Asia recognized him as the man who had stirred up trouble in the city of Ephesus. They also accused him of bringing a Gentile (a non-Jewish person) into the Temple, which would have made the Temple "unclean" and defiled.

Paul was beaten by the Roman guards, but was eventually allowed to address the crowd by the commander in charge. Standing on the steps of the Temple with his hands chained, Paul introduced himself and told his story about coming to know Christ. It included a description of his friend in Damascus, Ananias:

“But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus. A certain Ananias, *a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,* came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him.” (Acts 22:11-13)

This was the first of many occasions where Paul had to defend his apostleship to those who argued that he was just a big faker. Throughout his entire ministry, Paul was dogged by opponents who said that his experience on the way to Damascus was a complete hoax. By referring to Ananias, Paul was, in effect, saying, “Listen, one of your own who is well-respected, can confirm all of this for me. His name is Ananias. If you won’t believe me, ask him.”

Ananias was not only the right man for the job because of his obedience to follow God’s instructions, he was the right man for the job because he had made a habit of being the right kind of man. God used Ananias not only to confirm Saul’s conversion to Saul, but to everyone else, too. How could God have used Ananias if Ananias had been a cheater and a liar? Who would have believed Ananias’ story? Ananias *had* to be a “devout” man who had a good reputation among his people. What Ananias did was not nearly as important as who Ananias was.

In the end, God can use whoever He wants to use to do whatever He wants to do. However, the greatest possibility of being used by God comes when we *position ourselves to be used* by God. When we keep ourselves holy and pure, follow God daily, and try to keep a sound reputation, we give ourselves the best chance of “getting our number called” by God to “go into the big game.” Ananias was the right kind of man to be used for this particular task, and once God used him, we don’t know if he was ever called upon by God to do anything else again. But for that one “play,” Ananias was the man.

## VI. Conclusion

Any coach will tell you the same thing: the best way to get into the game is to show up to practice, give it your all on every play, have your helmet in your hand, and be ready to go into the game when your number is called. We never know when God is going to call us to do something huge for His glory, but we need to be ready when he does.

If Mike Flynt, a 59-year-old salesman, can step up and make a difference in a big game and in his team’s season, then why aren’t we? Just like Ananias, God could pick us to “come off of the bench” at any moment. When He does, will you be ready?

**PowerPlus Youth Camp 2009**  
**Bible Study Session Three**

**“Lean On Me”**  
**(Acts 12:25)**

## **I. Introduction**

Without question, the best story in Major League Baseball in 2008 was the comeback of Texas Rangers’ outfielder, Josh Hamilton. His story is one of potential, tragedy, downfall, hope, faith, and redemption. In 1999, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays picked high school baseball phenomenon Josh Hamilton in the first round of the MLB draft, giving him a \$3.96 million signing bonus. He was only eighteen years old at the time that he was signed, having just graduated from Athens Drive High School in Raleigh, North Carolina.

In 2001, a terrible car accident left him unable to play baseball and he began hanging out with some friends at a tattoo parlor. Having never taken a sip of alcohol or doing any kind of drugs, Hamilton began to sink into the dark world of addiction. By 2004, Hamilton had become addicted to cocaine, and had spent his entire signing bonus.

He was suspended by the Devil Rays, kicked out of his house by his wife, and in the late summer of 2005, woke up in a trailer surrounded by strangers. He got up, went to his grandmother’s house, and there his grandmother had a little “come back to Jesus meeting” with him.

After talking with his grandmother, Hamilton decided to turn his life around and reenter the game of baseball after not playing at all for two years. He was considered an extreme long-shot, but in 2006 was allowed to play for the Hudson Valley Renegades, a minor league team of the Devil Rays. He did relatively well in the 15 games he played in the minors and when the Devil Rays didn’t put Hamilton on their permanent roster, the Cincinnati Reds picked him up for \$100,000.

In December 2007, the Reds traded Hamilton to the Texas Rangers where he began to thrive. He was selected to play in the 2008 MLB All-Star Game. On July 14, 2008, at the MLB All-Star Home Run Derby, Josh Hamilton set a new MLB record for home runs in a derby on a single day with 28. Some of his home runs went over 500 feet. In his post-Home Run Derby interview, Hamilton gave all the credit to Christ, saying, “I just want to give thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and I want to seek to honor him every day.” In response, ESPN commentator Rick Reilly said, “It’s a bad night to be an atheist.”

By his own admission, Hamilton’s success was not just about his faith in Christ, but the people with whom he surrounded himself. In his words, they have “just as much to do” with his success as his ability and his faith. That leads us to a good question: “How important is it that we serve the Lord by being available to support other people?”

## **II. Background**

Yesterday we learned about a man named Saul (who would later become the Apostle Paul) who was an enemy of Christians until he himself came to know Christ. After Christ met Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul went into the city, met Ananias (whom we learned about yesterday), and received his sight again. Saul stayed there and preached for “many days” until the Jews in the city decided to try and kill him (Acts 9:23). One of their own had betrayed them and followed Christ.

Saul made his way to Jerusalem, but was not welcomed among the believers there until a man named Barnabas vouched for him (Acts 9:27). Barnabas told the leaders of the church in Jerusalem that Saul's experience was, indeed, real and that he was no longer an enemy, but a brother in Christ. Even though the Christians in Jerusalem accepted Saul at first, he soon wore out his welcome and had to go back to his home in Tarsus for almost 10 years.

Around AD 45, God began doing amazing things in the church in a city called Antioch, located about 300 miles north of Jerusalem in the region of Syria. Barnabas wanted Saul to be a part of what was happening in Antioch, so he went to Tarsus, found Saul, and brought him back to Antioch. Barnabas and Saul stayed in Antioch for a year preaching and teaching (Acts 11:26) as the church grew and the news of Christ spread throughout the region.

Yet while the church was thriving in the north, times were tough for believers in Judea and Jerusalem. As Christianity spread, Jews and Romans refused to do business with followers of Christ, which led to terribly difficult financial times for Christians.

The church at Antioch decided to take up an offering for the persecuted believers in Jerusalem and send it to them by way of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:29). After Barnabas and Saul gave the church in Jerusalem the monetary gift, the book of Acts introduces us to John Mark...

**III. Scripture:** And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark. (Acts 12:25)

#### **IV. Supporting someone requires your availability.**

John Mark was a believer in Christ living in Jerusalem approximately 14 years after Jesus' death. Apparently, John's mother, Mary, was an important part of the early church in Jerusalem and her house was a place that Christians would gather and pray (Acts 12:12).

While we don't know how he came to faith in Christ, we do know that he was Barnabas' cousin (Colossians 4:10) and was part of the "second generation" of Christians. He and his mother most likely became followers of Jesus within the first few years after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Once Barnabas and Saul had delivered the offering from Antioch, they asked John Mark to come back with them. Clearly, John Mark didn't have anything better to do, so he agreed. Once they all got back to Antioch, God was ready to unveil the next part of His global plan.

Acts 13:1-5 records the birth of missions. Back in Antioch, Barnabas, Saul, and several others were serving as leaders of the church. The Holy Spirit led them to set Barnabas and Saul apart to take the message of Christ to others. The church prayed for them, commissioned them, and put them on a ship to Barnabas' home, the island of Cyprus. Acts 13:5 makes specific mention of the fact that "*they also had John as their helper.*"

Think about this series of events: John Mark first went from Jerusalem to Antioch because his cousin, Barnabas, asked him to come. From hanging out with Barnabas and Saul in Antioch, John Mark next found himself on a boat bound for Cyprus, a key player in the First Missionary Journey. (He was literally their "attendant," a term used to describe a business manager or official assistant.) You just have to wonder if, at some point, Mark stood on the deck of the ship looking out at the crashing waves and thought to himself, "Exactly *how* did I get here again?"

When we decide that we are going to serve God and serve others, we have got to be ready to move quickly. We have got to hold our schedule loosely enough to be ready to go when God or other people need us to go. What would Mark have missed if he had told Barnabas in Jerusalem, “No, thanks, cuz. I’ve got to stay home.”? He would have missed out on the adventure of a lifetime.

“Wait, a second,” you might think, “I can’t ‘hold my schedule loosely! I’ve got to go to school! I have to work!” Have you ever considered, however, that God wants you to be available *AT* your school or where you work? We also have to look at the life of Jesus. Anytime you that think you have a busy schedule go back and look at Jesus’ Blackberry in the Gospels. Jesus was always on the move and yet He *always* seemed to have time for people. If we are going to serve, we have to be ready and available when our time comes.

## **V. Supporting someone doesn’t mean you always have to agree.**

After several months on the island of Cyprus (Barnabas’ home), the three missionaries sailed to Asia Minor. Once they arrived in the port city of Perga, however, something happened and John Mark went home. There is great debate of what caused John Mark to leave the group and return to Jerusalem. Some scholars suggest that John Mark was a young man and that he got homesick. Others maintain that he got much more than he bargained for and that he wasn’t ready for such a huge responsibility. Still others claim that he had a problem with Saul becoming the leader of the group. Lastly, some theorize that because he was Jewish and was a good friend of Peter, he, like Peter, struggled with seeing those who weren’t Jewish come to faith in Christ. In reality, we just do not know why John Mark left.

Three years later, in AD 49, Saul (now called “Paul”) was ready to go on his Second Missionary Journey. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along with them again, but Paul refused, saying that John Mark had “deserted” them on their first mission trip. In a gut-wrenching verse, Acts 15:39 states that they had “such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.” Paul took Silas with him and the groups went their separate ways. One missionary group became two, and Barnabas is only mentioned in passing after this event.

Whatever caused the rift, it was deep, disturbing, and had the potential to derail the fledgling movement. Even though neither group is condemned by Scripture, the story has a cold, harsh tone to it. Unable to resolve their differences, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark found themselves at a point of disagreement that could not be overcome.

*Unity* is different than *unanimity*. We do not have to agree on everything, but we do have to see eye to eye on the essential truths of faith in Christ. In those areas not essential to faith in Christ, we have got to respect each other’s differences of opinion. How much damage has been done to the kingdom of God by believers focusing on how much they differ instead of what they share in common? If we really believe that each of us has been created in the image of God and has the ability to have a unique relationship with Him, then we have to be willing to admit that we may not have *all* the answers.

St. Augustine was fond of saying, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things; charity.” In other words, let us agree on those basic truths of faith, let us give each other room to disagree on those things that are not critical, and let us do all of this with love and understanding.

## **VI. Supporting someone means that you stick with them until the end.**

It might have taken awhile, but Paul and Mark eventually worked through their issues. Ten years later, when Paul wrote his “prison epistles,” he described Mark as a “fellow worker” who was an “encouragement” to him (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). Something happened during this time that brought these two friends back together again. At some point, it appears that they even took another mission trip or served at the same churches together.

We will never know who took the first step to mend the relationship, but we do know that it was fixed. It also was not as easy as sending a text message or email. One of them had to physically track down the other to try and make things right. Can’t you just see John Mark visiting the churches that Paul had started and asking if Paul had been there recently, only to find out he had missed him by a few weeks? What about Paul, travelling to Jerusalem to try and find John Mark at his home only to discover that John Mark was in Asia looking for him.

At the end of his life and ministry, and in the last letter that he ever wrote, Paul did mention Mark one more time:

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. *Pick up Mark and bring him with you*, for he is useful to me for service. (2 Timothy 4:9-11)

Of all the people that Paul *could* have asked to have near him at the end of his life, he wanted Timothy and Mark. Was it that Paul really, really liked Mark or that he knew that he could depend on him to get to Rome? Was it both? Regardless, John Mark proved to be a man that Paul knew that he could count on in a time of crisis. Paul wanted John Mark with him during his final days on this earth.

We know that Mark eventually made it to Rome, but we don’t know whether or not he made it in time to see Paul before he was killed. It is comforting to think that Mark did make it to Rome before Paul was killed by the Roman Emperor, Nero, and that Mark was with Paul when he died.

We also know that at some point while Mark was in Rome, he sat down and wrote the earliest gospel account of Jesus’ life, the Gospel of Mark. John Mark was a dependable guy who not only wrote the truth, but lived it.

## **VII. Conclusion: the rest of Josh Hamilton’s story**

After Josh Hamilton was acquired by the Texas Rangers, the Rangers hired Johnny Narron from the Cincinnati Reds as a “Special Assignment Coach.” Johnny Narron’s “special assignment” is Josh Hamilton.

A strong believer in Christ a long-time supporter of Hamilton, when the Rangers are on the road, Narron handles all of Hamilton’s money, stays in an adjoining hotel room with him, and reads the Bible and prays with him every night. Narron says that he doesn’t do it because it is his job, but because he wants to see Hamilton succeed.

Hamilton makes it clear that Narron is not his “babysitter,” but his friend. They are friends who serve God by serving each other, sharing their successes, failures, and their lives.