In the 1950s a psychologist named Erik Erikson introduced a theory of how humans develop socially through stages.

- **Infant** = Trust vs Mistrust
- **Toddler** = Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt
- **Preschooler** = Initiative vs Guilt
- **School-Age Child** = Industry vs Inferiority
- **Adolescent** = Identity vs Role Confusion
- **Young Adult** = Intimacy vs Isolation
- **Middle-Age Adult** = Generativity vs Stagnation
- **Older Adult** = Integrity vs Despair

One corrective to Erikson’s work has been to see development more as a spiraling cycle than as stages we pass, never to visit again.

Genesis 17 is about God’s refusal to write Abram off. Instead, he spirals back to offer him a way to move ahead, a way to grow.

Specifically, it shows us three things God wants us to know about our mistakes.

I. GOD USES OUR MISTAKES TO DRAW US CLOSER TO HIM (GEN. 17:1-3)

A. God Reveals a New Name (1b)

**N.B.:** God has identified himself to Abram three times in the past. Each happened at a growth point.

- Gen. 12:1
- Gen. 14:18-20
- Gen. 15:1
- Gen. 17:1

“God reveals himself as **El Shaddai** to stress his ability to overcome nature in the service of his grace.”

- Yahweh – God’s personal name
- El Elyon – God’s powerful name
- “Shield” – God’s protective name
- El Shaddai – God’s promise-keeping name
B. God Gives a New Command (1c)

Lit., “walk before me and (you will) be blameless”

- one command, not two
- based on Gen. 15:6 – “Morality is put on a redemptive basis and inspired by a principle of faith.”
- Note especially the preposition

C. God Provides a New Confirmation (2)

“We walk before God as children, after God as servants, with God as friends, in God as participants.”

“God’s plan includes all promotions and demotions. His plan can mean both adversity and prosperity, tragedy and calamity, ecstasy and joy. His plan is at work when we cannot imagine why. It is at work through all disappointments, broken dreams, and lingering difficulties. And even when we cannot fully fathom why, he knows. Even when we cannot explain the reasons, he understands. And when we cannot see the end, he is there, nodding, ‘Yes, that’s my plan.’ For ‘from Him and through Him and to Him are all things’ (Rom. 11:35).” – Chuck Swindoll
II. GOD USES OUR MISTAKES TO MAKE US MORE FRUITFUL (GEN. 17:4-8)

A. There’s a Pattern: “As for...” sections begin (4, 9, 15, 20)

B. There’s Assurance – Again! “As for me, this is my covenant with you” (3)

C. There’s a Broadening

Gen 12:2-3

2 “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Gen 17:4-6

4 You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

D. There Are “Unknowables”

8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” 8 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. - Gal. 3:8-9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. - 1 Pet. 2:9

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. - Rom. 4:13

III. GOD USES OUR MISTAKES TO MAKE US DISPLAYS OF HIS GRACE (GEN. 17:9-22)
A. “As for you (Abraham)” (v. 9)
   The grace of excluded effort

B. “As for Sarai” (v. 15)
   The grace of significance

C. As for Ishmael (v. 17)
   The grace of opportunity

CONCLUSION
Sometimes we don’t get a do over. That’s alright. Here’s God’s promise concerning your irreversible mistakes. He can and does use them . . .
• To draw us closer
• To expand our impact
• To make us reflectors of his grace