

# The Story That Shaped the Author

Follow Me into Community, September 7 & 8, 2024 | Acts 15:36-41

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

Today we begin a year-long journey into the Gospel according to Mark.

## **I was hesitant to do this for a long time.**

Over the year I prayed and listened to God about what he wanted me to be preaching in the future.

I kept thinking that I heard Him telling me to study and preach on an entire Gospel, on Mark.

But this is new territory for me. I've never done a year-long study of a book before.

I was nervous, but friends who had done similar things encouraged me to go for it.

And I began to see how the Gospel according to Mark fits together.

And that push from God kept growing. So, I did what I would want you to do if you heard God telling you to do something—I said, "Yes!" It's a Next-Step decision for me.

## **I'm calling this series, "Follow me!"**

Those are the words Jesus used to call his first disciples.

Those are the words Jesus is saying to us through Mark.

The Gospel according to Mark is about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

And it is about Jesus, the One we are following.

## **We are starting with a mini-series on community, "Follow Me into Community."**

Mark shows us HOW Jesus makes disciples.

Jesus calls us; then he puts us into communities where we learn what it means to follow him.

So, we are going to start with Jesus' call into community to learn how to follow him.

## **Today we're going to ask, "Who was the author? Who was Mark?"**

Where was Mark from? How did he become a disciple?

What were his life and ministry like?

## **More importantly, "What can we learn from Mark's life?"**

You see, Mark's life teaches us some profound lessons.

And Mark's life challenges us in important ways.

We need people who are disciples to help us become disciples.

## **Mark was a young adult in the brand-new Christian community.**

Mark had two names. John was his Jewish name, and Mark was his Roman name, the one he used for business and travel. You may see him referred to as John, Mark, or John Mark.

Mark's mother was an important figure in the early church.

We meet her by name—Mary—in **Acts 12:12**. Peter had been arrested and was in jail. The Christians of Jerusalem gathered to pray. During the prayer meeting, Peter was miraculously freed from prison:

***When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.***

Mary was accustomed to hosting the Christian community in the upper room of her home.

As a young man, John Mark was surrounded by Christians.

### **Mark went to Antioch with his cousin, Barnabas.**

The Gospel had been spreading in Antioch in Syria.

The church in Jerusalem heard about it and sent Barnabas to investigate.

Barnabas found that a movement of the Holy Spirit was happening in Antioch. He needed help discipling the new converts and turned to Saul, who had been an enemy of the Church before he met Christ. Barnabas knew that Saul was intelligent and could help disciple new Christians.

We read that, after a trip to Jerusalem with Saul, Barnabas took John Mark, his cousin, with him back to Antioch. **Acts 12:25** reads:

***And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.***

Imagine getting mentored in ministry by Barnabas!

### **Mark went on the first missionary journey with Barnabas and Paul.**

The names here may be a little confusing. The Apostle Paul was called Saul before his conversion and among Jewish people. He later started going by his Roman name, Paul.

Not long after returning to Antioch, Barnabas and Paul received a calling from God to go to other places to introduce people to Jesus. When they set out, they took John Mark with them.

John Mark got to learn ministry and do ministry with Barnabas and Paul.

Can you see the pattern? John Mark's faith was shaped by multiple godly people!

### **Who has helped you become a disciple?**

There are lots of people who have helped me become and grow as a disciple.

One of my mentors has been shaping my life for nearly 25 years!

He helps me to think through what it means to be a disciple, and he challenges me constantly to keep making and multiplying disciples. I've mentioned him to you before.

He shapes me and pushes me and helps me to keep growing.

### **We won't grow as disciples of Jesus without people who are disciples helping us.**

Let's not ignore our work in becoming disciples or the Holy Spirit's work in making us disciples.

But we don't become real disciples outside of community with other disciples.

Other disciples show us what it looks like when THEY follow Jesus.

Other disciples show us how WE can follow Jesus.

Other disciples SUPPORT us as we follow Jesus and PUSH us!

We need other disciples in community if we are going to be real disciples of Jesus.

### **What fears, hesitations, and hang-ups keep you away from community?**

We are offering important opportunities right now to get into community with other disciples.

Some of you are saying to yourselves, "I don't have time for that." Okay. That's fair. Maybe. We all have time for what matters to us most. But if you say that you don't have time to be in a community group, how will you get community? Because you need community.

What is your hang-up with community? What is your hesitation? Okay, let's be honest about what it really is. What is your fear?

Be honest with yourself because something is keeping you from something you really need.

### **We need people who will give us second chances.**

#### **Mark needed a second chance.**

Mark made a choice on his first mission trip that damaged his credibility. He decided to leave the team part-way through the trip and return to Jerusalem. That left a gap on the team.

When Paul and Barnabas got done with the trip, they spent time in Antioch. But then they felt the call of God pulling them again to go to share the Gospel.

Which brings us to our Scripture passage today.

There was no question in either missionary's mind. The trip needed to happen.

But there was a hitch. Barnabas wanted to take Mark. Paul did not. Mark's leaving seems to have created a questions about his resilience, judgment, and commitment.

Paul was adamant that Mark not go, but Barnabas was insistent. The two apostles separated.

#### **Barnabas gave Mark a second chance.**

Paul took Silas and went one way, but Barnabas took John Mark and went another.

Barnabas gave John Mark a second chance.

#### **Someone gave me a second chance.**

Elementary school was not always easy for me. I had a couple of teachers who didn't quite like me. To be perfectly honest, looking back, I'm not sure I liked them either. I loved learning, but I didn't really love school for a while.

Then in the fourth grade, I had Mrs. McFarlane. For some reason, she believed in me. She affirmed me and gave me opportunities to learn and grow. I thrived in her class.

And from that point on, school was something I loved, and I was determined to excel.

Mrs. McFarlane gave me a second chance in school the way Barnabas gave Mark a second chance in ministry.

#### **Do you need a second chance?**

Do you need a second chance in ministry? Or how about a second chance in life?

The Gospel tells us that we get a second chance with God in Jesus Christ.

We blew our first chance. We sinned against God. We have ALL sinned against God.

And God would be entirely within his rights to say that we've had our chance. He could.

But God decided to offer us salvation instead. God sent Jesus into the world. Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life; He did what we could not do. Then He took our sins and failures on himself and died on the cross to pay the price for our sins.

Now, Jesus offers to forgive us. If we will repent and believe in Him, we can be forgiven.

We can be given a second chance. In life. In serving Him.

Do you need that second chance today? But there is more.

### **To be in community, we have to GIVE second chances too.**

To be in community is to be in community with other people.

If we are imperfect, sinful, and in need of second chances, then we can rest assured that every person around us is likewise imperfect, sinful, and in need of second chances.

So, if we're going to be in community (which we all must be), then we are all going to be in community with sinful, broken people just like us—people who need second chances.

So, to be in community, we not only have to RECEIVE second chances in Jesus, but we also need to GIVE second chances too.

And that's not easy. We like to RECEIVE second chances, but we don't like to give them. We like to walk away, call ourselves strong, and avoid being hurt again.

But the Bible tells us to forgive as we have been forgiven. In fact, the Bible implies that we will be forgiven in the ways that we forgive others. Let's GIVE second chances.

*And let's DO SOMETHING with the second chances we're given.*

### **We need to be people who make and multiply disciples.**

#### **Mark became a trusted member of Paul's team again.**

**Colossians 4:10** contains multiple pieces of good news:

***Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him) ...***

Colossians was written by Paul later in his life.

In it he mentions Barnabas favorably. We have no evidence that Paul and Barnabas ever worked together again, but this is evidence that Paul held Barnabas in high regard.

Then there is a reference to Mark, Barnabas' cousin. Our Mark. Mark was with Paul and a member of Paul's team. At some point, Paul saw the value in Mark and gave Mark a second chance too. Mark took that second chance and became a trusted part of Paul's team! In fact, there are multiple references in Paul's letters to Mark, suggesting that he was a team member for an extended period of time—making disciples, planting churches, and equipping leaders.

#### **Mark was like a son to Peter.**

Peter mentions Mark in **1 Peter 5:13**:

***She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.***

This verse tells us a lot. First, it tells us that Mark was with Peter doing ministry.

Plus, we learn that Mark was a disciple of Peter. Peter calls Mark “my son.” That means that Peter had disciplined him. Mark worked with Peter. As Peter taught and shared his memories of Jesus, Mark memorized everything Peter said in order to share it himself in the future.

### **Mark wrote the Gospel that bears his name.**

After Peter died, the Christians who knew that Peter had been a treasure trove of direct memories about Jesus worried that these memories would get lost.

God the Holy Spirit called to mind everything Peter had said about Jesus, and Mark wrote it down in the Gospel that bears his name. That Gospel has now circulated and been used by God to show what a disciple is, how a disciple is made, and who Jesus is for over two millennia.

### **Mark took his second chance and did something with it!**

Mark took his second chance and used it to make and multiply disciples.

That’s what *Mark* did with his second chance. That’s what *WE* do with our second chances.

*We need to be people who reach the next generation.*

### **In the background of Mark’s story is Barnabas, a disciple deeply committed to the next generation.**

Barnabas was the one who went and found Paul and called him into ministry.

Barnabas was also the one who called Mark into ministry to make and multiply disciples.

There isn’t an exhaustive list of those Barnabas called into ministry, but we see a pattern here. It was Barnabas’ way of life. And there is a pattern for us!

### **We need to be a church committed to raising up the next generation of pastors.**

We have to raise up disciples, leaders, staff members, and pastors.

There is a looming crisis unfolding right now across the Church in that there are not enough rising leaders, staff members, and pastors. Churches feel this every time we have a vacancy.

Why? Because the pool of potential future pastors and leaders is shrinking.

The Barna Research Group did a report on this in 2022.

This graphic shows that in 2022, 50% of pastors were 56 and over. That means that within 15 years, 50% of the pastors working today will be 70 or older. And you can see that just around 15% of the rising pastors are 40 years old or younger.<sup>1</sup>

We are not making new pastors. That is our job and something we must do. We need to be a church committed to raising up the next generation of pastors.

### **I confess that I have failed to raise up the next generation of pastors.**

I have not spoken clearly enough about the need for some of us to become leaders, to join a church staff, or to become pastors.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/aging-americas-pastors/>

There is one young man I have known since he was in kindergarten. Nearly two decades ago he announced his intention to go into youth ministry when he grew up.

I didn't want to pressure him to do something God wasn't calling him to do, so I didn't raise the topic with him often, even though he and I have been close all these years.

He's finishing up college now. He is making his career choices and wrestling with God's calling on his life. Two years ago, I had to confess to him that I had failed him. I did not make clear to him that ministry was an important vocation that he needed to consider actively.

It's our job as the Church to raise up our future leaders and pastors, and I am wrapping my mind around what that means and hope that you will join me in thinking and praying and ultimately doing something. But it's not just pastors and leaders.

### **We need to be a church committed to reaching the next generation.**

Mark benefitted from the first generation of Christians helping him become a disciple.

Then Mark became a disciple who helped generations of people become disciples.

We must make the next generation of disciples.

As a 50-something now, I know the value of making disciples who are 50 and above.

I also see the imperative of making disciples among the children, students, and young adults.

We must disciple children. We must disciple students. We must disciple young adults and release them to make many more disciples, generations of disciples.

What will that require of us as a church? Two things it will require of us are urgency and resolve. We may not fail to raise up the next generation of disciples. We must not. We cannot. We will not.

### **We need to be disciples who reach the next generation of disciples.**

Disciple-making flows in generations, but those generations are not all about age.

When I make a disciple, I am one generation. The disciple I make is the second generation. The disciples that disciple makes represent the third generation.

No matter what the age, we must make the next generation of disciples and release them to follow Jesus and make more generations of disciples themselves.

### **This year, we're going to learn how.**

The life of Mark sets the stage and shows us that it can be done.

But the Gospel according to Mark shows us how.

And, through Mark, God shows us why. Because of Jesus. We are HIS disciples.

And we're going to do it. We're going to make and multiply generations of disciples. We're going to do it the only way it can be done. Together.