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NOT AS BAD AS RYAN LEAF
Acts 15:36-41

Laurie and I have been amazed as we have talked to Michael and Carissa at how often they have had to deal with leaders in both the military and the corporate world that are so bad that it is impossible to understand how they could ever have been promoted into the positions they are in. In one case Michael had to deal with a superior officer who really was not sane. However, I suppose I really shouldn't be surprised. There is considerable evidence that presumably smart people in organizations in our country make a lot of questionable decisions that lead to a sizable amount of failure.

Consider some of the product decisions that have been made by successful companies, for example. One of the classics, of course, was New Coke. I know that there is always the pressure in our society to come up with the newest thing, but Coca Cola is a worldwide success story. Changing the formula proved to be a very poor idea. But that was totally predictable. Coke is not alone. Remember Google Glass? Google is as successful and as innovative as a company could be, but that didn't stop them from coming up with Google Glass back in 2014. That product ran into a storm of criticism due to privacy, safety, ethics and etiquette concerns and ended up a total flop.

There are plenty of other similar stories. Harley Davidson tried to expand their brand to include cologne and after shave. I'm sorry but hog cologne was never going to make it. Hey, you make motorcycles. They finally gave up after their products belly flopped. Did you ever see *Cosmopolitan* Yogurt? That's right, somebody at *Cosmopolitan* magazine thought it was a good idea to put out yogurt as well as a magazine. What in the world made them believe that people would think a publishing company would be good at making yogurt? That experiment lasted 18 months. Then there's Frito Lay, the highly successful snack food brand. In 2005 they introduced Cheetos Lip Balm. Yeah, for some reason no one seemed real interested in Lip Balm that tasted like Cheetos. Can you imagine?

My point here is that when you look around it is not hard to find failure in this world. Which I find comforting because when I look at my own life I discover that there are more than a few hiccups there. Today we are going to look at the story of someone who failed, yet turned out to be a game changer anyway. His maybe is

one of the great comeback stories in the history of our faith. We are going to look at a man named John Mark, beginning with Acts 15:36-41.

JOHN MARK FLAMED OUT

John Mark was a young Jewish man who lived in first century Jerusalem. Like many Jews of that time he had both an Aramaic or Hebrew name, John, and a Greek name, Mark. He was a believer in Jesus, a part of the very first generation of Christians. In fact, he was a member of a very prominent Christian family.

Acts 12:12 says John Mark's mother was named Mary, like several other prominent early women who followed Jesus. His father is not mentioned, which suggests that he was deceased. Nevertheless, it appears they were a fairly well to do family. Believers met often in their home, meaning it had to have been larger than a typical home. When Peter was rescued by an angel from jail he went to Mary's house. This suggests it was the usual gathering place and that Peter was a frequent visitor there. So John Mark knew Peter from early on. Another indication that John Mark's family was financially well off is seen in Acts 12 when it mentions that they had servants.

In Colossians 4:10 Paul wrote that Mark was "the cousin of Barnabus." Some scholars believe that Mark was actually a nephew of Barnabus and the term translated "cousin" just indicated he was a relative. Either way, John Mark was related to Barnabus. This young guy was a member of a family that was right at the center of the very first church. They played an important role. John knew the leaders like Peter and Barnabus.

I can relate in a way to John Mark. When I was in my teen years my parents started a ministry to college students that impacted thousands of students in Bakersfield. In addition, they had leadership positions in several Christian ministries in the city, including the large and prominent church we attended. I grew up in an environment of ministry where my parents were personal friends with a number of internationally known Christian leaders like Bill Bright, the founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ, Miss Wetherell Johnson, the founder of Bible Study Fellowship, Ray Stedman, the pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, and others. I think that had an impact on me, because it was a dynamic environment and it made ministry seem like a desirable, exciting way to live. I think it also gave me a bit of a sense that I was kind of somebody.

These days most of us are familiar with the drafts that professional sports leagues have. The NFL draft in particular is a spectator sport in itself. It has given spawn to

an entire industry. The focus of attention in those drafts is always the first round picks. I wasn't arrogant, but I think living in that milieu gave me a sense that I was sort of a high draft pick for ministry. It wouldn't take long for life to disabuse me of that notion, but I admit it was there for a while.

John Mark, I suspect, was something like that. In Acts 11:29 the Christians in Antioch, knowing that the church in Jerusalem was facing hard times, sent them some financial help. Barnabus and Paul were chosen to carry the gift to Jerusalem. Acts 12:25 says, "When Barnabus and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark." That seemed like confirmation that Mark surely was cut out for great things in ministry. They brought him back to Antioch to help out in the church there. He was drafted by none other than Paul and Barnabus. This was even further confirmed in chapter 13 when the Holy Spirit communicated that Barnabus and Saul should go on a church planting trip in Asia Minor. Verse 5 says, "When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper." So they drafted Mark to go on their church planting trip.

Unfortunately first round draft picks don't always prove to be what everyone hoped. The baseball draft is a complete guessing game because in many cases the players are high school kids years away at best from playing in the Bigs. But even the NFL where the players being considered are college guys who have played at a high level, there are many picks that fail. I read an article written by an expert back east about the biggest busts in the draft in recent years. The writer identified the biggest bust in the baseball draft as Matt Bush, picked number 1 by the San Diego Padres, and in the NFL draft it was Ryan Leaf, picked in the first round by the San Diego Chargers. Leaf, of course, is the poster child for epic draft failure. His crash and burn career sent the Chargers into a tailspin for years and actually played a role in costing a friend of mine his job as their coach. I tell you this because while he was not in Ryan Leaf's league, it appeared early on that John Mark was also a bust as a high ministry draft pick.

Acts 13:13 is an innocuous sounding verse that actually has some sad news. "From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem." John left. That's matter of fact with no emphasis, seemingly just a detail of history. But John's leaving was much more than a minor detail. Back in chapter 15 Paul and Barnabus are ready to go on another trip. Barnabus wants to give John another try, but Paul wants no part of that. Verse 38 says John, "deserted them in Pamphylia." Deserted is a much bigger word than "he

left." They were counting on John Mark. They needed his presence and his support, and he bailed out and left them hanging. It was an epic fail.

There are a bunch of theories as to why he deserted the team. The going was too tough, he couldn't stand the heat, he was homesick or some even think he didn't like the fact that Paul was becoming the more prominent leader on the team over Barnabus, his relative. We aren't told, so we don't know. What we do know is that Paul and Barnabus needed him, were depending on him, and he failed. He deserted. He abandoned his post in time of war. He was the first AWOL missionary in history. It was a big enough deal that Paul refused to have him come on another trip because he couldn't count on him.

No doubt Mark felt defensive about this and had some excuses, but in the end there was no getting around this. It was a big fat flop. It was such a fail that it led to the break up of the dynamic partnership of Paul and Barnabus. Barnabus didn't defend Mark's failure or try to excuse it, he just wanted to give him another chance. That was, as we have seen, classic Barnabus. Frankly, Mark didn't deserve it. But Barnabus gave it to him anyway.

JOHN MARK WAS NOT FINISHED

Rough starts are not uncommon in ministry. I have quite a number of friends whose early ministry opportunities ended bitterly. I recall many years ago going to a meeting of pastors from the denomination I was a part of at that time. Once a month all the pastors from that group in San Diego County would get together. By this time I was a battle scarred veteran of 5 years of ministry. I was no longer under the illusion that I was anybody's high draft pick. At this particular meeting there was a new guy who was planting a new church in east county. I recognized the signs. He thought he was a high draft pick. He was a high energy, charismatic guy, and he had great dreams and plans. I felt from the start he had unrealistic expectations and he wasn't nearly as hot as he thought he was. Sure enough, though he started with a big splash, his expectations crashed head on into reality. His church started all right, but kind of struggled along, two steps forward, one step back. It wasn't failing, but it wasn't setting the world on fire by any means either. He got discouraged, people left, and a couple of years later he was no longer at our monthly meeting. I eventually learned that he had folded his tents and called it a career. He felt he had failed, and he gave up the idea of ministry as a job for good.

But I also know other stories that though they had a rough start, that wasn't the end. Perhaps you have heard of Chuck Swindoll, internationally known megachurch pastor and author. I actually served on the staff of Chuck's church up in Fullerton

for the last year plus of my seminary training. Early in his ministry a church he pastored blew up on him. It was a painful experience for him, but he went on to great things.

Fortunately that also happened with John Mark. Barnabus gave him his second chance, and though we don't know the details, he apparently made the most of it. In Colossians 4:10 years later Paul told that group of believers that if John Mark came to them they should welcome him. He was once again serving as one of Paul's trusted representatives. In Philemon 24 Paul refers to him again and calls him his fellow worker.

The most poignant reference to him comes in 2 Timothy 4:11. Paul was in prison awaiting trial. This imprisonment would end with his death, and he knew it. In that painful time some people had deserted him. He wrote, "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." The man who once refused to let Mark come on a church planting trip because he couldn't be relied on, was now requesting that Timothy specifically find that same Mark and bring him to Paul. Mark had become the go to guy that Paul wanted.

This same Mark also spent time with Peter. He wrote down Peter's memoirs of Jesus' earthly life. We call what he wrote the Gospel of Mark. So John Mark, the failed missionary, became a game changer by writing part of God's Word that we still read to this day.

IMPLICATIONS

Failure is not fun. It can be frustrating, painful, discouraging, sometimes even humiliating. But it is a part of life for all of us. No one succeeds at everything 100% of the time. This Fathers Day I have been reflecting on my experience as a dad. There were plenty of failures. I remember a time when we were on vacation and we're staying at a Disney hotel. I was freaked out because we were staying in a hotel that cost way more than I was comfortable with. In retrospect I can see that in my mind I had blown that up to a much bigger deal than it was. I now see the cost of that stay as trivial over the life of our family and wish I had been more extravagant. I was certainly not trusting God, but was stressing unnecessarily. We spent that day at a Disney water park, but in the middle of the day we went back to our hotel room to rest for a bit. To save money I went to the grocery store to buy some food for us to eat lunch. I got some cheese, lunch meat, fruit and juice. When I got back Laurie started passing out the food. It didn't take long for the griping to start. They didn't like the lunch meat, the fruit wasn't very good, there wasn't enough juice, they wanted more stuff to eat, I had made poor choices for food.

Finally, the volcano, meaning yours truly, erupted. I was stressed already and now my efforts weren't being appreciated. So I blew. That's it! I am doing everything I can and spending way too much money to try to give you a happy vacation, but no one seems to appreciate it. Everyone is unhappy and doing nothing but complain. Well if we're all going to be unhappy there's no point in staying here, so pack up. We can be unhappy in a cheaper place. We're leaving. Way to go, Dad. Great example of patience, kindness and grace. That's really exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, loving your family and showing them what it means to live out the Gospel.

I remember that story vividly to this day because that was the only time I ever messed up as a dad. And if you believe that then maybe you'll also believe me when I tell you that I own this really big White House on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D. C. that I've been trying to sell. I'd be willing to sell it to you at a bargain price because I'm anxious to unload it. Sadly, that event was replicated in lots of ways many times as my kids were growing up. We had our "I'm going to stop this car" moments on a number of occasions. I can recall any number of times when I felt like I was completely failing as a dad.

That's just one aspect of my life. I see so many ways I totally fail to walk with God as I should. There are other failures. You want to talk about ministry? Well I know failure when it comes to that. Do you ever feel like you have blown it, or that maybe you are blowing it on a continual basis. You are not alone. Most of us struggle to come to grips with our failures, and often we will do anything to excuse them or hide them, and that only makes the whole thing worse. So what can we learn from the example of John Mark that can help us?

GOD USES FAILED PEOPLE

Consider the great heroes of the faith. Begin with Abraham. He is the father of faith. But Abraham had a number of ugly failures to his credit. The classic was his "she's not my wife, she's my sister" dodge that he tried in Egypt. He cost his wife Sarah dearly by putting her in an impossible situation. It was selfish cowardice at its worst. Later his faith wasn't strong enough to believe God was actually going to fulfill his promise to give him a son, so he agreed to Sarah's idea that they help God out by having Abe sleep with Sarah's maid. Fail. Despite those failures God used him to be the example for us!

Then there was Moses, the great leader and deliverer. Except he started out his efforts at delivering his people by murdering a guy then running out to a desert that makes the far side of the moon look good by comparison and spent the next 40

years of his life in total defeat there. But God, much to his surprise and his reluctant acceptance, still had a plan to use him in a powerful way.

How about the great prophet, Jonah? God specifically called him, communicated with him, and told him to go tell the people of Nineveh, some of the worst on the planet, they'd better shape up or God was going to order them all out of the pool. You know the story. God points east, and Jonah heads west. He wanted the people of Nineveh to die, the sooner and the more violently the better. He wanted no part of God giving them a chance to turn it around and survive. So he ran, and ended up doing a tour of the lower intestines of a huge fish. Now that's a truly epic fail. And yet God still used him, even though he was grumpy about it. For a time the people of Nineveh actually turned to God.

Then there is Peter, that towering man of faith, one of the two greatest leaders of the early church. He swore undying devotion to Jesus. He would die with him if need be. He was true to his word right up until that awkward moment when he feared that being devoted to Jesus might just mean dying. Then suddenly it was "Jesus? Jesus who? Never heard of him." What a humiliating, ugly, colossal failure. And yet Jesus would say to him, "Peter, feed my sheep." And he did. God used him to change the world.

How about Paul, another of the giants of the church? In 1 Timothy 1:13 he wrote, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy." That's a pretty grim description. In the name of religion he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. In verse 15 he wrote, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst." I'd say that's a pretty gnarly fail. There are some bad sinners in this world, but I'm the worst. And yet that was not the end of his story. He became the apostle of grace, one of the greatest leaders in history.

Our failures, even our failings this very moment, do not ruin us, disqualify us, or cause God to reject us. I have more than my share of failures that I don't like to highlight, maybe not even be reminded of, but that changes nothing about how God loves me or about my usefulness in his kingdom. We recently had several encounters with people from our past, people who attended the church where I previously served, the one that concluded I was a failure that they had no place for. Laurie refers to such people as ghosts, maybe because they haunt me. When I see them I hear a voice inside my head that says, "You suck, and they know you suck. You are such a failure." It's really wearisome.

It helps me to think, "Okay, I admit it, I failed. That puts me in company with Abraham, Moses, the prophet Jonah, Peter and Paul. Oh yes, and Mark." That's pretty good company. In fact, God couldn't use some of those guys until they had failed. The point here is that failure is not final. God absolutely does not need our success. At times our failures are important in shaping us to be like Jesus, getting us to a place where God can really use us, and teaching us in how to be at peace and have joy because of his love for us and the hope he gives us, no matter the circumstances of our lives.

GOD HAS THE ANSWERS FOR OUR FAILURES

What shall we do when we fail? A few years ago the Professional Association of Teachers in Great Britain proposed banning the word "fail" from classrooms. They wanted to replace it with "deferred success." I understand the desire to say that failure is not final. However, denial of reality is never going to be a successful strategy. That is one humans employ religiously. We go to absurd lengths sometimes to rationalize why we didn't really fail, or why a was a "deferred success" wasn't our fault. The healthiest way for us to deal with failure is to acknowledge it for what it is. We need to own it! Until we do nothing good can come from failure.

Unfortunately for some admitting their failure can defeat them. Former boxer Mike Tyson was interviewed for an article in USA Today, and in some brutal honesty he said, "I'll never be happy. I'm really a sad, pathetic case...My whole life has been a waste. I've been a failure."

He's not in denial, but he wasn't getting past the failure either. He was seeing it as an insurmountable hole. That can happen to us. I think it does happen to believers who essentially give up and merely go through the motions, covering up what they feel is pretty much a failed effort to really follow Jesus.

Psalm 73 has some beautiful words for people who have failed. And they are critically important words. Verse 21 says, "When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you." When we fail it is natural for us to be grieved and we have a tendency to become embittered. We hate failing, and it weighs us down. Have you heard of the Zeigarnik Effect? Psychologists have noticed that our brain tends to sort of file away a project that is successfully completed. It recognizes the effort no longer demands its attention. But when something has not been completed or if we have failed at it our brain registers it as having no closure, thus still needing attention. It

continues to spin in our memory as the brain tries to find some way to fix the mess. What this means is that we have a built in tendency to obsess about failures.

The Psalmist says our failures can make us senseless and ignorant in addition to grieved and embittered. They can cause us to behave in dumb ways. I have seen Christians react to failure with self defeating defense mechanisms. They get mired in a victim mentality that causes them to stay stuck, they isolate themselves from other people who might be an encouragement to them, or they harbor resentment toward other people that eats away at their own peace and joy.

Verse 23 says to the Lord, "Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand." This Psalm promises that God is with us even in our worst failures. He does not abandon us. He does not get disgusted with us. He continues to love us. Verse 26 is powerful. "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart." I will fail, but God does not. And in my worst failures, he is there to strengthen my heart.

How does God strengthen our hearts? There is a part of his strengthening that is mystical, in the sense that it is God's presence giving us heart and his putting his strength in our souls. But there are some other aspects to it that we can more easily define. We can see this by thinking of two kinds of failure and their effects.

Spiritual failure makes us feel guilty and defeated

I recently reflected on a number of my own shortcomings and once again got in touch with the fact that there is inside me an ever present awareness that I just don't measure up. I feel like I fail in so many ways. I feel the negativity that is there and find it terribly discouraging.

There is a fundamental truth that God uses to strengthen my heart. **No one comes to Jesus until they have failed.** Repeat, no one comes to Jesus until they have failed. Jesus died to pay for our sins for the very reason that we all fail and we cannot fix that problem. If we could fix it, then he didn't need to die for us, he just needed to tell us to try harder. The fundamental first step in putting your faith in Jesus is admitting that you need a Savior because you can't save yourself. In other words, you must admit you fail and you can't stop failing. My relationship with God is not about my ability to do better or to be what I think I'm supposed to be. If it were, then Jesus's death on my behalf was unnecessary.

Colossians 2:13-14 says, "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all

our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."

Dead in sin. That's a huge spiritual failure. How much good can a dead person do? I've done considerable research on the subject and discovered that comes to exactly zero. Here's the thing: we never find faith in Jesus until we admit we are dead in our sins and in need of a Savior. How many of my failings, my sins, has God forgiven? A lot of them? Most of them? The ones in the past? No, all of them. In fact, God has canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness.

Laurie and I have lived in our house a long time now. Our mortgage is not paid off. I wish it were, but we refinanced a couple of times and that has pushed back the finish line. We still owe money on it. Every now and then I day dream about how nice it would be if somehow that debt got canceled. What if someone with way more resources than we have came in and paid the remaining amount we owe on that debt? The debt would be canceled. Would it make any sense if that day dream happened for me to start feeling anxious each month about making a mortgage payment? That would be dumb. There's nothing left to pay!

When the Romans put a person on a cross they attached a sign explaining his crime. In Jesus' case all they could put there was that he was King of the Jews. But God has done something astounding. He has written out our debts, listing all our failings, all our sin, all that is wrong with us. He nailed that to the cross of Jesus. That is why Jesus was there. That is why he died. And he paid for every tiny bit of it. The debt is 100% paid for by Jesus. It simply no longer exists.

So now when those discouraging feelings of guilt and hopelessness are stirred up by our failings, we need to go back to the cross of Jesus. It's all paid for. When God looks at us what he sees is the perfection of his Son. He sees the righteousness of Jesus. He loves us, because that's what he sees. Psalm 136 says of God 26 times, "his love endures forever." Do you get the message? 26 times, one for every letter of the alphabet. From A to Z, all our sin is forgiven and God's love for you and me endures, and it endures forever. Nothing will ever separate us from it.

But I still feel like a lost cause. Do you know what God says about that? Romans 8:29 says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." God has destined you to be like Jesus. He is in the process of making that happen even now. Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." Will God succeed? He's all powerful! What is

going to stop him? Your puny failures? I don't think so. Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God started it, he is continuing it, and he will complete it. That is our destiny.

Functional failure can make us feel worthless or useless

So the grace of Christ deals with the spiritual failure that John Mark felt. But he still had to deal with the fact that in the practical reality of this world, he had failed and proven himself untrustworthy. Paul didn't think he could use him. John Mark knew that, and probably felt that a lot of other people thought the same. He may well have thought the same.

When we fail we can feel ashamed, humiliated, and defeated. We feel like our very worth as a human is at stake. What we need to learn to live by is the truth that our real worth is never affected when we fail. Our last softball game Laurie had me a bit concerned. When it comes to hitting, no one's going to mistake her for Babe Ruth, but she can usually get the bat on the ball. For some reason this past game she suddenly started having trouble doing that. She kept swinging and missing. As you know I love this woman desperately and I was concerned that she might get frustrated, feel discouraged, want to give up. Fortunately, Laurie really understands her worth, and doesn't get bothered much by that kind of failure. She was her usual irrepressible self. At one point after she did manage to hit the ball, get on and ran the bases I saw her bent over and looking down. It looked like she might have injured herself. I said, "Laurie, are you all right?" She said, "My shoes are getting dirty." Clearly not concerned about failing to hit consistently.

It's been interesting watching little Ella growing and learning. Learning to walk is a lesson in dealing with failure. She is now a full blown toddler who walks and runs all over the place. But even now she takes an inordinate amount of spills. She trips over ever little thing. I have yet to see her collapse in tears after falling yet again and start moaning, "I've been trying to master this walking thing for 6 months now and I'm still failing way too much. I'm useless. No one could ever love me" She just pops up and keeps on motoring after every failure.

Part of the reason for that is that she is not thinking at all about how she looks or what anyone thinks. She doesn't fear that if she falls someone will say, "You're worthless. " She doesn't have even a thought that someone might think less of her because of her precarious walking at times. Her value in the eyes of everyone, but especially her parents and family who love her so, is not affected even a teensy bit by such failures. Her value is never attached to her ability to succeed.

Our problem is that we tend to think that we have worth because of some ability, some quality, some achievement in us. We think we have worth because of what we do, and when we fail that says that we aren't worth much. Our personal worth is central to our mental health, so failure is a huge threat.

But we need to think about worth. For years Laurie had told me that her grandmother had insisted that her valuable silver tea set should some day go to Laurie. Her grandmother died years ago, but no silver tea set. Laurie at points feared that somehow she would not be given that very valuable thing that was promised to her. But a couple of years ago as her parents were getting ready to move out of their house they told Laurie they were going to finally send that tea set to her. We don't have much use for a silver tea set, but we wondered if it might be worth something. After all it's silver! We checked on the Internet and saw silver tea sets going for thousands of dollars! I thought of several uses for the money we could reap from this windfall. The tea set finally came. It turns out that it is not actually silver, but it is silver plated. We checked the value of the tea set on the Internet based on the maker and model. It's worth somewhere between \$35-40. Maybe we can sell it and have a dinner at Islands.

Worth is determined by value to someone, what someone is willing to pay for it. So what is our worth? It is not determined by what some other human will pay for our services, or by what they think of us. We think that, but somehow no matter how much worth other humans ascribe to us, it always leaves us wanting. It's never enough. The people who are the stars of this world, the ones who have the greatest worth, attest that they need something more.

At our core we are seeking worth in the eyes of the greatest being of all, the one we all answer to, and that is God himself. Here is what he says about our worth.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The price God was willing to pay for us was the cross. It is infinitely high, meaning we have unlimited value to him. When we rest in our worth that comes from his valuing and loving us, a failure in this world may be disappointing, discouraging, even humiliating at times, but it never touches our worth.

So when we fail, nothing about who we are is impacted. Like Ella, we can just get back up and keep motoring. Proverbs 24:16 says, "For though the righteous fall 7 times, they rise again." Who are the righteous? They are those declared righteous by God. We are declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ and no other way. Why 7 times? Because 7 is the biblical number that stands for completeness. In other words, the righteous in Christ might fail totally, completely,

continually, but they just get back up and keep going. They are the Energizer bunnies of this world.

Winston Churchill said, "Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm." In Christ we succeed, because we can go from failure to failure without even a hint of loss of enthusiasm. John Mark is proof that it is true.