



Unshakeable in the Midst of Crisis

Adapted from “Unshakeable” series by Scott Erickson

It’s not a question of *IF*, but *WHEN*. You **will** go through difficult times. The Stokowski family reminds us that life can change in an instant. Christine Stokowski shares her story:

Her hands shook as she tearfully told a Cook County judge how she fell to her knees on the side of Interstate 55 in March 2014, two years prior, and cried when a doctor called with the news her oldest son had been killed by a drunk driver.

She would later learn that her son, Shane Stokowski, an outgoing 33-year-old graphic designer just seven months away from his wedding, was being a good Samaritan when he was run over while trying to stop an intoxicated

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man from leaving a bar in Chicago's West Town neighborhood.

Speaking at the sentencing for the driver, Timothy McShane, Stokowski said her family, as well as her son's fiancée, were still struggling with the loss.

The fiancée, Erin Harvill, went from planning her wedding to picking out her fiancé's casket. "I think of Shane every second of every day," said Stokowski, clad in a white T-shirt with her son's engagement photo on the front.

Judge Lawrence Flood sentenced McShane, 44, to 16 years in prison, calling his actions "outrageous and extreme." McShane's blood wasn't drawn at a hospital until about eight hours later, but his blood-alcohol content still tested at 0.225, nearly three times the legal limit of 0.08 percent, prosecutors said.

Convicted of aggravated DUI and reckless homicide, McShane tearfully apologized and

acknowledged his struggles with alcohol. From that fateful night, McShane remembered being intoxicated as he shook Stokowski's hand (a man he did not know) and those of his friends as he left the Aberdeen Tap on a Saturday afternoon.

Stokowski and his friends were able to persuade him to get out of his girlfriend's SUV, but McShane later sneaked back outside and started trying to drive away, hitting the cars parked in front of and behind him, according to trial testimony.

"C'mon, man, don't do it," an eyewitness reported that Stokowski pleaded in a friendly tone with McShane, whose license had already been suspended after a history of DUI arrests. McShane instead hit the gas pedal.

Police found marks on the road-salt-coated driver's side of the black Nissan that showed where Stokowski's hand had slipped off the door, according to trial testimony.

Stokowski's younger brother, Patrick, who was to be the best man at his brother's wedding, was so overwhelmed by grief and depression that he had to quit his job, he told a judge.

"All we have now are memories of Shane, and those memories are starting to fade," he said. Stokowski's sister, Sheila, gripped the side of the podium and tried to hold back tears lamenting the loss of a much-older brother whom she had just started getting to know as an adult.

McShane apologized to the family after his mother told the judge her family has a long history of alcoholism. "I'm terribly, terribly sorry that Shane's not in your life," McShane said, breaking down in tears as he turned to face Stokowski's family. "I wish I could take it back."

McShane said much of what happened that day was still unclear to him. After Stokowski's death, he entered an alcohol treatment program at Normandy House in Elmwood Park. "I realized that anything negative in my life was caused by

alcohol," he said.

In asking for less than the 29-year maximum sentence, McShane's attorney, Thomas Brandstrader, said his client could be rehabilitated. "He's not the same person who let alcohol control him," he said.

But Assistant State's Attorney Martin Moore said McShane blew off numerous warnings that he had a problem with alcohol, citing three previous DUI arrests and the loss of his truck-driving job after failing a Breathalyzer test at work.

Speaking to reporters after the sentencing hearing, Stokowski's family members said they were satisfied with a sentence that will keep McShane behind bars for years. Christine Stokowski said Harvill, her son's fiancée, told her when picking out Stokowski's casket that she wanted her own ashes at her death placed inside with his remains.

But Shane's parents assured Harvill, whose

wedding dress arrived the week of the funeral, that she would be happy again.

"She's young, she has a long life ahead of her," Shane's father, Jeff, said. "We want her to find someone just as good as our son."¹

Think about what you just read. Three families were completely devastated and forever changed because of one man's reckless decision and rebellious heart.

It could easily be anyone's family. Because this broken, sick world is so terribly affected by sin we will know loss, pain, and grief in this life.

When the time comes, will your experience with that reality break you? Or will you have the resources and support to be *Unshakeable in the Midst of Crisis*?

¹ Steve Schmadeke, "Druken driver gets 16 years in prison for killing good Samaritan," *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 2016, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-drunk-driver-killed-good-samaritan-met-20160608-story.html> (accessed July 6, 2017).



COURAGE Level Questions

C1: Have you even gone through something in your life and asked “How could something like this happen?” What were your thoughts?

Exercise #1: Describe a difficult, painful event in your life. Then consider how you would answer these questions below.

C2: How did you face going through the difficult event?

C3: How did you feel 30 days after the event? One year after the event?

Exercise #2: Read the following verse and answer the question.

Luke 4:1 (ESV) And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.

C4: Reread that part, “*Jesus was led by Spirit in the wilderness.*” What can you learn from these verses about life’s difficult times?

STRENGTH Level Questions

Exercise #1: Remember, it's not a question of *IF*, but *WHEN*. You **will** go through difficult times. Read the following verse and answer the questions.

Psalm 42:1–5 (ESV)

S1: What can you learn from these verses to help you find strength in difficult times?

S2: From the verses, what factors do you see that are essential for satisfaction and wholeness in life?

Exercise #2: Many men are searching for a change to take away their emptiness. Read the following verses and answer the question.

Psalm 42:1–2 (ESV)

S3: What do these verses speak to you regarding longing after God?

Exercise #2: On a scale from 1-4, with 1 being *not at all* and 4 being *too much*, rate yourself in how distracted you are for the things of God.

Now write out an action plan to improve.

Exercise #3: The Psalmist's longing for God was intensified by his absence from God's house and God's people. Read the following verses and answer the questions.

Psalm 42:3–4 (ESV)

S4: What can you learn from these verses regarding longing for God and His people?

S5: What two things increased the Psalmist's longing for God?

Exercise #4: On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being *very well* and 4 being *not well*, how do you rate your longing for God and His people?



Now write out a plan to increase your longing for God and His people.

ENDURANCE Level Questions

NOTE: In **Psalm 42:3-4 (ESV)**, the Psalmist is far from the temple. He is in the region of Mount Hermon. He is listening to empty, doubting people asking, *“Where is your God?”*

E1: Describe a time in your life when you have asked, or been asked, “Where is God?”

Exercise #1: In times of difficulty, delay seems to be common. Read the following verses and answer the questions.

Isaiah 45:5 (ESV)

Hosea 6:1–3 (ESV)

On a scale from 1-4, with 1 being *very well* and 4 being *not well*, rate yourself on how well you deal with delay in your life. Now write out a plan to improve.

Exercise #2: From these verses, list at least three ways to handle delay during difficulty.

1)

2)

3)

Exercise #3: During difficult times, David leaned on God in at least two ways.

Psalm 43:1–3 (ESV)

E2: From these verses, what is one way David leaned on God?

Exercise #4: On a scale from 1-4, with 1 being *very well* and 4 being *not well*, rate yourself on how well you lean on God's strength. Now write out a plan to improve your "leaning abilities."

Exercise #5: Read the following verses and answer the question.

Psalm 43:4–5 (ESV)

E3: From these verses, what is one way David leaned on God in difficult times?

E4: In these verses, from what three things does God’s presence call David?

Exercise #6: On a scale from 1-4, with 1 being *very well* and 4 being *not well*, rate yourself on how strong is your “joy in God.” Now write out a plan to improve, or increase, your joy.