



Unshakeable in the Midst of Crisis

Adapted from “Unshakeable” series by Scott Erickson

The question in life is not will we go through difficult times, but how will we go through difficult times. The family of Shane Stokowski reminds us that life can change in an instant.

Read Christine’s story:

Christine Stokowski's hands shook as she tearfully told a Cook County judge Wednesday how she fell to her knees on the side of Interstate 55 two years ago and cried when a doctor called with the news her oldest son had been killed by a drunken 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 a good Samaritan who had been run over while trying to stop an intoxicated 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 are still struggling with the loss. The fiancée, Erin Harvill, went from planning her wedding to picking out the casket her fiancé was buried in. "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.

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McShane, who was convicted in March of aggravated DUI and reckless homicide, tearfully apologized and acknowledged his struggles with alcohol. Though he did not know Stokowski, a clearly intoxicated McShane shook his hand and those of his friends as he left the Aberdeen Tap on a Saturday afternoon in March 2014.

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 was suspended after a history of drunken driving 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 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 as she lamented 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 former fiancée, told her when picking out Stokowski's casket that she wanted her own ashes at her death placed inside with his remains. But his 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," his father, Jeff Stokowski, said of Harvill, who now lives in California. "We want her to find someone just as good as our son."¹

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

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

C2: Describe a difficult event in your life.

- How do you face going through the difficult event?
- How did you feel 30 days after the event? One year after the event?

C3: Read and answer the following.

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

- Reread that “Jesus was led by Spirit in the wilderness.” What can you glean from these verses about life’s difficult times?

STRENGTH

S1: The question in life is not will we go through difficult times in life, but how will we go through difficult times in life. Read the following verses and answer the questions.

Psalm 42:1–5 (ESV)

- What can you glean from these verses to help you find strength in difficult times?
- From the verses, what factors do you see are essential for satisfaction and wholeness of life?

S2: Many men are searching for a change to take away their emptiness. Read the following verses and answer the questions.

Psalm 42:1–2 (ESV)

- What do these verses speak to you regarding longing after God?
- 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.
- Write out an action plan to improve.

S3: 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)

- What can you glean from these verses regarding longing for God and His people?
- What two things increased the Psalmist's longing for God?
- 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?
- Write out a plan to increase your longing for God and His people.

ENDURANCE

E1: In **Psalm 42:3-4 (ESV)**, the Psalmist is far from the temple. He is in the region of Mount Hermon. He is hearing voices of empty, doubting people asking, “Where is your God?”

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

E2: 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. Write out a plan to improve.
- From these verses, list at least three ways to handle delay during difficulty.

E3: During difficulty, David leaned on God in at least two ways.

Psalm 43:1–3 (ESV)

- From these verses, what is one way David leaned on God?
- 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. Write out a plan to improve your leaning abilities.

Psalm 43:4–5 (ESV)

- From these verses, what is a way David leaned on God in difficult times?

- On a scale from 1-4 with 1 being very well and 4 being not well, rate yourself on how well your “joy in God” factor is. Write out a plan to improve your joy.

- From these verses, what three things does God’s presence call David to do?