



Overcoming Wrong Choices and Personal Weaknesses to Fulfill Our God-Given Destiny of Winning Souls By Karen Nyquist

***This lesson was inspired by Pastor Todd Jones' sermon that he preached in
Fairfield, California, on 2/18/2018.***

When we make wrong life choices, it can greatly impact our lives, the lives of our loved ones, and fulfilling God's calling on our lives. The resulting negative consequences can make us feel that we have disqualified ourselves. We may start judging ourselves so harshly, focusing on our personal weaknesses and shortcomings. Next, we start comparing ourselves with others, so that we start feeling so totally unworthy that we even doubt God's original call.

Timothy was a young man who had to live with the consequences of prejudice and rejection because of his mother's wrong choice. In addition, he experienced low self-esteem, timidity, fear, and poor health. How does he battle through all this? How does he become a soul winner? Did he ever fulfill his God-given destiny?

John Mark was also a young man. He had to overcome the consequences of his own poor decision, one that hurt him, his family, and the early church. Had he disqualified himself? Was he now unworthy of the call that he thought God had given him? Would God still want to use him? After such a bad start, John Mark gets back up and tries again. With the help of others, he was able to battle through difficulties that he himself had caused. How does he become a soul winner? How did he fulfill his God-given destiny?

Let's look at the lives of these two young men who felt God's call to win souls. They struggled to overcome the consequences of poor choices and their own personal weaknesses trying to fulfill their God-given destinies. Their lives can inspire us to do the same.



A. Timothy - the Timid Social Outcast

1. Timothy's Mother's Poor Choice and Timothy's Strong Response - Timothy's mother, Eunice, chose to marry an unbeliever, which was a wrong choice (2 Corinthians 6:14). This caused her and her son to be outcasts by the local Jews. His grandmother, Lois, remained faithful to her daughter and grandson. Timothy wanted to win souls so much that he was willing to be circumcised by Paul, not because it was required, but to make him more acceptable to the Jews.

"Then he (*Paul*) came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek" (Acts 16:1-3).

We all have had family members or friends or others who have made choices that negatively impacted our lives. Are any of those consequences negatively currently impacting God's call on your life?

Look at the sacrifice that Timothy was willing to make in order to be able to witness to those around him. Let's pray and ask God to help us be willing to make painful sacrifices also.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please work on me so I will be willing to pay whatever the cost to be used by You to win souls and the other callings that You have on my life. In Jesus' name, amen!

2. Timothy Overcame Personal Pain and Kept Holding onto His Faith - Timothy's grandmother and mother were believers but not his father. That usually brings strife into a home. Since he sided with his grandmother and mother, he probably had a strained relationship with his father. Not having a father close to you can hurt your self-esteem. Yet, Timothy had strong faith and Paul trusted him. Paul became his mentor and even a father figure to Timothy. We know this because several times in the scriptures Paul refers to him as "my son."

Paul wrote, "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you (*Timothy*) in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1:3-5).

Timothy overcame his personal pain and grew in his faith. What can you do to

overcome your pain or roadblocks? _____

We'll return to Timothy a little later. Now, let's look at the other young man, John Mark.



B. John Mark – The Soldier of the Gospel Who Deserted

1. John Mark's Godly Heritage - John Mark's mother was known for having powerful prayer meetings in her home where even the apostles would go to pray. "So, when he (*Peter*) had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12).

John Mark's cousin was the mighty missionary Barnabas, who was the partner of the even mightier Apostle Paul. "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas" (Colossians 4:10).

2. John Mark - A Missionary-in-Training with Barnabas and Paul - John Mark was even chosen to accompany both Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey. "And Barnabas and Saul (*Paul*) returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:25).

3. John Mark Decides to Quit - We don't have an actual account of what happened but the Bible refers to the incident later. Was he afraid or not ready to make such a commitment? "*(John Mark)*, the one who had departed from them (*Paul and Barnabas*) in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work" (Acts 15:38).

Christians sometimes say they will do something but don't. They give up, or get distracted, or realize God never called them to that ministry. Have you ever made a commitment to serve God in a ministry and then backed out? If so, what should you do now?

4. John Mark's Decision Angers Paul - We don't have a scripture that explicitly expresses how Paul felt about Mark leaving, but we do have one about another who left the mission field, Demas. Paul uses the word, "forsaken" (2 Timothy 4:10-11). That shows Paul was hurt when Demas left him. Paul probably felt the same toward Mark and does not trust him.

Have you ever made a decision that either angered or hurt those that you highly respected? _____

How did you feel when you found out how your decision had affected others?

Let's look at John Mark's response.

5. John Mark Is Later Invited by Barnabas, but Is Rejected by Paul - Later on, after being encouraged by Barnabas, John Mark decides he is ready to go again. Barnabas is willing to give him a second chance but not Paul. Rejection hurts! How will John Mark overcome the pain of Paul's rejection?

"Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing.' Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:36-41).

This split between these two of closest comrades must have shaken the early church to the core. It would be like having a senior pastor and his assistant pastor leaving one another. Surely, many Christians were dumb-founded. Some may have even been taking sides. The sequence of events that happened because of John Mark's previous terrible decision to "desert" Paul and the work, were worse than he ever could have imagined. How did John Mark feel now? Ashamed? Disqualified?

Have you ever done something that you were so ashamed of that you felt you had disqualified yourself? _____ That you were no longer worthy of the call that you thought God had given you? _____ Were you afraid that God would not still want to use you? _____

6. God Can Make Things Work Out! - Thank God that He can turn things around and still make things work, though not according to His first plan! "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). For the time being, Mark would accompany Barnabas on the missionary work and Silas would work with Paul.

Can you remember one or more times when, even after you had messed things up pretty badly, God was able to make things work out? _____

Now, let's see how Timothy has been doing.

C. Timothy Is Being Strengthened and Used by God



1. Timothy Answers God's Call to the Mission Fields - Timothy travels to numerous cities with Paul. The persecution is spreading in different locations. Thessalonica had become so dangerous that Paul had to leave. Silas and Timothy did not leave until later. Even though this was a frightening time, Timothy's faith and dedication are growing. "But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed" (Acts 17:13-15).

What difficult situations has God helped you persevere through to share the gospel? _____

2. Timothy and a Friend Minister Together - Timothy and Erastus travel and minister for a time without Paul. "When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.' So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time" (Acts 19:21-22).

What could you do to reach others without depending on the evangelism teams in our church? Could you go out with a friend? Who would be a good partner for you? Will you contact them and ask them? _____

3. Timothy Even Travels Alone for Some Missionary Work - "Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:16-17). "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren" (1 Corinthians 16:9-11).

God wants us to be ready to witness to others by ourselves. Make a list of those that God has placed around you that you feel He wants you to reach out to. _____

4. Timothy Is Sent to Establish and Encourage the Persecuted Christians - "Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this" (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3).

As we grow in the Lord and our faith, God can use us in even greater ways. Who do you know who is being shaken and needs your help to establish them? _____

5. Timothy Becomes a Young Pastor, Yet Needs to Be Reminded to Have Faith in His Calling and to Fight for His Destiny - "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, to Timothy, a true son in the faith ... This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck"

(1 Timothy 1:1-2, 18-19).



“Let no one despise your youth, ... Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all”(1 Timothy 4:12,14).

1st and 2nd Timothy are letters full of advice on how to become a stronger Christian and how to minister to other Christians. Timothy's daily struggles are the same as many of us. Throughout the centuries, many Christians have benefited from the advice that Paul gave Timothy.

When life gets hard and things don't seem to be turning out the way we expected, it is easy to forget the prophecies that have been spoken over us. Write down some of the prophecies that God has given you about your callings, your ministries, your purposes, so you remember to have faith in them and to fight for them. _____

6. Timothy Is a Pastor Who Struggles with Fear - Timothy's church is located in Ephesus, which is the center of the worship of the goddess Diana. This is a very difficult location. In his letters, Paul is giving him advice. “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6-7). By stirring up the gifts that God has given us, we too can overcome fear.

Do you feel timid about winning souls? What are some of your fears that you are struggling with? How can stirring up your gifts help you overcome your fears? _____

7. Timothy Is Often Sick, While Paul Seems So Strong - When we compare ourselves to others, we may end up feeling very inadequate. While Paul was repeatedly beaten, stoned, and even shipwrecked, he always rose up and became strong again. Timothy, however, was often sick. He could easily have felt unworthy when he compared himself with Paul. Yet in his letters, Paul didn't compare nor criticize, he encouraged Timothy with practical advice on how to help him with his stomach and “frequent infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:23).

I am sure Timothy often thought, “God heals others, why not me? Why do I have to keep struggling with these? Don't I have enough faith?” We can look at others around us. They might not get sick. They may have more energy. They get so much more done than we do. But we are not them; we are ourselves. “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you” (2 Corinthians 10:12-13).

Just as a good parent does not compare one child with their siblings, so God does not compare us with His other children. Let's be wise by not comparing. a) How have you been comparing yourself with others? _____

b) Instead, write down your gifts and strengths, praising and thanking God for each one. _____

c) Now, list areas that you know you should and can improve. _____

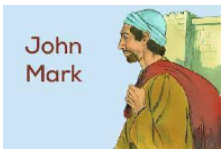
d) Next, set attainable steps toward achievable goals, so you can be pleased with your progress. Compare your past performance with your present and keep your eye on reaching your desired goals in the future. Set flexible “deadlines.” Comparing yourself with yourself is good. Expect some setbacks. You'll need more sheets of paper for this, but this can be a good start.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

8. Timothy Passes All The Tests! - Through the power of the Holy Spirit and encouragement of Paul, Timothy stands strong through the most difficult of tests, even being imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer" (Philemon 1:1-3). "And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that *our* brother Timothy has been set free (*from prison*), with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly" (Hebrews 13:22-23).

God knew what He had put inside Timothy, just as He knows how He has equipped each of us for the work that He has called us to do. God always gives us the grace, wisdom, strength, and guidance that we need to fulfill our ministries.

Now, let's go check up on how John Mark is doing.



D. John Mark Is Also Being Strengthen and Used by God

1. John Mark Works with Apostle Peter - After being rejected by Paul for a missionary journey, John Mark traveled with Barnabas, his cousin. Later, he also worked with Peter. The relationship must have been close, because Peter calls him, "my son." How encouraging! God used two powerful men to mentor John Mark. God won't give up on us! Peter wrote, "She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you*, greets you; and so *does* Mark my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

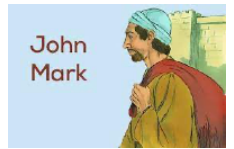
2. Paul Reconsiders and Commends John Mark to Others - "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are* my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me" (Colossians 4:10-11). John Mark had become a comfort to Paul! Hallelujah!



E. Timothy and John Mark Join Paul in His Later Years

1. John Mark Is Working with Paul, Who Is In Prison - "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers" (Philemon 23-24).

2. During His Last Days, Paul Calls Them Both to His Side - Paul wrote Timothy, "Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:9-11). (Some believe that 2 Timothy was the last book that Paul wrote before his execution.) During these very difficult days, he knew he could depend on both.



F. Timothy and John Mark Fulfilled Their Destinies

God helped these two young men, who had many obstacles to overcome. Timothy became a successful pastor in a very pagan city. John Mark was the writer of the gospel of Mark. His was the first of the four gospels to be written. God has used his gospel to witness to and to win many millions of people for two thousand years. Both of these souls winners definitely fulfilled their God-given destinies.

G. We Will Fulfill Our Destinies Too, with God's Help!

Even if we or people in our lives have made wrong life choices that greatly impacted our lives, God's calling on our lives still remains. We will dismiss any thoughts that we have disqualified ourselves. We will not compare ourselves to others. We will focus on our God-given strengths and stir up our gifts. We will not allow any fear to stop us. We will turn our hearts toward the lost and ask God to help us win as many souls as possible. He will not fail us. Now . . .

Let's Go Win the Lost at Any Cost!