

## 引言 INTRODUCTION

Setback is a common thing in life. How you handle a loss reveals your character. Some people throw the towel and walk away. Others are determined and they keep trying. Sa-soon Cha, a sixty-eight year old South Korean woman desperately needed a driver's license for her vegetable business. But she was not able to score a minimum of 60 out of 100 points in the written test. Without passing that, she could not go for the road test. Ms. Cha never gave up. In fact, she showed up almost daily at the licensing office to repeat the exam. Her persistence finally paid off. She got enough score after her 950<sup>th</sup> attempt. That is over three-and-a-half year if you deduct the weekends! Eventually, she spent about U.S. \$4,200 in application fees. I hope she passed the driving test without much trouble. Setback is not an end unless you call it quit. Very often, a defeat can be a turning point in life. A loss can become a gain if we grow in wisdom from the experience. The book of 1 Samuel ends with a sad note. It is a heartbreaking account for Israel. God's people did not only lose in a war. They also lost their king. Chapters 30 and 31 bring out a sharp contrast. It was likely that the two battles took place about the same time. David and his men were able to conquer the Amalekites in the far south. They rescued their families and seized a big plunder. In comparison, Saul and his troop suffered a heavy blow from the Philistines at Mount Gilboa to the far north. Whereas David flourished in his fight, Saul perished at the end. Saul's death paved the way for the rise of David to the throne. We will look at Saul's final moments by considering three words.

## 解釋 EXPLANATION

### 1. 打敗 Defeated

The first word is "defeated." Saul's army was defeated by the Philistines. The enemies prevailed over the Israelites. Some soldiers passed away, others ran away. Among those who lost their lives was Jonathan, the dearest friend of David. Jonathan was faithful to God, his country and David. He also stayed respectful to his mad father and king. A noble soldier died. Meanwhile, Saul barely hung onto his life from a severe wound. Seeing the enemies approaching, Saul realized that he had a slim chance to survive or escape. Therefore, he asked his armor-bearer to put him under the sword. Being slayed by an enemy is never an honorable thing. But enduring humiliation is even worse. Saul knew that the Philistines were good at torturing their captives. Samson the famous judge experienced that. The Philistines made him blind and locked him in chains between two pillars. Samson prayed to God to restore his strength so that he could pay revenge to the enemies. God answered Samson's prayer. He pulled down the columns. The roof collapsed and crushed three thousand Philistines. Saul did not want to die in a shameful way like Samson did. However, his armor-bearer dared not follow the order. He was torn between violating the king's command versus killing the Lord's anointed. Before he could decide, Saul fell on his sword. When the armor-bearer saw it, he did the same thing. Saul followed what he did all along. He took matters into his own hands in his life and in his death. Saul's downfall speaks volume about the failure of people's expectation. The Israelites wished to have a king like what other nations had. They wanted a ruler to lead them to war. They put all their hope on a

man instead of God. Unfortunately, their king relied on himself but not God. Eventually, Saul was swallowed by his pride. Even at the final moment of his life, Saul did not call on God for help. He died the way he lived – a disobedient and stiff-neck rebel. Would the outcome be different if Saul repented before God? We do not know. But it was evident that Saul was aware of his sins. God sent prophet Samuel to convict Saul. God also gave Saul multiple opportunities to turn back to Him. But Saul refused to do that. Saul's life is a snapshot of typical sinners. They focus on themselves but not on God. They indulge in people's praises. They get jealous when others have more of something than they do. But no matter how capable a person is, one day everyone has to give an account to God. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us: **And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.** We do not like to talk or even think about death. But denying the fact will not change the reality. The great evangelist Pastor Billy Graham once said that the death rate for humans has never changed. It is always at 100%. Medical advancement can prolong life, but it can never prevent death. The Bible tells us that death is the penalty for sin. Our gracious God provides us the only solution for sin. It is through the death of Jesus Christ. God invites us to come to Him, confess our sins and receive Jesus into our heart by faith. Those who do not do so in their earthly life will have to bear the consequence of their sins in eternity. Sometimes, God changes our perspective for life through the death of our loved ones. A repairman came to our church to fix something recently. After he had completed the work, I asked if he is a believer. He said his wife is a Christian but he was not in the past. His life changed six years ago when their son passed away two days after birth. A pastor visited the couple to offer comfort. The husband decided to follow Jesus. The Lord is waiting for you. Accept Him today!

## 2. 玷污 Defiled

The second word we will consider is “defiled.” Saul thought that choosing an easy way out would spare him from enemies' humiliation. While the Philistines could not make a spectacle of him when he was alive, they defiled his body after his death. When the war was over, the Philistines returned the next day to collect valuable items. They spotted the bodies of Saul and his three sons. Perhaps they recognized the royal family by the different war-gears they put on. The soldiers then did a few things to defile Saul. First, they chopped his head off. Back then David did the same thing to Goliath after he subdued the giant. Next, the Philistines displayed Saul's armor in one of their temples as a trophy of the battle. David also stored Goliath's sword in the tabernacle. The Philistines went on and pinned the remain of Saul on a city wall. Very likely, wild beasts would devour the corpse. It was a gross but an effective way to shame an enemy. To make sure that every Philistine knew about the victory, the leaders sent messengers to spread the news around their territories. We can imagine people react with a joyful celebration. Saul craved over people's worship in his life. But now the enemies gave glory to their idols in his fall. The man who was a head above other Israelites was now a head shorter. What was left in Saul's handsome appearance was but a broken body. Once a mighty warrior now had nothing to take pride in. God has a way to humble the proud. There is nothing we can brag about ourselves if we truly realize that every blessing is from God. If God removes His protection, no one can continue to exist. Psalm 147:10-11 say: **10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, 11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.** Strength, skills and military force that Saul counted on all failed. He misplaced his trust on people and things but not God. We need to always keep in mind that

leaders, technology and tools are just means through which God bestows His grace. Nowadays, people worship stuff and use God while they should worship God and use stuff. They do not know how to conduct a normal life when their phone battery dies or the internet has an outage. Equipment may malfunction. Rulers may disappoint us. But God always sits on His throne. If Christians can take pride in anything, it is the fact that God shows us mercy. No one chooses God, but God chooses us and saves us. Sinners only deserve an eternal condemnation. Therefore, if not because God's grace, then no one can be saved. Once we have an eternal life, then nothing can undo our salvation. Jesus promises us in John 10:27-28 that: **27 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."** We are in the protection of our Lord. Satan can scare us and tempt us. Those who hate us because of our belief can harm us. They can falsely accuse us and defile us. But they cannot remove our status as God's children. Our earthly life will gradually deteriorate and end eventually, but our eternal life will continue. No power can sever our relationship with Jesus. Here, Jesus gives us a good definition of true believers. They do not just mention on their lips that they are Christians. Like sheep that listen to their shepherd, people who have a genuine relationship with Jesus will follow their Lord. This is something we should reflect on. Do we only know about Jesus? Or do we have a deep desire to know Him, so that we are willing to obey Him?

### 3. 忠心 Devoted

The third word we will examine is "devoted." The Israelites were defeated in a battle. Their king was defiled. In the midst of sadness and devastation, there was a glimpse of light. A group of people at Jabesh Gilead were still devoted to their fallen leader. Their relationship with Saul begins in chapter 11. At that time Saul was barely crowned as a king. He heard that some Ammonites were waging war against Jabesh Gilead. The location was on the eastern bank of the Jordan river. Saul then summoned men all over Israel to counter the enemies. That amateur troop had a decisive victory. How could the people at Jabesh Gilead forget such a big saving grace? Therefore, when they knew how the Philistines defiled Saul's remain, they decided to take action. A few courageous men traveled thirteen miles to Beth Shan and retrieved the bodies of Saul and his sons. Then they burned the bodies and buried them in Jabesh Gilead. Next, they called for a seven-day fast to remember their late king. They did all they could to pay a final tribute to the royal family. The author specifies that the tomb was under a tamarisk tree. That reminds us of a scene in chapter 22 when Saul was sitting under another tamarisk tree. He was catching some breeze when his soldiers were hunting for David. Finally, Saul's remain had a proper resting place. Those devoted residents of Jabesh Gilead resembled the few faithful followers of Jesus. The disciples all ran away after Jesus died on the cross. They were afraid to get into trouble by associating with their Master. But Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body. He and Nicodemus, the Pharisee who visited Jesus at night and asked Him questions about eternal life, treated Jesus' remain and laid it in a tomb. Those two secret followers wanted to give their Teacher a final honor. Then there were a few ladies who visited the tomb at sunrise right after the Sabbath. They wanted to anoint Jesus' body with spices. Unlike Jesus' disciples who were hiding in fear and confusion, those women used actions to demonstrate their love for the Lord. God rewarded their devoted hearts. They were the first witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. Those believers stayed faithful to Jesus despite fear and opposition. Later on, the leaders of the first Christian church displaced the same boldness when facing persecution. Peter and John were

threatened by the Jewish religious leaders. They ordered the two apostles not to preach about Jesus. They reply with courage in Acts 4:19-20 – 19 ...“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” The message was clear: if the religious leaders claimed that they believed in God, then they should obey Him instead of following their own agenda. The apostles saw the resurrected Lord. They knew that Jesus was God. He was the only pathway for salvation. They determined to remain truthful to Jesus’ calling. Whether in Biblical times or in modern times, Christians are always the minority in the society. Some people may not like us if they know what we believe. It is easy to maintain our faith in a church. Once you leave this building, you will face the unbelieving world. Your family members, friends and colleagues may give you a hard time because you are a Christian. Do not be afraid and do not back down. Be respectful to others. Stand firm in the faith by relying on the Lord. If you draw near to Him, He will stay close to you. Jesus will give you the confidence and wisdom to bear witness for Him. Your good deeds and moral conduct prove that God is real.

## 結論 CONCLUSION

A defeat can be a turning point in life. A loss can become a gain when we grow in wisdom. Surely David would learn a few lessons from Saul’s failure. Saul’s life ended in a tragic way. He was God’s chosen king. He had some good qualities to succeed. He had a good appearance. He showed flashes of leadership skills and bravery. God also put His Spirit into Saul’s heart. However, later he became self-centered and he was jealous of David. Most importantly, Saul rejected God and so God rejected him too. The Spirit of God departed from Saul. His envy turned into insanity when he was tormented by an evil spirit. From then on, Saul was on a downward spiral. The author of first Chronicles also records Saul’s defeat in battle and his death. He gives some concluding remarks about Saul’s life in 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 – 13 So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. 14 He did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse. Saul failed because he did not have an obedient heart toward God. Therefore, he would not seek God’s advice nor follow His commands. As a result, God decided to appoint David as the next king. Subsequent stories show that David was far from perfect. But he was a man after God’s own heart. Even today, Jesus does not call capable but humble people. They are dependable because they choose to depend on God. They may not earn the prizes from the world, but they will receive eternal rewards from God.

## 引言 INTRODUCTION

挫折是人生中常見的事。你如何面對失敗顯示出你的品格。有些人從此洗手不幹。另外有些人卻堅持決心，繼續努力。一位 68 歲姓查的韓國女士迫切需要駕駛執照來經營她賣菜的生意。但她一直無法在筆試中拿到 60 分的最低合格分數。如果不通過筆試，她就不能參加路考。查太太沒有放棄。事實上，她幾乎每天都到辦事處重複考試。她的堅持終於有了回報。她在第 950 次的嘗試中獲得了足夠的分數。如果扣除週末，那就是三年半的時間！結果，她花了大約 4,200 美元的手續費。我希望她順利通過路試。挫折不是結局，除非你決定放棄。很多時候，一次失敗可能是人生的轉捩點。如果我們從經驗中增長智慧，損失可以變成收穫。撒母耳記上以悲劇收場。對於以色列來說，那是一段令人難過的歷史。神的子民不僅打敗仗，他們也失去了自己的君王。第 30 章和第 31 章形成鮮明對比。那兩場戰事很可能是同時發生的。大衛和他的手下在南面征服了亞瑪力人。他們拯救了家人並奪取了一大筆戰利品。相比之下，掃羅和他的軍隊在北面的基利波山被非利士人打敗。大衛凱旋而歸，而掃羅卻戰死沙場。掃羅的死為大衛登上王位鋪路。我們將會以三個用詞來看掃羅生命的最後片段。

## 解釋 EXPLANATION

### 1. 打敗 Defeated

第一個字是「打敗」。掃羅的軍隊被非利士人打敗。敵人戰勝了以色列人。一些士兵喪生，其他人則逃跑。在那些失去生命的人中，有大衛的最好朋友約拿單。約拿單對神、他的國家和大衛忠心。他也一直尊重他失去理智的父親和王。一位品格高尚的士兵死了。與此同時，掃羅受了重傷。他看到敵人逼近，知道生還或逃跑的機會渺茫。於是，他要求拿兵器的人把他殺死。被敵人殺死從來都不是一件光榮的事情。但忍受羞辱更糟。掃羅知道非利士人善於折磨俘虜。著名的士師參孫經歷過這一點。非利士人使他雙目失明，並用鐵鍊把他鎖在兩根柱子之間。參孫祈求神恢復他的力量，好報復敵人。神回應了參孫的禱告。他拉下了柱子。屋頂倒塌，壓死了三千非利士人。掃羅不想像參孫那樣羞恥地死去。但是，拿兵器的人卻不敢遵命。他左右為難。他不知道應該違抗王的命令還是殺死耶和華的受膏者。在他還沒來得及做出決定，掃羅就倒在自己的刀上。拿兵器的人於是也照樣自盡。掃羅一直都是我行我素的人。無論是生

是死，他都是自作主張。掃羅的失敗充分反映出人民不正確的期望。以色列人希望像其他國家一樣有自己的君王。他們想要一個統治者來帶領他們去打仗。他們把所有的盼望都寄託在一個人身上，而不是寄託在神身上。可惜的是，他們的王依靠自己而不是依靠神。最終，掃羅敗在自己的驕傲之下。即使在他生命的最後時刻，掃羅也沒有向神求助。他從頭到尾都是一個不順服和頑梗的人。如果掃羅願意向神悔改，結果會不會不一樣呢？我們不知道。但很明顯，掃羅清楚自己的罪。神差遣先知撒母耳來責備掃羅。神也給了掃羅多次回轉歸向祂的機會。但掃羅拒絕那樣做。掃羅的生命是典型罪人的寫照。他們的眼中只有自己而不是神。他們喜歡人們的讚賞。當別人擁有的東西比他們多時，他們便嫉妒。但人再有本事，總有一天要向神交賬。希伯來書 9:27 提醒我們：**按著定命，人人都有一死，死後且有審判。**我們不喜歡談論甚至思考死亡。但是否認事實並不能改變現實。偉大的佈道家葛培理牧師曾說過，人類的死亡率從未改變過，它始終是百分之百。醫學進步可以延長壽命，但無法阻止死亡。聖經告訴我們，死亡是罪的懲罰。我們慈悲的神為我們提供了解決罪的唯一方法，就是藉著耶穌基督的死。神邀請我們來到祂面前，承認自己的罪，並憑信心接受耶穌進入我們的心。那些在今生拒絕救恩的人將要在永恆中承擔他們罪的後果。有時，神通過我們親人的死亡改變了我們對生命的看法。最近有一位修理工來我們教會修理東西。他完工之後，我問他是不是信徒。他說他的太太是基督徒，但他過去不是。直到六年前，他們的兒子在出生兩天後去世時，改變了他的生命。一位牧師拜訪這對夫婦，安慰他們。這位先生決定跟隨耶穌。主在等著你。今天就接受祂吧！

## 2. 玷污 Defiled

第二個我們要思考的用詞是「玷污」。掃羅以為選擇一條容易的出路可以免於敵人的羞辱。非利士人在掃羅活著的時候不能羞辱他。但在他死後，他們玷污了他的身體。戰爭結束之後的第二天，非利士人回來收集有價值的物品。他們看見掃羅和他三個兒子的屍體。也許他們認出王室人員穿戴不同的軍裝。然後士兵們做了幾件事情來玷污掃羅。首先，他們砍下了他的頭。當時，大衛制服巨人歌利亞之後也做了同樣的事情。接下來，非利士人將掃羅的盔甲作為戰利品展示在他們的神廟裡，就像大衛將歌利亞的刀存放在會幕中。後來非利士人把掃羅的遺體釘在城牆上。很可能，野獸會吃屍體。這是羞辱敵人殘忍但有效的方法。為了確保每個非利士人都知道勝利的消息，領袖們派遣使者到處宣揚。我們可以想像他們歡呼慶祝。掃羅一生都渴望人們的崇拜。但現在敵人因他的死而將榮耀歸給他們的偶像。比其他以色列人高出一個頭的人現在少了一個頭。掃羅本來英俊的外表，現在只剩下一具殘破的身體。原來一個威猛的戰士，現在沒有什麼值得驕傲的了。神有辦法使驕傲的人降卑。如果我們明白一

切祝福都來自神，我們就沒有什麼可以自誇的了。如果神挪去祂的保護，就沒有人能繼續存在。詩篇 147:10-11 說：**10 他不喜悅馬的力大，不喜愛人的腿快。11 耶和華喜愛敬畏他和盼望他慈愛的人。**掃羅所倚靠的力量、技巧和軍隊全都落空了。他錯誤地相信人和事，而不是神。我們必須時刻記住，領袖、技術和工具只是神施予恩典的途徑。現在人崇拜物品但使用神，而不是崇拜神使用物品。當手機沒電或網路中斷時，他們不知道如何過正常的生活。設備可能會發生故障，統治者可能會讓我們失望，但是神一直坐在祂的寶座上。如果基督徒有任何事情可以誇口，那就是神對我們的憐憫。沒有人選擇神，唯有神揀選我們並拯救我們。罪人只配受永遠的沉淪。因此，若不是神的恩典，沒有人能得救。一旦我們得到永生，就沒有任何力量可以奪走我們的救恩。耶穌在約翰福音 10:27-28 中應許我們：**27 「我的羊聽我的聲音，我也認識他們，他們也跟著我。28 我又賜給他們永生；他們永不滅亡，誰也不能從我手裡把他們奪去。」**我們在主的保護之下。撒旦可以嚇我們，也可以試探我們。那些因為信仰的緣故恨我們的人會傷害我們。他們可以誣告我們並玷污我們。但他們不能取消我們作為神兒女的地位。我們在世上的生命會逐漸衰退並最終停止，但我們永恆的生命會延續下去。沒有任何力量可以切斷我們與耶穌的關係。在這裡，耶穌也給了我們一個真信徒的定義。他們不只是嘴上說自己是基督徒。就像羊聽從牧羊人一樣，與耶穌有真正關係的人會跟隨他們的主。這是值得我們反思的。我們只知道耶穌嗎？還是我們深切渴望認識祂，以致願意順服祂？

### 3. 忠心 Devoted

我們要探討的第三個用詞是「忠心」。以色列人被打敗了，他們的王也被玷污了。在悲傷和沮喪之中，有一絲曙光。在基列雅比的一些人仍然忠於他們被打倒的領袖。他們與掃羅的關係始於第 11 章。當時掃羅才剛剛成為王。他聽說一些亞捫人攻擊基列雅比城。該地點位於約旦河東岸。掃羅於是在全以色列招募人來對抗敵人。那支雜牌軍竟然取得勝利。基列雅比的人怎麼能忘記這麼大的恩惠呢？因此，當他們知道非利士人玷污掃羅的遺體時，他們決定採取行動。一些勇士走了十三英里來到伯珊城，領回掃羅和他兒子的屍體。然後他們把遺體焚燒，埋葬在雅比基列。之後，他們宣告禁食七天以紀念他們的君王。他們竭盡所能向王室致以最後的敬意。作者指出，墳墓位於一棵垂絲柳樹下。這讓我們想起了第 22 章中掃羅坐在另一棵垂絲柳樹下的情景。當他的士兵正在追捕大衛時，他卻在樹下乘涼。掃羅的遺體終於有了安息之所。那些忠心的雅比基列人類似於耶穌的少數忠心跟隨者。耶穌死在十字架上後，門徒們都四散了。他們害怕因與主的關係而惹上麻煩。唯有亞利馬太的約瑟向彼拉多要耶穌的遺體。他和尼哥底母一起處理耶穌的遺體並將其安放在墳墓中。尼哥底母是曾經在夜裡拜訪耶穌並向祂詢問有關永生的問題的那個法利賽人。他們兩個秘密的

跟隨者想給他們的老師最後的敬意。然後有幾位婦人在安息日之後的日出時分去到墳墓。她們打算用香料膏抹耶穌的身體。當時耶穌的門徒正在恐懼和困惑中，但這些婦女用行動來表達她們對主的愛。神獎賞她們的忠心。她們是復活的耶穌的第一批見證人。儘管有害怕並且要面對反對的勢力，那些信徒仍然忠於耶穌。後來，第一所基督教會的領袖們在面對迫害時也表現出同樣的勇氣。彼得和約翰受到猶太宗教領袖的威脅。他們命令兩位使徒不要傳講耶穌。他們在使徒行傳 4:19-20 中勇敢地回答：19 ...「聽從你們，不聽從神，這在神面前合理不合理，你們自己酌量吧！20 我們所看見所聽見的，不能不說。」他們的信息很明確：如果宗教領袖聲稱他們相信神，那麼他們應該順服從神而不是按照自己的意思行事。使徒們看見了復活的主。他們知道耶穌是神。祂是得救的唯一途徑。他們決定忠於耶穌的呼召。無論是在聖經時代還是在現代，基督徒始終是社會中的少數。有些人會因為我們的信仰而不喜歡我們。我們很容易在教會中保持信仰。一旦你離開這座大樓，你將面對不信的世界。你的家人、朋友和同事可能會因為你是基督徒而給你帶來麻煩。不要害怕，不要退縮。保持尊重別人。靠著主堅守信心。如果你靠近神，祂就會與你同在。耶穌會給你信心和智慧為祂作見證。你的好行為和道德標準證明神是真實的。

## 結論 CONCLUSION

一次失敗可能是人生的轉捩點。如果我們從經驗中增長智慧，損失可以變成收穫。大衛肯定會從掃羅的失敗中學到一些教訓。掃羅悲慘地結束了他的生命。他是神所揀選的君王。他有一些成功的條件。他有英俊的外表。他展示出領導才能和勇氣。神也將祂的靈放在掃羅的裡面。然而，後來他變得自我中心，並且嫉妒大衛。最重要的是，掃羅厭棄了神，因此他也被神厭棄。神的靈離開了掃羅。當他被惡魔折磨時，他的嫉妒變成了失去理智。從那時起，掃羅就一直走下坡。歷代志的作者也記載了掃羅戰敗和死亡。他在歷代志上 10:13-14 評論掃羅的生平：13 這樣，掃羅死了。因為他干犯耶和華，沒有遵守耶和華的命；又因他求問交鬼的婦人，14 沒有求問耶和華，所以耶和華使他被殺，把國歸於耶西的兒子大衛。掃羅失敗是因為他沒有一顆順服神的心。因此，他並不尋求神的旨意，也不會遵循神的命令。結果，神決定揀選大衛成為下一任的君王。隨後的故事表明大衛遠非完美，但他是一個合神心意的人。即使在今天，耶穌並沒有呼召有能力的人，祂乃是呼召謙虛的人。他們是可靠的人，因為他們選擇依靠神。他們可能得不到來自世界的獎賞，但他們會從神那裡得到永恆的獎賞。