

## “GETTING UNSTUCK IN MY FIELD (CAREER)”

By Rom A. Pegram (10/6/19)

Today, we’re going to be talking about how to get UNSTUCK in our jobs or careers or fields of work. And I thought it might be fun to start today by looking at some famous people who got stuck in their job, then experienced a turn-around, getting UNSTUCK—going on to be successful. Let’s give this a try...

*Do you know who this is? Van Gogh...* He started as a school master, then became an apprentice priest, and then an art dealer ... before he found his true calling as *an impressionist painter*. Vincent Van Gogh went from being stuck to UNSTUCK.

*Does anybody know who this is? Julia Child...* At the age of 30, Julia worked for the U.S. government as a spy (Asia). She didn’t take her first cooking class until she was 36 years old, when she found her true calling. Julia went from stuck to UNSTUCK.

*Do you know who this is? Walt Disney...* The creator of the happiest place in the world, right? Did you know he was rejected by the U.S. Army in WWI? The Army rejected him, then after the war he couldn’t get a job. He finally got a part-time job at a newspaper and after that he went to an ad agency—where he took his first lessons in animation. And you know what that led to. Disney went from stuck to UNSTUCK.

*Now tell me, do you know who this is? Harry S. Truman—President Harry S. Truman.* President Truman started out as a bank clerk, then became a bookkeeper, and then he and a friend started a hardware store that failed. He was really stuck, until he became a politician—eventually President. From stuck to UNSTUCK.

*Can you tell me who this is? Harrison Ford...* Before he became Hans Solo (Star Wars), he toiled for 15 years as a carpenter and stagehand, even at one point making cabinets for a lesser known producer, George Lucas. He went from stuck to UNSTUCK.

The point is, all these people at some point were stuck, then became UNSTUCK! Let me ask you this: Do any of you feel stuck in your career or job right now? Be honest. Do you feel like maybe you’ve hit a ceiling with your job, and you can’t go any higher than where you’re at right now? Maybe there’s no meaning or fulfillment anymore. Or maybe you work in a bad work environment with a toxic boss. You just feel stuck—maybe even like a failure...

Folks, if any of this rings true, here’s what I know! There are more people who are listening to me right now who are stuck than who are UNSTUCK when it comes to their jobs. Recent studies show that 60% of Americans feel stuck when it comes to their jobs and/or their careers—feeling a real dissatisfaction with their jobs. And it’s not that the other 40% are all that happy; it’s just that the 40% don’t feel like quitting today. But, is this how God wants us to be? Now, I’m not saying work should be easy; I’m not even saying work must be fulfilling and meaningful all the time. What I’m saying is ... **GOD DOESN’T WANT YOU STUCK WITH IT COMES TO YOUR CAREER—YOUR WORK.** Look at this first verse with me, would you? Ecclesiastes 2:24 (NLT)...

**So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God.**

Where does that verse say satisfaction in our work comes from? It's from 'the hand of God.' So, how many of you would like to find satisfaction in your work? How many want to be satisfied in their job? All of us, right? And this verse tells us that that satisfaction is a gift from God! So, if you want to move from stuck to UNSTUCK in your career...

- It's not about quitting. I've quit jobs before and that didn't necessarily mean I was UNSTUCK. It could even get you more stuck!
- It's not about finding your dream job; I know many people who thought they'd found their dream job, only to discover they were more stuck than ever before...

So, what are we talking about when speaking of moving from stuck to UNSTUCK in our careers? *It's really about trusting God*—giving God control of this area of your life. In fact, that's our definition of UNSTUCK—*moving forward in my life because I am willing to what? Give God complete control!* If you feel stuck in your faith, give God control of your spiritual life. If you feel stuck in your finances, give God control of your finances. If you feel stuck in family relationships, turn over control of those relationships to God. That's how it works. Today, I want to look at a New Testament guy named 'Mark' who—at one point in his life—got stuck pretty bad. And from Mark, we're going to learn some lessons about getting UNSTUCK...

Mark's story happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Jesus was resurrected, ascended to heaven, and Jesus' last commandment to his disciples was what? 'Go into the world and make disciples, teaching them all I've taught you.' That was his final command. So, during the two years after Jesus' death, the Church was just getting started. The disciples were going out and telling people about Jesus—the Church really growing...

One of the new churches—Antioch—chose two really superstar missionaries—*Paul and Barnabas*. The Antioch church was going to send them places where they'd never heard about Jesus—to Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and to Europe—Greece, in particular. They were getting ready to go and this is where Mark comes in—part of the missionary team. From Acts 13:4-5, listen: "So Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit. They went down to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailed for the island of Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> There, in the town of Salamis, they went to the Jewish synagogues and preached the word of God. John Mark went with them as their (*what?*) assistant." He's their assistant...

So, John Mark went with them as their assistant and it's an exciting time—going on this 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey. But ... things turned out pretty badly before they get ve4ry far. They leave Cyprus for their next destination (Acts 13:13-14) and look what happens: "Paul and his companions then left Paphos by ship for Pamphylia, landing at the port town of Perga. There John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> But Paul and Barnabas traveled inland to Antioch of Pisidia...."

Now, we don't know for sure why he quit, but we do know he left on bad terms with Paul and Barnabas. He deserted them. How do we know that? Because a couple years later, when they were getting ready to go on a 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, here's what happened (Acts 15:36-41): "After some time Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let's go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing.' <sup>37</sup> Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. <sup>39</sup> Their disagreement was so sharp that they

separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. <sup>40</sup> Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord's gracious care. <sup>41</sup> Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there."

We know Paul and Silas had an incredibly successful trip. We know this because Luke, who was on the 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey, went with them. As a doctor, he was into details and wrote everything down. That's where we get the book of Acts. But we don't know what happened to Barnabas and Mark, as there was no one writing down their story as they went along. But we do know Mark got stuck in his job. He was unhappy; he quit. Whatever happened, I know there's a lot of us here today who either do or have felt like Mark. You feel stuck...

Fortunately, this isn't the end of Mark's story (I'll come back to that shortly). But first, I want to look at this. I want to learn from Mark by looking at four choices we can make in our lives to get UNSTUCK in our jobs. Here's the first...

**CHOOSE TO MAKE GOD MY BOSS.** We must choose—*of our own free will*—to make God our boss, to give God control of this area of our lives...

Now, we don't know why Mark quit the team—why he went home. We can only speculate. Maybe it was pride. Maybe he had unrealistic expectations as to his role; maybe he expected to preach, like Paul and Barnabas, but they didn't feel he was ready yet. Maybe he was jealous of Paul and Barnabas—maybe feeling unappreciated. Have you ever been there before? You do all this hard work, and your co-workers or bosses get all the credit. And that makes you feel stuck. Maybe Mark felt he'd been treated unfairly. All speculation, but possibilities...

Some places of work have parties from time to time, but do you know the most attended party at most workplaces? 'The pity party (as my mom used to call them). You know what I'm talking about—you feel sorry for yourself and say, 'poor me.' We've all been there, haven't we? And if you work in a toxic work environment, I'm really sorry; I hate that you're in that situation. But I also need you to understand *work is hard*. That's the truth; *work is hard*. But think about this: If it wasn't hard, they probably wouldn't pay you. You'd do it for free. Right? So, we have to understand that that's a part of this ol' world we live in. *Work is hard*.

And maybe Mark's problem (and ours at times) is really ... *who we go to work for*. Colossians 3:23 gives us some insights: "Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." So, who are we supposed to be working for? THE LORD. So, do your very best ... and *do it for God!*

If you decide to go to work for God every day, then he's the one you're trying to please. Your stress level goes down—only trying to please One. Your fulfillment level goes up, not caring the size or importance of the job—only that it's being done for God. In Galatians 1:10, Paul writes: "Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant." Pleasing God is all that really counts in this life; so, *choose to make God your boss*. Then...

**CHOOSE TO SEPARATE WHO I AM FROM WHAT I DO.** Mark was probably a bit down in the dumps after he quit that 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey—even more so when Paul rejected him for the 2<sup>nd</sup> tour. He probably felt like a failure, like he wasn't going to amount to much. Maybe Mark connected work with his identity and was a bit lost when the split happened—not knowing what to do with himself after that; that happens—our sense of identity connecting to our job or career; we do this all the time!

It's like when we approach someone new and ask them, "What do you do?" If you ask me, I would say, "I'm a pastor." Others would say, "I'm a farmer, or a secretary, or salesperson, or engineer"—whatever you do for a living. So, *what did we just do? We connected our identity with what we do.* And basically, when we do that, we're saying they're the same thing ... but is that right?

Call me crazy, but *I don't think what we do is really who we are!* That would mean, when we fail at work, WE are a failure. And that's just not right. Who we are, folks, is always tied into who God made us to be—*who we are in Christ.* Eph. 2:10 reminds us: "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." **TURN TO THE PERSON NEXT TO YOU AND REMIND THEM, "You are God's masterpiece!"** Would you do that?

You are God's wonderful creation. *Don't ever let others equate your self-worth to your net worth!* Don't believe the lie that says your career is who you are, because it's not. Consider this (as radical as it may sound): *Your job ... is not your main purpose in life!* Have you ever considered that? You need to separate who you are from what you do. Another choice we can make to get UNSTUCK in our jobs is this...

**CHOOSE TO BE FAITHFUL IN THE SMALL THINGS.** In other words, when you work, learn to do the ordinary things extraordinarily well! If you do that, you'll get UNSTUCK quickly...

I don't exactly know what it was like for Mark on that 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey. No doubt, it was hard. He was probably assigned to tasks like carrying baggage, while Paul and Barnabas got to do the teaching. He was probably in charge of plugging in the microphones, hauling the amplifiers, and general set up for their worship times. Perhaps he considered some of the tasks beneath him—menial, if you will. And that caused Mark to be frustrated; he lost interest. And then he probably started 'phoning it in' a few times. (I'm sure no one here's ever done that!)

But here's the truth: God teaches us, in his word, that that's not how it works. *God is not going to bless you with something great and big if you're not faithful with the small things you have now.* In fact, Jesus says that in Matthew 25 (parable)—ending with a response to the good employee saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" And we need to seek that same response from God—every time we go to work! Ecclesiastes 9:10a says, "Whatever you do, do well...." So, choose to be faithful in the small things, and finally...

**CHOOSE TO PERSEVERE EVEN WHEN I FEEL STUCK.** What's the easiest thing to do when you feel stuck? QUIT, right? Give up. I've been there ... with some regrets! The truth is, quitting doesn't always get you UNSTUCK; many times, it gets you *more stuck* ... as Mark found out!

Paul experienced the need to persevere during his missionary journeys. In his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Church at Corinth (1:8-9), Paul says, "We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. <sup>9</sup> In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead." And that's exactly what we need to do, too, when stuck in our jobs.

Now, here's the rest of the story... You know Mark. We saw his story begin—as one who gave up on God's work early on; he quit, didn't he? And he could have quit for good, but to his credit he didn't. You see, at the end of Paul's life (in prison in Rome), he wrote letters to a young pastor—Timothy (2 Tim. 4:9-11). In the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter Paul says, "Timothy, please come as soon as you can. <sup>10</sup> Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. *Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry [italics mine].*" Did you hear that? Mark, here, goes from stuck to UNSTUCK. He went from being left behind by Paul to being one who Paul asked to come see him at the end of his life!

We also know this: Mark goes on to be a close advisor to Peter (1<sup>st</sup> bishop of Rome). How do we know that? Because Mark wrote down Peter's personal account of the life of Jesus ... which we know as THE GOSPEL OF MARK. From stuck to UNSTUCK...

Maybe God is using whatever tough time you're going through right now—in your job—to prepare you for what's next—just like he did with Mark. Maybe God's preparing you for something big—something he wants done for him. So, don't quit; don't give up. Instead, allow God to be in charge—to change your heart during this time. And learn, like many before us, *to rely on God's power in our lives fully*—the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Let's close with this verse (2 Cor. 3:5): "It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God." *Our only power and success come from God... Work for him!*