

Unshakeable: Providential Relationships

Small Group Discussion

Opening question (try to get everyone involved in discussion):

- Looking back, are there people you feel God providentially brought into your life at crucial times? Who? How did God use them? Feel free to spend more time with this opening discussion than you normally would, although you may need to limit everyone to sharing about 1 person, for the sake of time.

Introduction

- Review: We are in a sermon series called “Unshakeable.” We’re examining how we can have the kind of growing faith in God that enables us to weather storms with steadfastness. We described this kind of faith as “confidence in God—confidence that God is personal, that he is good, that he cares about you, and that you can trust his promises.”
- Andy Stanley talks about “five faith catalysts,” or experiences that God typically uses to grow people’s confidence in him.* The catalyst that we’re discussing this week is Providential Relationships.

Discuss

- On Sunday, we learned that **God places the right people in our path at the right moment to strengthen our faith in him.** This faith catalyst is what we call, “Providential Relationships.”
- In *Deep and Wide*, Andy Stanley argues that relationships take on this providential effect in our lives when we either hear from God through someone, or see God in someone. Share a few examples from recent years of when you have heard from God through someone or seen God in someone, and how it has impacted your faith. (Have only a few people share).
- Are there those in your circle of relationships who would say that YOU are someone God providentially dropped into their lives?
- How do you balance the relationships in your life that strengthen your faith and the relationships that could inhibit your spiritual growth, knowing full well that these relationships could also be the pivotal for others to draw closer to God?
- Read the following passages in the Bible, where we see providential relationships at work, then discuss the questions that follow. If you are short on time, you can break into smaller groups or pairs and each take one, then report back to the whole group.
 - Acts 8:26-39
 - Acts 9:1-19
 - Acts 9:19-31
 - Acts 10:23-48
 - Acts 18:24-28

*This sermon series has been based on the “Five Faith Catalysts” in *Deep and Wide*, by Andy Stanley. Portions of this study guide have also been adapted from small group materials published by North Point Ministries.

- For discussion (after reading the passage):
 - Who is the recipient of providential influence in this passage? Who is the giver of providential influence?
 - How was the recipient “made ready” for the influence that he would receive from this person?
 - How did the people in question meet?
 - What risk(s) did the giver of providential influence take in this scenario?
 - What can you observe here about how God uses providential relationships, which may be helpful for your life?
- Of the people currently in your life, who do you consider to be wiser than you, from whom you would like to learn? Is there a particular area of your life that you would like to see strengthened, where someone might have been influential?
- Of the people currently in your life, to whom might you extend hospitality, with a view toward being used by God to have influence in his/her life?
- What does it mean to “win the right to be heard,” by showing hospitality?
- Pastor Josh suggested that as a giver of providential influence, you might bring people along in what you’re doing (in life and ministry).
 - Have you ever done this in an effective way?
 - Is there anyone who God might be currently pointing you toward, who you can “bring along” in life and ministry?
- Why is it important to correct in private and praise in public?
- Andy Stanley acknowledges that most providential relationships begin with an awkward conversation. Based on this reality, Josh suggested that we take the risk to have bold conversations.
 - When has a providential relationship in your life begun this way?
 - Do you feel God leading you to have this kind of conversation with anyone now? Who and why?

Sharing and prayer:

- Share about any needs that you have, and pray for one another.
- *As you close, ask each person in the group to pray a sentence prayer thanking God for a relationship he or she views as providential.*