

## SETBACK OR SET UP? WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED

### THE CHURCH EXPERIENCES SETBACKS.

#### The stoning of Stephen

<sup>54</sup> The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. <sup>56</sup> And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!" <sup>57</sup> Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him <sup>58</sup> and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

<sup>1a</sup> Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

#### Persecution Scatters the Believers

<sup>1b</sup> A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup> (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) <sup>3</sup> But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

**Acts 7:54-60; 8:1a; 8:1b-3 NLT**

### SAUL EXPERIENCES A SETBACK.

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. <sup>2</sup> He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them - both men and women - back to Jerusalem in chains. <sup>3</sup> As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup> "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!" <sup>6</sup> Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." <sup>7</sup> The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! <sup>8</sup> Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. <sup>9</sup> He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink. <sup>10</sup> Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. <sup>11</sup> The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. <sup>12</sup> I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again." <sup>13</sup> "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem!" <sup>14</sup> And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake." <sup>17</sup> So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on

the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. <sup>19a</sup> Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. **Acts 9:1-19a NLT**

- Saul thought his purpose was to **stamp out Christianity**.
- Saul had his **own agenda interrupted**.

### SAUL HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

#### Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

<sup>19b</sup> Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" <sup>21</sup> All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?" **Acts 9:19b-21 NLT**

- God wants to change what you're **known as or known for**.
- Saul became known as **Paul the Apostle**.
- God will often use our past to **help someone's future**.
- If you're **truly saved**, you're **truly changed**.

### PAUL MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE HAD SURRENDERED RELIGION AND TRADITIONS FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

<sup>11</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. <sup>12</sup> I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. <sup>13</sup> You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion - how I violently persecuted God's church. I did my best to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors. **Galatians 1:11-14 NLT**

- God took the passion and zeal that was in Paul **for traditions** and used it for **missions**.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. **Romans 8:28 NLT**

### Next Steps for me today...

- Have you surrendered **your life to Christ**?
- Have you surrendered **your past to Christ**?
- Have you surrendered **your future to Christ**?