

WELCOME

Welcome to the Unshakable series. It is our prayer that as you meet each week in community groups, you will experience significant spiritual growth. This series is designed to help you understand important issues of faith and Christian living. As you consider the truths in these sessions, you will be able to live out your faith clearly before God and others.

Remember that transformation is God's work. It is God's will for us and it is a work of his grace. We cooperate with God's grace by diligently applying his truth to our lives and obeying that truth as we face daily choices. Yet is the power of God that undergirds those choices and leads us along the way.

Each session in this curriculum includes unique sections which are designed to help you interact with the video presentations, connect with others in your community group, and reflect on your own personal response.

Whirlwind of Life

This introductory paragraph describes the context for real-life application of the truths that will be discovered and discussed.

Taking Refuge in a Word from God

Each week you will study a particular Word from God that is intended to speak to the whirlwind that's described above. It should be understood as if God himself were speaking to you personally. Each week's Word from God was derived from a variety of scripture texts. The italicized statements explain or add depth to each particular Word from God.

Roots Growing Deeper

These are discussion questions designed to help you interact with David's message, the life of Joseph, the video presentation, and the key Bible passage relevant to the study.

Our Firm Foundation

This section is intended to help you understand the theological foundation for each Word from God. Specific Bible verses are included in parentheses to allow you to do further individual study.

Reaching for God

This is a responsive prayer to help you personalize the truths that have been discussed.

Week One: I am never surprised

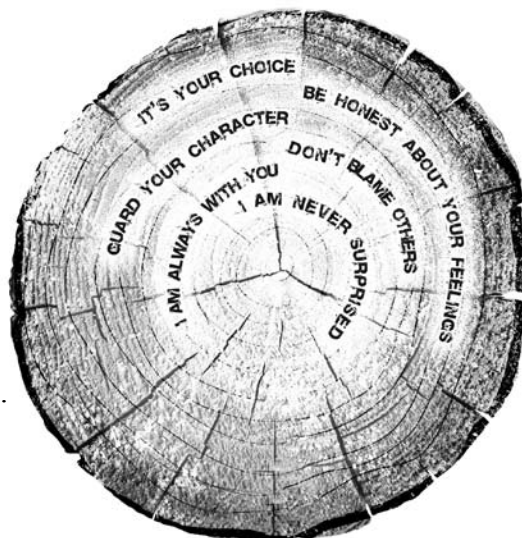
Week Two: I am always with you.

Week Three: Don't blame others.

Week Four: Guard your character.

Week Five: Be honest about your feelings.

Week Six: It's your choice.



UNSHAKABLE Week #1

Whirlwind of Life

Jesus told us plainly that in this life we will have trouble. As we survey the world around us we see lots of trouble—like whirlwinds. The recession, lost jobs, shrinking assets and uncertain futures capture the headlines. There's also the personal struggle that we all face from time to time: sickness, aging parents, fractured relationships, the death of loved ones and the challenges of parenting, to name just a few. When life feels like a whirlwind out of control, where is God? It's sometimes easy to feel like we've somehow fallen off of God's radar. What does God say to us in times like these?

Taking Refuge in a Word from God: "I am never surprised."

Your difficulty did not take me by surprise. I called you to be mine before the world began. Before one hour had passed, I knew them all. I have a plan for you that will not be ruined by the trials and difficulties of life.

Roots Growing Deeper

Joseph's Story: (Genesis 37)

1. What is one thing you remember from David Smith's message this past weekend?
2. Think about the whirlwind of events that happened to Joseph in Genesis 37:12-36. Joseph began his day being sent by his father to check on his brothers and ended the day as a slave in a caravan headed to Egypt. What would you guess were some of Joseph's thoughts as his life took what seemed like a dramatic turn for the worse?

Todd's Video:

1. Think of a situation that has happened in your own life similar to what Todd Weir shared regarding the sudden death of his wife's cousin. How did you react? How was your own faith challenged?

Planted in Truth: "But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations" (Psalm 33:11).

1. How do we know God has a plan for our individual lives? Are there verses or illustrations from the Bible that assure us that God does have a plan and a purpose for each of us? Has there been a time in your life when you were very conscious of God's plan and purpose for you?
2. Some Christians ask God for the best parking space at the department store, while others are afraid to ask God for anything. Do you believe God cares about the details of your life? If so, how should that affect the way we approach our circumstances?

3. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 89:28, “My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.” Note that God uses the same phrase, “stand firm,” in reference to both his plan for us and his covenant with man. How does it make you feel knowing that God’s plan for us is as “firm” as God’s eternal covenant with man?
4. Is there a particular area or circumstance in your life where you struggle to believe that God is in control?

Our Firm Foundation

I am never surprised. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign. That means that he has all power and is able to do whatever he wills. He reigns over everything because he is Lord, or master, of all things. Because God has sufficient power to exert his will in our lives, and because he loves us unconditionally, he is trustworthy. The plans he has for us are secure. God knows the beginning of our life and the end of our life. He knows everything about us and is able to accomplish his will in our life. This is a source of wonderful comfort and hope to every follower of Jesus.

(Genesis 17:1; Job 42:2; Matthew 19:26; Jeremiah 32:17; Revelation 19:6)

Reaching for God

O sovereign Lord, we acknowledge you as God Almighty, the Most High, the controller of all things. We believe the plans you have for us are to prosper us and not to harm us, to give us hope and a future. We are in awe of the depth of your wisdom and knowledge. We sometimes get caught up in our struggles and our circumstances and forget that you are in control. Even if our future is uncertain, we have a hope that comes from you. You know us and you love us. Our desire is to love you back, to stand firm in the whirlwind of life, to take refuge in you. We ask that, as we study and share with one another, our roots will grow deeper in you and that our time spent together will be encouraging. We ask that you would strengthen us to live with a faith that is unshakable. To you be honor and glory forever!

Notes

Unshakable WEEK #2

Whirlwind of Life

In the face of danger and obstacles, God reminds us to be strong and courageous because he goes with us and he will never leave us or forsake us. As we survey the world around us we can feel alone – like the storm cloud above us is ours alone and follows us wherever we go. When we feel alone and singled out in trials, what is our hope? What does God say to us in times like these?

Taking Refuge in a Word from God: “I am always with you.”

I know your trials and I hear your prayers. I am with you in the midst of your difficulties and you are not alone. In fact, I know your needs before you ask. No matter what you are facing, no matter how you may feel, I am with you and I will sustain you.

Roots Growing Deeper

Joseph’s Story: (Genesis 37, 39)

1. What is one thing you remember from David Smith’s message this past weekend?
2. What circumstances in the pit and the prison would have made it very easy for Joseph to doubt that God was with him? What indications were present to show that God was indeed with Joseph? How hard would it have been for Joseph’s faith to be unshakable under those circumstances?

Shelley’s Video:

1. Shelley talks about Kim’s feeling of being really alone in her struggles. Have you ever felt that way? Is it a situation that you could share with the group? Chances are someone else has also struggled in something similar and your story could encourage them.
2. Shelley mentions an expanded paraphrase of this week’s truth, “God will not leave me without protection, weakened and alone. He will take action to protect me from harm; he will not leave me vulnerable or draw away from me.” What words in that statement add to your understanding of God’s promise?

Planted in Truth: “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 31:8).

1. What does it mean that God “goes before you”? How should this influence the way we view difficult circumstances? Why do we often feel alone in our troubles?

2. How do you believe the New Testament offers the same type of encouragement as Deuteronomy. 31:8? What examples might we see in Jesus' life and teachings?
3. What are some common circumstances in trials we face that tend to make us feel as if God has left us?
4. What are some practical steps we can take to remind us that God is with us in the whirlwind?

Our Firm Foundation

I am always with you. The Bible teaches that we have a union with God through our faith in Jesus Christ that assures us of God's abiding presence. He will never leave us alone. We are "in" Christ and Christ is "in" us. Our union with God is so secure that the Bible says that there is nothing in heaven or earth, present or future, which can separate us from God's love. He is not simply a God far off or one of past history or who will appear in the future. He is a God who is present. He acts at every point in the history and experience of his people, and we are his people. Whatever our situation or need, he is with us now and forever.

(2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:27; John 15:4-5; Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:39)

Reaching for God

Dear heavenly Father, we acknowledge you as our refuge and our strength. We trust you and believe that you are near to all who call on you, that you hear our cries and you are mighty to save and protect. We want to be more aware of your presence with us and the comfort and hope that gives us. When we are at our low points, feeling alone or even forsaken, we can turn to you with our whole heart. You are a very present help in trouble. We're reminded that in you, we live and move and have our being. We take courage in knowing we are never alone. We ask that you would give us eyes to see and hearts to know your comforting presence every day. It is our desire to stand firm, unwavering, and unfaltering. We ask that you would strengthen us to live with a hope that is unshakable.

Notes

Unshakable WEEK #3

Whirlwind of Life

Even though the Bible reminds us not to grumble against one another, we tend to want to blame others when bad things happen: someone causes us to lose our job, our friends turn on us, our spouse fails us, or someone's neglect causes us pain. The temptation is to groan or complain against those we think are responsible or even just the next unfortunate person who crosses our path. We can feel like we're caught in the quicksand of anger and accusations. When it seems like life just isn't fair and we become trapped in bad attitudes and resentment, where should we find our freedom? What does God say to us in times like these?

Taking Refuge in a Word from God: "Don't blame others."

I know that when things go wrong, it's human nature to want to blame someone. Looking for someone to blame when things go wrong is never healthy or productive. I am the Righteous Judge and I will judge fairly. Blaming others will not solve your problems or help you to persevere. Keep your focus on me.

Roots Growing Deeper

Life of Joseph: (Genesis 45)

1. What is one thing you remember from David Smith's message this past weekend?
2. Joseph's love for his brothers, even though they had treated him badly, was so overwhelming that he finally broke down and wept, rather than continue his bitter charade. What kind of person must we be in order to love and have compassion for those who mistreat us or cause us trouble?

Kevin's Video:

1. In Kevin's video, he says that blame often lands on God. In what sense do our grumbling, complaining, anger and bitterness about our troubles "land on God"?

Planted in Truth: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody" (Romans 12:17).

1. What are some of the ways we "repay" those who cause us trouble?
2. What does the Bible say about vengeance?
3. This verse says we are to "be careful" in our response, and in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said we are to love those who treat us wrongly (Matthew 5:43-48). Is Jesus serious about wanting his followers to respond with grace and compassion when trouble comes our way due to the actions of others? How do we do that?

4. Jesus said in John 16:33, “In this world you will have trouble.” The “trouble” in our life is sometimes the result of other people’s actions. Discuss the various “troubles” in your life or our culture where we might be tempted to blame others.
5. When someone causes us trouble, whether it’s a friend, a family member, or even a politician in Washington, is it “evil” to become bitter, angry and slanderous? After reading Psalm 15:1-3, how might we respond when we’re tempted to blame others for troubles in our life?

Our Firm Foundation

Don’t blame others. The Bible teaches that God will judge the world according to his righteousness. This is a power that only God can exercise because only God is untainted by sin and self-interest. God will weigh the actions of every person. Jesus said that we’re not to judge others, even when they cause us pain, but that vengeance belongs to God. We can rest in the knowledge that God will judge the world and no one is exempt. We do not need to take that right to ourselves, but can instead let go of our bitterness or anger and focus on God’s grace and strength.

(2 Timothy 4:1; Romans 2:16; Matthew 7:1-2; Matthew 5:38-42)

Reaching for God

O Lord Almighty, we acknowledge you as our deliverer and righteous Savior. We trust you and believe that you know every detail of our lives. We don’t want to be burdened by blaming others in our times of trouble -- we want to cry out to you, knowing you will answer our prayers. Help us by the power of your Holy Spirit, to let go of any anger, resentment or bitterness we’ve held onto and to come to you to be restored and renewed. We find freedom from the weight of worry as we rest in your lovingkindness and trust in your ultimate justice in all things. It is our desire to be firmly established as we respond in faith to any and all things you allow in our lives. We ask that you would strengthen us to live with a freedom that is unshakable.

Notes

Unshakable Week #4

Whirlwind of Life

In 1 Samuel 16, we are reminded that God looks at, tests and weighs our hearts. He is pleased with integrity-- an undivided heart. When we look around us and see the heartache and the moral chaos that is the way of the world, we can feel that it's not worth the effort to walk in righteousness. It's like we're in a mudslide and it's way too easy to slide down the slippery slope of "whatever works" to get us through the whirlwinds of life. When it seems like making the right choices is just too hard, where do we find strength to persevere? What does God say to us in times like these?

Taking Refuge in a Word from God: "Guard your character."

When things get difficult, it's tempting to look for the easy way out, to cut corners, or to pursue the quickest means to an end. You can allow your heart to be taken captive by escapism or opportunism. Crises come and go, but your character must endure.

Roots Growing Deeper

Joseph's Story: (Genesis 39)

1. What is one thing you remember from David Smith's message this past weekend?
2. Joseph's refusal to compromise his character ultimately landed him in jail. If guarding our hearts and protecting our character could lead to the whirlwind getting worse, is it still worth it? Why?

Jim's Video:

1. What do you think Jim Futrell means when he says, "We need a spiritual emergency fund"? What do you think that looks like, and how can we do that in our life?

Planted in Truth: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

1. What are the "heart dangers" that we face when in the midst of trouble or whirlwinds in life? Can you share any experience where you had to choose between your character and a quick resolution to a problem?
2. What does it mean to "guard your heart"? How do trials and troubles in our life often threaten our character? In what practical ways can we guard our character in the midst of trouble?
3. What does the psalmist mean when he says that our hearts are the "wellspring of life"?

Unshakable Week #5

Whirlwind of Life

In Psalms, we are reminded that God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. God hears us and is sensitive to our suffering. Sometimes it seems like our trials are as relentless as hurricane-force winds and we want to lock ourselves inside and pretend we don't even hear the roaring wind. In the trials that "throw us for a loop" or threaten to turn us from God, can we admit that we are fearful and struggling or do we try to keep our true feelings from showing? We often quote Bible verses and attempt to "grin and bear it", but where do we go to show our true selves in times of heartache and disappointments? Where do we find a place to be real? What does God say to us in times like these?

Taking Refuge in a Word from God: "Be honest about your feelings."

I am not disappointed by your fear or even your lack of faith. I am disappointed by your unwillingness to come to me with your feelings. I want you to be honest about your emotions and your struggles. I want to listen and I want to help. I cannot comfort your heart and heal your wounds if you are unwilling to open yourself up to me.

Roots Growing Deeper

Joseph's Story: (Genesis 41)

1. What is one thing you remember from David Smith's message this past weekend?
2. Joseph said that God "has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." From that statement, can we deduce anything about Joseph's willingness to be honest with God about his feelings?

Joan's Video:

1. Joan shares a thought she was wrestling with, "How could I be a good testimony for God if I didn't appear to have my life together?" Is a "good testimony for God" the same as "having it all together"? Why or why not?
2. What might happen in our faith community if everybody was open and vulnerable about the real person on the inside?

Planted in Truth: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

1. The verse above assumes we are able to admit we are weary and burdened from life's struggles. Why is it sometimes difficult for Christians to admit they are really struggling on the inside?

2. When we become weary and burdened by life’s whirlwinds, we’re invited to come to Jesus. What does that invitation mean to you? How does that happen in your life?
3. Jesus promises to give us rest when we are struggling. When have you experienced the “rest” of God when in the midst of a difficult situation? How might you describe the “rest” God gives us in the midst of the whirlwind?

Our Firm Foundation

Be honest about your feelings. The Bible teaches that God is omniscient. Omniscience simply means that God is all-knowing. Since God knows everything, he knows the scope of your emotions, from courage to depression, from fear to elation, from frustration to brokenness. God understands your heart. When we face the whirlwind, we must never hide our heart from God. God loves us unconditionally. He knows our weaknesses and our struggles and has committed himself to us. He’s approachable and compassionate and he invites us into his presence where we can find comfort and hope in the midst of our pain.

(Isaiah 40:29; Luke 16:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Psalm 119:50; 2 Corinthians 12:10)

Reaching for God

Gracious Father, we acknowledge you as the faithful one who hears us when we cry out to you. You are full of grace, mercy and compassion. We trust you and believe that you delight in our prayers. You listen to us and renew our strength to stand in times of trials. When our hearts ache, we want to cast our cares on you, for you care for us. You hold us close in your tender mercy and invite us to admit our failures, our weaknesses, our limitations and our vulnerability. We ask that you would give us the courage to lay before you what is in us, not what we think ought to be in us. You give us a peace that passes understanding as we lay our burdens before you. We ask that you would strengthen us to live with a peace that is unshakable.

Notes

Unshakable Week #6

Whirlwind of Life

There was a man in the Old Testament named Job, whose life suddenly took a dramatic turn toward pain and sorrow. Job was confronted with the choice between trusting God and getting lost in his own anguish. Job's dilemma is common to all of us. Whirlwinds will come into our lives at unexpected times and catch us unprepared. In a split moment, we can be torn between trusting in God's love and kindness, and frantically searching for our own way. What does God say to us in times like these?

Taking Refuge in a Word from God: "It's your choice."

You can run from me, or you can run to me. I'm your Father who loves you. I will care for you as a Shepherd cares for his sheep, and I am the watchful Father waiting for his prodigal to return. I will not force myself upon you, but rather invite you to find your strength and safety in my love.

Roots Growing Deeper

Joseph's Story: (Genesis 50)

1. What is one thing you remember from David Smith's message this past weekend?
2. Joseph's choice to see his life and his troubles from God's perspective is clear in Genesis 50:19-21. Can you share an experience in your life where you made a decision to trust your circumstances to God and in return, found your strength and safety in his love?

Paul's Video:

1. In his video, Paul talks about how the whirlwinds of life can sometimes tempt us to run from our faith. What one choice have you made which you believe will keep your life anchored in the midst of life's troubles?

Planted in Truth: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

1. It's clear from the verse above that the decision to run from God or find refuge in God is our choice. Why does God leave the choice to us? Wouldn't it be better for us if he overwhelmed our will so that we always chose him?
2. Joshua alludes to others whom we might be tempted to serve. In the context of this series, the whirlwinds of life, who or what might those "others" be?
3. It would appear that the choice for Joshua and his household is set in stone. How have the "words from God" we've discussed over the previous five weeks helped to make the choice to "serve the Lord" easier for you?

Leaders' Guide

This curriculum was designed for use in a community group setting. To provide the most effective and meaningful experience for your small group, please review the following suggestions and timeline.

Each week is comprised of five sections. Each section has a specific purpose and is intended to achieve a specific goal in the community group experience.

Whirlwind of Life (5 minutes)

This section is intended to establish the setting for understanding this week's Word from God. It describes the context for real-life application of the truths that will be discovered and discussed. Someone should read it aloud and the facilitator could perhaps ask the group, "Does this whirlwind resonate with your life or someone you know?"

Taking Refuge in a Word from God (2 minutes)

This section presents the "Word from God" for this week's study. Each statement that we will study throughout this series is to be read and understood as if God himself were speaking to us personally. Each week's Word from God was derived from a variety of scripture texts. The italicized statements in this section are intended to explain or add depth to each particular Word from God. Someone should read it aloud and the facilitator may allow an opportunity for comments.

Roots Growing Deeper (40 minutes, including DVD)

This section provides the content for this week's study. It begins by asking the group to share their responses to David's sermon from the previous weekend. The facilitator may want to encourage participants to bring their sermon notes and be prepared to share their thoughts about David's message. The second subsection should begin by viewing the pastor's video vignette, included on the DVD that was provided with this curriculum. Each video runs from 8 to 12 minutes in length. This subsection includes questions which allow the group an opportunity to interact with the video. The facilitator might also ask the group if there are any other comments about the video. The last subsection is a study of the foundational Bible verse for this week's lesson. It includes discussion questions that will help the group explore the deeper meaning of each verse. It would be helpful if the facilitator reviews the discussion questions in this section prior to the community group meeting. The facilitator should encourage as much discussion as time allows.

Our Firm Foundation (5 to 10 minutes)

This section is intended to lay a theological foundation for understanding the Word from God. Someone should read it aloud and the facilitator should ask for any comments or responses. Specific Bible verses are included in parentheses to allow the group to do further study individually. The facilitator may choose to read those verses aloud if time allows.

Reaching for God (5 minutes)

This section is a responsive prayer intended to personalize the truths that have been discussed. The prayer may be read in unison or the facilitator may ask an individual to read the prayer for the group. One possible scenario might be for the facilitator to announce that the study is going to be closed with prayer and that the facilitator will read the prayer as written and invite any participants who would like to add their own prayer to do so. Encourage the group to review the prayer throughout the week in order to internalize its truths.



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