

Mario Bros.

Welcome to **Week 3 of Screens to Sacred** as we look at some moments in entertainment that can be good reflections and reminders for us to turn our gaze back to the Word of God. As we have said each week this type of series gives us an opportunity to look for impressions of God or godly principles that we find in pop culture. Even though many of the creative entertainment works that we are going to be looking at are secular in nature and in some cases not even produced or written by people of faith, we can still find helpful spiritual principles and see glimpses of God throughout these creative works. And this should not surprise us. In fact, if anything it proves that man (no matter what his or her belief may be) has been created in the image of God and as image bearers we all reflect His glory whether through art, music, or movie entertainment. Another reason this is a profitable exercise for us is that it gives us a natural bridge by which we can have spiritual conversations and share the Gospel with other people even though they may not be believers or may not have ever read the Bible themselves. These popular movies and shows provide us a platform with which we can cultivate further conversations about God.

Today we are looking at the history of the most famous plumber in the world - **Mario**. The original movie version of **Mario Bros** was a bold direction for **Nintendo** and video game movies. In 1993, less than 10 years after the character's first game, the movie **Who Framed Roger Rabbit** premiered with **Mario** as the star of the movie, which was a big credit for a kid in that time frame. Plus, you had a young John Leguizamo as Luigi. It was bound to be amazing, or so it was hoped. With a \$48 million budget, it was met with \$20 million in ticket sales at the worldwide box-office and scored a 23% on Rotten Tomatoes. It was considered a colossal failure, and was met with so much criticism and regret that Nintendo didn't let them try another movie for 30 years! The movie was so disappointing that Nintendo let an entire lifetime pass before they tried again. Despite the cinematic failure, Mario is one of the highest grossing, most recognizable video game characters of all time. New theme park worlds are being added at Universal studios just for the character alone. Outside of the dozens of his own games, he has appeared in over 200 other games as well with more on the way. Finally in 2023 Super Mario got his chance at redemption with an animated adventure. The movie was also met with plenty of speculation and criticism up front for the voice casting choices and designs, but it finally paid off. Nintendo gave the Mario Bros movie a \$100 Million Dollar budget and it has currently earned at the box office **1.3 Billion** (\$1,351,266,849 to be exact). That's billion. With a B.

Look at what can happen with a second chance. Although I doubt anyone could have predicted Mario's success and impact on the world, his designer definitely did not. In reality, Mario was initially a disappointing replacement to Shigeru Miyamoto's original dreams and desires. Shigeru was a designer for Nintendo, and in 1979 produced a widely disliked arcade game called "**Sheriff.**" His game was basically a failure in an industry that was barely taken seriously. He was essentially a joke within a joke. Then, right after his failure came the amazing success of "**Pac-Man**" in 1980. This could have been motivation for him to quit, to give up, to realize he's just not that good of a designer, and to walk away. However, he was determined not to let this be his downfall and he set out to make a game even more popular than Pac-Man.

He wanted to be the man behind a best selling video game. His plan involved less innovation, and more capitalizing on properties he knew were a hit. He set his sights on **Popeye!** The comic strip and cartoon character had been going strong for over 50 years and had been revitalized and brought to the attention of the world with a live action portrayal by the comedic legend Robin Williams. Miyamoto did everything he could to get Nintendo the rights to Popeye so that they could produce this amazing game he envisioned, but sadly, much like his game Sherriff, it

would never become a success because it would never be released. His original plan was to create a jumping adventure game where Popeye had to climb up levels dodging obstacles to get to the top and rescue Olive Oyl from his burly nemesis Bluto. **King Features**, the company that owned the rights to Popeye just wasn't feeling the value of allowing their property to be in the hands of the budding video game industry so they denied Nintendo the rights to use Popeye. Once again, Shigeru Miyamoto was face to face with failure.

This morning as we look at the history of Mario Bros. I want us to see **Three Life Principles** that we also find in God's Word regarding FAILURE and how God wants to use that to do something extraordinary in our lives.

Life Principle #1 - Failure doesn't have to DEFINE us

We see this amplified in the life and actions of Moses. We think of Moses as the mighty liberator of Israel, and the messenger and vessel of God's fulfilled promise to His chosen people. Yet for a season of his life, Moses was simply a failure.

Exodus 2:11-15 (NIV) **11** In the course of time Moses grew up. Then he went to see his own people and watched them suffering under forced labor. He saw a Hebrew, one of his own people, being beaten by an Egyptian. **12** He looked all around, and when he didn't see anyone, he beat the Egyptian to death and hid the body in the sand. **13** When Moses went there the next day, he saw two Hebrew men fighting. He asked the one who started the fight, "Why are you beating another Hebrew?" **14** The man asked, "Who made you our ruler and judge? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought that everyone knew what he had done. **15** When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done, he tried to have him killed. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian."

Moses abandoned every bit of his royal Egyptian life and he left Egypt in failure and defeat. He left the place God had placed him in disgrace and he ran to hide in the wilderness. And when he ran, he ran hard. He settled down. He got married. He started a family and didn't look back. That could have been the end of his story. He may have had a happy family and life, but that's not all that God had planned for him either. Sometimes we get in the place where we let failure get in the way of our moving forward.

If Nintendo had never tried again with the Mario movie it would have lived in failure, and if Miyamoto or Moses didn't take advantage of their second chances, it would have dramatically changed the outcome of their lives.

I'm pretty sure you have been in a place like me where you feel like every step forward is met with opposition. It's like every time you try to accomplish something, the whole world is against you. Here's what I'm here to tell you: keep pushing. I know it's hard sometimes, I know failure and opposition sucks, but keep going. God teaches us frequently to keep going, because in all reality we just can't see the whole picture from our perspective as to what God is up to in our lives.

2 Chronicles 15:7 (NIV) "But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."

Galatians 6:9 (NIV) "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

James 1:4 "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

These are promises God gives to those who serve Him. To those who place their trust in Him and who keep striving for His kingdom. This is a basic principle of life also. Failure doesn't have to define us. And this is even more true for the son or daughter of the KING.

Shigeru kept pressing on even though he faced repeated defeat and frustration. He was happy with the game concept and decided he would just have to create a villain, hero, and damsel of his own to replace Bluto, Popeye, and Olive. He wanted to maintain the same triangle dynamic but at the same time not be completely obvious that he was just using placeholder archetypes for the characters he actually wanted to use. He eventually settled on his original dynamic, and on July 9, 1981 his game was released. His game that used cheap home-made knock offs for beloved cartoon and film characters, and had every reason to fail, didn't.

His substitutes for the characters he wanted were **Donkey Kong, Mario, and Pauline**. Mario exists today because King Features didn't believe in Popeye being a video game commodity. The most iconic character in video game history exists because a man failed multiple times and was forced to persevere to achieve his goal. Slow clap for Shigeru. While I know Popeye still exists, he is more of a relic of long gone generations of cartoons, while Mario is still thriving today. There are very few people in the world that don't know the perky plumber. Donkey Kong is also equally recognizable and has developed a great name for himself along the way. Even Pauline made a big comeback in Super Mario Odyssey as the mayor of New Donk City.

When Shigeru created these characters, I don't think he believed he would be changing the video game entertainment world. I don't think he believed he would be creating one of the most successful and iconic characters of all time. I don't think he expected his substitute for Popeye to become a legend. What he wanted was to create a successful video game, and against great odds and in the wake of failure, he not only met his goal but far surpassed it. And this leads us to a second principle for life.

Life Principle #2 - We have no idea how FAR a second chance will TAKE us.

Exodus 3:1-6 (NIV) **1** Moses was taking care of the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. As he led the sheep to the far side of the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

2 The Messenger of the LORD appeared to him there as flames of fire coming out of a bush. Moses looked, and although the bush was on fire, it was not burning up. **3** So he thought, "Why isn't this bush burning up? I must go over there and see this strange sight." **4** When the LORD saw that Moses had come over to see it, God called to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Moses answered, "Here I am!" **5** God said, "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals because this place where you are standing is holy ground. **6** I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Do not be surprised at how God will get your attention! Btw, you can run and you can try to hide from God, but there is nowhere you can go to get away from Him! Notice Moses is out in the wilderness on the far side of the desert and thinks He is all alone with his sheep.

How many of us try to hide, when we see God getting close, or God leading us close to Him? Failure and sin can cause us to hide from God. We see this with Adam and Eve in the garden in **Genesis 3**.

Genesis 3:6-8 (NIV) **6** When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. **7** Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. **8** Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

And in actuality this was also what Moses was doing as well. Are you trying to hide from God today? Do you feel like you have failed God and are no longer of any use to Him? Moses did! Adam and Eve did!

Exodus 3:7-11 (NIV) **7** The LORD said, "I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard them crying out because of the slave drivers. I know how much they're suffering. **8** I have come to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good land with plenty of room for everyone. It is a land flowing with milk and honey where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites live. **9** I have heard the cry of the people of Israel. I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. **10** Now, go! I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you can bring my people Israel out of Egypt." **11** But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

We never feel adequate. We never feel like we are enough. We see our failure but we don't see our potential or our future. Especially when God is involved

Exodus 3:12-13 (NIV) **12** God answered, "I will be with you. And this will be the proof that I sent you: When you bring the people out of Egypt, all of you will worship God on this mountain." **13** Then Moses replied to God, "Suppose I go to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What should I tell them?"

We really do not understand how far a second chance can take us! And that leads us to our third life principle.

Life Principle #3 - It's not about WHO is CALLED, it's about WHO is CALLING

Exodus 3:14-17 (NIV) **14** God answered Moses, "I Am Who I Am. This is what you must say to the people of Israel: 'I Am has sent me to you.'" **15** Again God said to Moses, "This is what you must say to the people of Israel: The LORD God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever. This is my title throughout every generation. **16** "Go, assemble the leaders of Israel. Say to them, 'The LORD God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, appeared to me. He said, "I have paid close attention to you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. **17** I promise I will take you away from your misery in Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" "

Moses had no idea what this conversation with a burning bush was going to lead to, but God had huge plans for the nation of Israel, and we see on this end of the story how it all played out eventually leading to the salvation of us all. Don't give up just because you fail!

You probably have some choices and actions in front of you right now that might look to you like they are second best. You might be facing some situations that seem like cheap substitutes for what you actually desire, but please understand that though it may not be what you originally wanted, that doesn't mean it can't be far greater than you ever imagined. Don't give up. You could be that one moment of endurance away from your Mario moment, even if you can't see it. Shigeru didn't see his coming, but it was waiting to unfold before him.

You may not be able to see what God is unfolding before you in your life, but please believe, He's not against you. He's not your enemy. He loves you and wants the best for you. Listen to what God says to His people in the Love Letter He has given us called the BIBLE

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV) "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand."

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV) "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Romans 8:28 (NIV) "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Within a year of Donkey Kong's release, it was so popular and so successful that King Features had a monetary change of heart and decided to allow Nintendo to make a Popeye game. At that point people didn't respond as positively to the game because it was too similar to Donkey Kong. While this is a story about the success of Shigeru, it's equally a story about King Features. You see, they were presented with an opportunity of a lifetime and passed on it.

There is an opportunity of a lifetime before you today also! 2000 years ago Jesus (God's Son) went to an old rugged cross and died on it so that you would not have to face the wrath of God for your sins and failures. In essence it was for the purpose of offering you and I a second chance at life. Don't miss it my friend by rejecting Jesus and His offer of salvation.

I don't know where you are at today, but this I do know. Failure doesn't have to define you! Especially where God is involved. He is the God of second chances if you will only confess and repent of your sin. If you will, the Bible tells us that He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you of all unrighteousness! It is not about the called, it is about the ONE who calls us to Himself. And I want you to know that if God can use the likes of Moses, David and the disciples, He can use you!

Imagine what the world would have been like if Popeye would have been made instead of Donkey Kong. Nintendo may never have become the company it is today. Video games may never have become the hit that they are. We can't know that outcome, but what we do know is what happened when Shigeru didn't give up.

We also know what happened when Moses embraced his second chance. How all of earth and the Kingdom of God was changed. I hope the world gets to hear the story of what happens when you don't give up too. When you don't let failure define you and you don't pass up on the second chance at life Jesus is offering you through His forgiveness! Would you PRAY with me?

Invitation:

- 1) Who today needs a second chance at life? Would you accept Jesus?**

- 2) Maybe you are here today and you have been serving Jesus for years but you have failed in some way along the way. Some moral failure perhaps. Some mistake where you are having to face consequences for your sin. God is not done with you!**

- 3) Maybe you keep facing opposition everywhere you turn. Doors are being shut as you are pursuing your dreams. You are discouraged and about to give up. Keep pressing! Keep moving forward with Jesus because breakthrough is just around the corner and God may be doing something you didn't even realize!**