

Big Idea: Our mistakes don't define us.

Primary Scripture: Acts 15:36-41

Supporting Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:11; 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- Disney is everywhere with theme parks, movies, Disney+, Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars, ESPN.
- All of it started with one man – Walt Disney.
- Before success, Disney failed repeatedly.
 - He was fired for “lacking creativity.”
 - His first animation studio went bankrupt.
 - He created Oswald the Lucky Rabbit before losing the rights.
- In the middle of those failures, Walt created Mortimer Mouse, who would become Mickey Mouse. This changed everything.
- Walt's story shows us that mistakes don't have to define us.
- Today's Bible story is about John Mark, someone who failed big but whose story wasn't over when he did.
- God worked through John Mark's failure and He does the same with us.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- Paul and Barnabas were a dynamic duo in the early church, traveling together to spread the message of Jesus and planting churches.
- Now, they're preparing for their next trip, where they plan to check in on the churches they started and encourage the believers they met.
- That's where John Mark comes into the story and where some tension starts to build.

³⁶ 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.” ³⁷ Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. (Acts 15:36-37 – NLT)

- Paul wants to revisit the churches they planted.
- This trip is about encouraging new believers and seeing how they're growing in their faith.

- Barnabas, known for his encouraging heart, suggests giving John Mark another chance by bringing him along on this next journey.

³⁸ *But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. (Acts 15:38 – NLT)*

- John Mark had joined Paul and Barnabas on a previous missionary trip, but he quit partway through.
- We don't know exactly why he left. It could have been homesickness, fear, or frustration. But Paul saw it as abandonment.
- Paul isn't ready to trust him again.
- Barnabas sees potential and growth in John Mark.
- Paul sees failure and risk.
- Their disagreement grows so strong that they part ways.

³⁹ *Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. ⁴⁰ Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord's gracious care. ⁴¹ Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there. (Acts 15:39-41 – NLT)*

- For John Mark, this could have been the end of his story.
- It would have been easy for him to believe:
 - "I messed up too bad."
 - "Paul will never trust me again."
 - "I'm disqualified from doing anything important for God."
- But God wasn't even close to being done with John Mark.
- Even though Paul gave up on him (for a time), God didn't.
- Later in John Mark's life, we learn from church history that he became very close to the Apostle Peter.
- Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, mentored John Mark, sharing everything he saw and experienced with Jesus.
- Many scholars believe that John Mark took all those stories from Peter and wrote them down in what we now know as the Gospel of Mark.
- Even more incredible is Paul and John Mark eventually reconciled.
- Near the end of Paul's life, Paul actually requests John Mark's help while he's in prison.

¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry. (2 Timothy 4:11 – NLT)

- Paul, the same guy who refused to work with John Mark after his failure, now sees him as valuable and helpful.
- This is such a powerful picture of grace.
- Instead of ending in failure, John Mark's story ended with restoration, purpose, and trust rebuilt.
- John Mark's mistakes didn't define him.
- God's grace and plan defined him.
- No mistake is too big for God to redeem and use for His purposes.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. God doesn't give up on us.

- John Mark messed up, but God gave him another chance.
- Through Barnabas, God gave John Mark an opportunity to grow and serve again.
- God never gave up on him and doesn't give up on us.
- Our mistakes are not the end of the story.

2. Mistakes help us grow.

- John Mark's biggest failure became a turning point.
- He could have quit but instead, he learned, grew, and matured.
- Growth often comes through failure.
- John Mark went from someone Paul rejected to someone Paul specifically requested.
- Our mistakes can teach us, strengthen us, and prepare us for what's next.

3. God offers second chances... and more.

- John Mark's story isn't just about a second chance but about what he did with it.
- We all have a choice after failure to stay down or get back up.
- John Mark got back up, and God used him powerfully.

- No mistake is too big for God's grace.
- Jesus offers second chances, inviting us to step into something new after failure.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Own your own story.

- Admitting mistakes is hard, but it's the first step toward healing.
- Own your mistake.
 - Be honest with yourself.
 - Have a conversation with God asking for forgiveness or help.
 - If your mistake hurt someone, apologize without excuses.
- John Mark's story changed because he owned his past, and we can do the same.

2. Choose growth over guilt.

- Guilt keeps us stuck but growth helps us move forward.
- 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.

⁸ We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 – NLT)

- When you fail, ask yourself these questions.
 - What did this teach me?
 - What can I do differently next time?
 - How can this make me stronger?

3. Show grace to others.

- Everyone messes up so how can you become someone's Barnabas?
- Look for someone this week who needs grace, encouragement, or a second chance.
- Send a text, spend time with them, or just remind them you believe in them.
- We all need someone to believe in us after a mistake. Be that person for someone else.