



RESCUING THE RUNAWAY

WEEK 6
07.10.16

FOCUS VERSE

II Timothy 4:11

Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

LESSON TEXT

Acts 12:12, 25

12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

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25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Acts 13:5, 13

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

.....

13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 15:36-40

36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

II Timothy 4:11

11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.



FOCUS THOUGHT

It is refreshing when someone steps forward and demonstrates the godly principle of patience to rescue those who fail.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Patience for Those Who Fall Short of Our Expectations

When John Mark left Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey, Paul was disappointed in him. For that reason Paul did not want to take Mark on the proposed second journey (Acts 15:38). It became a point of contention between Paul and Barnabas, who insisted that Mark go along (Acts 15:39). Consequently, Paul and Barnabas agreed to disagree and went separate ways with Barnabas taking Mark with him.

Barnabas demonstrated a strong sense of spiritual maturity, patience, and godliness in his effort to mentor John Mark. He defended him, expressed confidence in him, and took him along for ministry. What a vitally important role for mature believers in the church—caring for the weaker brethren and rescuing them from failures!

One writer observed the following: "God is not only the God of second chances; He is the God of another chance. This is good news because most of us mess up the second chance fairly quickly. One of the amazing facets of God's character is His incredible patience with us" (www.gotquestions.org, "What Does the Bible Say about Second Chances?" accessed February 25, 2015).

It is interesting that Paul so quickly gave up on John Mark after being patiently cared for himself by Barnabas upon first coming into the church. We all need to be a little more patient with those who fail to meet our expectations. Even Paul ultimately recognized Mark's value to the kingdom of God and requested of Timothy: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (II Timothy 4:11).

OUTLINE

I. PATIENCE NECESSARY

- A. John Mark's Background
- B. Early Immaturity

II. PATIENCE TESTED

- A. Paul Focused on the Past
- B. Barnabas Had Patience

III. PATIENCE REWARDED

- A. John Mark Matured
- B. John Mark Wrote the Gospel of Mark
- C. Patience Is Priceless

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

As creatures of time, we are in the process of "becoming." Time is the method God has chosen to unveil His purposes, and time is the potter's wheel upon which we are shaped according to those purposes. When we demand results now, we are often rejecting God's mode of operation. When we demand that God intervene and change someone's mind immediately, we often fail to reckon with the

fact that God typically does not impose His will upon anyone. Instead, He uses time—the instrument of His will—to stimulate and inspire change. Dealing with disappointments, coming to grips with our mortality, and suffering hardships, but also experiencing joys, mercies, unmerited kindnesses, and unexpected pleasures are all God's agents of change.

Therefore it is important to learn the value of patience, for patience demonstrates wisdom and understanding. Having patience shows that an individual trusts not only what God is going to do but also how He is going to do it.

This brings us to the subject of Mark—a somewhat shadowy figure in the New Testament. We are given four solid facts from which to infer and reconstruct his role in early church history: (1) As a younger man, he abandoned an early Christian missions effort with Paul and Barnabas. (2) When considering a second missionary journey, Barnabas believed in Mark enough to risk an important friendship with Paul. When choosing between continuing a successful missionary endeavor with

Paul or embarking upon a mission with the previously unreliable Mark, Barnabas counterintuitively chose the latter. (3) Mark's later years revealed a marked change: he won the respect of Paul, vindicated Barnabas's earlier belief in him (II Timothy 4:11), and earned the affection and trust of Peter, who called him "son" (I Peter 5:13). (4) Mark is credited with having recorded the Gospel that now bears his name.

The patience of Barnabas, it seems, played a key role in Mark's successful ministry development. Barnabas believed a man's failure is not final and God is time's master, shaping and revealing the man He intended Mark to be.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. PATIENCE NECESSARY

A. John Mark's Background

Our first explicit information regarding Mark comes in Acts 12:12. Here, after being miraculously released from prison, Peter "came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying." Tradition has it that this house was the site of the Last Supper, the place where the apostles prayed after Christ's ascension, the place where the Holy Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost, and where Mathias was elected as a disciple in place of Judas. If tradition is correct, then what a home Mark must have grown up in!

But even if tradition is unreliable on this point, it is significant that Peter's first instinct after being released from prison was to go to this house. Mark's mother's house was a house of prayer. The connection that would later lead to Mark's recording of his Gospel through the eyewitness teaching and preaching of Peter was established here, and the home had witnessed strange and miraculous events.

Luke, in accord with Paul's effort to see the church as a Jewish and Gentile hybrid people of God, often stressed in Acts the Jewish-Gentile nature of the church. We can see this emphasis in the way Luke introduced us to Mark: He was called first by his Jewish name, John (Yohanan), and then by his Greek-Latin name, Mark (Marcus). We can be fairly certain

Mark was a Jew, probably of the tribe of Levi, because his mother owned a home in Jerusalem, and he was a near relative of Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36).

B. Early Immaturity

After Barnabas and Saul, who later was referred to as Paul, had fulfilled their calling in Jerusalem, they took John Mark and set off for Antioch. In Antioch "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). The Spirit did not mention Mark. Mark, it would seem, went along as an apprentice and a servant to his elders. (See Acts 13:5.)

The three set off for Antioch's port city, Selucia, and sailed to Cyprus—Barnabas's native country. From there they went to Salamis. Up to this point, little of note seems to have happened. (See Acts 13:4–5.) However, when they arrived at Paphos, their mission took an eerie turn. A certain Bar-Jesus (Son of Jesus), serving perhaps as a personal adviser to the territory's deputy, Sergius Paulus, felt threatened by the teachings of Saul and Barnabas. (See Acts 13:6–8.)

Bar-Jesus was also called *Elymas*, which Luke translates as "sorcerer." As Elymas attempted to poison the budding relationship between the missionaries and Sergius Paulus, Saul "filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season" (Acts 13:9–11). Indeed, the man who claimed to have insight into spiritual matters became, like Saul after his Damascus encounter, blind and needing someone to take him by the hand.

This may be where Mark changed his mind about being an evangelist. Perhaps this encounter with Elymas was all Mark could take, for afterward he headed home to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Mark's departure at this point is probably not coincidental. Perhaps he saw what real demonic opposition was like and faltered.

Time went by and Paul and Barnabas found themselves in Jerusalem again (Acts 15:36–40).

After deciding to go on another missions trip, Barnabas proposed that they take Mark along again. In fact, the language is much stronger than that: Barnabas was “determined” to take Mark. Paul, however, was equally determined not to take him because Mark had left them on the previous missionary journey. “The contention was so sharp between them” (Acts 15:39) that Barnabas and Paul never went on a missions trip together again.

It seems as if Luke forgot about Mark; the last mention of Mark and Barnabas in Acts was when Barnabas took him to Cyprus.

II. PATIENCE TESTED

A. Paul Focused on the Past

It is common for people to try to gain some measure of predictability of the future by paying heed to what has happened in the past. Life teaches us a person’s past is often a snapshot of that person’s future. A man may seem to have changed, and he may believe he has changed; he may even promise that his mistakes belong in the past and he has learned from them. But our experiences warn us that when the euphoria of the moment dies down and old temptations haunt him again, he may return to his old ways and become what he once was.

Paul knew better than anyone that people can change. He was the one who urged the Philippian church to forget “those things which are behind” and to reach forward to “those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13). But he also knew people are frail and once a man put his hands to the plow only to look back, that man was bound to follow the direction in which he was looking. Paul set high standards for himself, and he expected nothing less from the people with whom he worked. Missions was for the committed, not the indecisive. But Paul, in all of his wisdom and experience, was blind to something Barnabas saw.

Though Barnabas probably had no notion of the almost unparalleled service Mark would ultimately render to the kingdom of Heaven, Barnabas evidently saw potential in Mark that he felt was worth developing. The Christian faith insists people can indeed change, and in this instance, Barnabas applied this tenet to Mark’s life.

B. Barnabas Had Patience

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (II Timothy 2:24–26).

Ironically, it was Paul, not Barnabas, who wrote these words. But they characterize Barnabas’s attitude toward Mark. Barnabas’s patience demonstrated trust in God’s sovereign oversight and care. He could have given up on Mark and decided to remain with the blossoming Paul—in whom Barnabas had a personal stake. (See previous lesson 5.) But Barnabas believed in Mark and wanted to give him a second chance. Traveling with Mark would give Barnabas an opportunity to encourage him and help restore his faith and confidence in God and in his calling to the ministry.

III. PATIENCE REWARDED

A. John Mark Matured

In time, Barnabas’s patience was vindicated. We do not know what happened to bring Mark to maturity, but evidently he changed completely. It is possible the missionary trip with Barnabas played a large part in that change. While writing from prison, Paul called upon the services of Mark. In fact, immediately after mentioning that another young man, Demas, had abandoned him and become apostate, Paul wrote to Timothy: “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (II Timothy 4:11).

It is ironic how life sometimes brings us full circle! Here in one verse we have a reunion: Luke, the only one to record Mark’s failure; Paul, who believed Mark’s failure was crippling; and Mark, the runaway himself. At a time when Paul was looking for strong Christian support and fellowship in his last days on earth, he called for, of all people, Mark.

B. John Mark Wrote the Gospel of Mark

According to Papias, a Christian presbyter in early second century AD, at some point later in life Mark compiled the teachings and memories of Peter into what became known as the Gospel of Mark. This early witness to Mark's contribution to the canon of Scripture does fit with what little we know of Mark. Despite being an ethnic Jew, Mark had a Latin surname (Marcus), and the last record we have of him in the Bible is in II Timothy 4:11 where Paul called for him to come to Rome. Peter stated that Mark was in "Babylon" (a metaphor for Rome derived from the Old Testament) in I Peter 5:13.

Mark's Gospel seems to have been written for a Roman audience; only his Gospel uses terms translated from Latin into Greek, such as "legion," "tribute," "scourged" (Mark 5:9; 12:14; 15:15). And only Mark records the story of the Roman centurion declaring that it was the Son of God who had just been crucified (Mark 15:39).

The tradition that Peter was the primary source for the content of Mark's Gospel is also corroborated by the Gospel's internal evidence. The internal evidence strongly suggests it was written from a close eyewitness's viewpoint. For instance, it describes Jesus as asking the father of a demon-possessed child a question unrecorded in the parallel Gospels: "How long is it ago since this came unto him?" The reason for the diagnostic question is still somewhat unclear; it does not seem directly related to the action that followed. The question is one a doctor in search of a treatment might ask; but Jesus, who is described in other places as being privy to the inner thoughts of those around Him, in no way needed this information in order to heal the child.

Whatever theological and historical reasons Mark had for recording a question the other writers felt did not suit the purposes of their particular narratives, Jesus' question, though it played no role in the story's plot, did answer the question a concerned reader might have. We want to know about this child's background; we might want to know how long he had suffered. But most telling is the fact it is a question a close eyewitness would have been likely to remember.

A secondhand witness tends to remember only the details that relate directly to a story's point; a close eyewitness, however, remembers even secondary details. For example, children who were not yet born when the terrorists attacked on 9/11 will "recall" what they learned from their history textbooks: the hijacked planes, the religion of the terrorists, the towers that were destroyed; but the children's parents who were alive on that day will remember what street they were driving on, the song on the radio that was interrupted when the news was announced, and a host of other unrelated but emotionally intertwined details.

Mark's record of Jesus' question to the boy's father revealed a similar intimate knowledge of details otherwise lost. Matthew was one of the disciples but he was not a part of the inner circle, so he was not privy to some details. Luke gathered his account from various eyewitness sources. Jesus' only words to this grieving father in Matthew's and Luke's accounts (John did not record the story) are the terse: "Bring him hither to me." (See Matthew 17:17; Luke 9:41.) Only Mark mentioned that the possessed boy "wallowed foaming" (Mark 9:20) and the crowd collectively pronounced the child dead (Mark 9:26).

Mark's Gospel gives us the most intimate portraits of Jesus, often disclosing His inner feelings: His anger at the unbelieving crowd (3:5); His compassion for the hungry and sheep-without-a-shepherd multitude (6:34–42); His sigh before commanding the deaf man's ears to be opened (7:34); His refusal to allow anyone to "carry any vessel through the temple" (11:16). And only Mark gives the maritime detail that there were "other little ships" accompanying Jesus and the disciples when they were caught in a storm (4:36).

Also, only Mark tells us about a young man who ran away naked when Jesus was arrested at Gethsemane (Mark 14:51–52). It is another stray detail that plays no direct role in the overall plot, yet bears all the marks of a close eyewitness's memory of a highly emotional and tragic night.

In sum, Barnabas's patience paid off; Mark left us an indispensable record of the life of Jesus. And Barnabas's patience is still paying off today. Where modern critics doubt the historicity of the Gospels' account of Jesus'

life, arguing that we know of Jesus only through secondhand and thirdhand information, Mark's Gospel strongly contradicts this argument. An honest study of the Gospel of Mark will suggest a close personal view of our Lord's life. Mark not only recorded the content of the stories Peter related, but just as important, he also preserved the way in which Peter related his account. The way in which a story is told is important to give insight into the writer or storyteller.

C. Patience Is Priceless

Failings are forgotten because of someone's patience. Mark's failure at Pamphylia is greatly overshadowed by the fact that his name is listed at the head of one of the four Gospels in the Bible. In fact, his youthful indiscretion is overwhelmed by his later reputation; we draw attention to his immaturity today only because it is ironic in light of the giant he became.

This is the testimony of patience! It gives young people who fail, the opportunity to build trust again.

Backsliders have returned to God because of someone's patience. Many of us know mothers and fathers who have believed their sons and daughters would return to the Lord—in spite of everything everyone else knew about those sons and daughters. One pastor prayed for twenty years that his son would come back to the house of God. Most people who knew the situation saw no hope of this ever happening, and they marveled at the pastor's stubborn love and trust. Today, just as his father predicted, he is back; and seeing the man he has become turns disbelief on its

head. Although most people could not believe he would ever recover from his fall, now they have a hard time believing he ever fell in the first place.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

As mentioned earlier, only Mark records the story of a young man who fled naked from Jesus' arrest at Gethsemane (Mark 14:51–52). Again, we cannot know for certain, but a few questions haunt this passage: who was this young man? And what is the significance of this detail? Some of the men in the crowd who had come to arrest Jesus grabbed the young man by his garment. Apparently fearing what might happen to him, he ran away, leaving his garment behind.

It has long been believed that this is Mark's "self-portrait." The young man who was later known in Acts as having run away from the mission may have had a shameful record of running away at the wrong time. And by including himself in the story of Christ's Passion, Mark demonstrated the grace and patience of the Lord in allowing him to be the one to record Jesus' definitive story.

Whatever the case, Barnabas waited. He waited for time, God's instrument for creating change, to make Mark the man with whom history is now familiar.

Patience is one of the gifts of the Spirit. Patience is an attribute of love (I Corinthians 13:4), and God is love (I John 4:8). One of the most convincing ways we can demonstrate trust and faith in God is by being patient. ■

REFLECTIONS

- Can you remember someone having been patient with you? Reflect upon how that person's patience made a difference in who you are today.
- Think of someone you would describe as patient. What do you think is the reason he or she is patient? Would you also describe this person as a person who trusts God? Trust and patience almost always go together.
- Do you know of anyone around you who has not earned a second chance but needs a second chance?
- We have record of three letters Paul wrote later in his life to young men whom he was mentoring (Timothy and Titus). Is there anything in these letters (besides II Timothy 4:11) that would suggest Paul had learned from his experience with Mark?