

Unshakeable Faith online Introduction

Should Christians experience hard times?

Some well-known Christian leaders teach what is known as “prosperity Gospel.” This is the belief that God rewards obedience with wealth, health, and happiness. Scot McKnight, in an article on beliefnet.com defines it this way:

“The prosperity gospel (or the health and wealth gospel) teaches that God desires the material, spiritual, and physical prosperity of his people. To become prosperous, all one has to do is believe, receive, and act upon God's promises.” (Read McKnight’s entire article here.)

Well, that’s all well and good until some faithful Christian encounters a trial or difficulty. What do we do with the prosperity gospel then?

1. What have you been taught about the presence of trials in a Christian’s life?

Many Christian women I love and admire have faced or are facing significant trials like life-threatening illness, divorce, death of a child, and financial hardship. These kinds of situations would knock many people flat. But these women are standing firm on their faith in God. They’ve discovered that God works in the middle of it all for His glory.

Of course, the biggest problem with the teachings of the prosperity gospel is found in the teachings of the Bible.

2. Read the following passages and record what the Bible does teach about trials in the lives of believers.

a. John 6:33 –

b. John 15:18-20 –

c. 2 Timothy 3:12 –

d. James 1:2 –

e. 1 Peter 1:6 –

3. *Summarize what the Bible teaches about trials in the lives of believers?*

Scripture makes it clear that believers will face trials and difficulties. However, as we continue to faithfully follow God those trials are never wasted. He uses them to refine our faith, shape our character, work out His purposes, and bring glory to Himself. And yes, God does care about every aspect of our physical well-being. But He cares even more about our eternal well-being.

Are you ready for the inevitable trials of life? You can have a faith that will stand rock-solid whatever comes your way. Over the next eight weeks we will discover how God grew Peter's faith from shaky to unshakeable. Let's take a brief look at this growth.

4. *Read Mark 14:27-31. How did Peter think he would respond when hard times came?*

5. *Read Mark 14:50; 66-72. How did Peter actually respond when Jesus was arrested and tried?*

6. *Read Acts 4:13-20. Peter and John had been arrested for healing a crippled beggar in Jesus' name. How did they respond to the command of the Jewish rulers?*

7. *What kind of change do you see in Peter?*

Peter went on to endure beatings, persecution, and other imprisonments because of his faith in Jesus. History and church tradition also reveal that Peter was martyred for his faith in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero. The brash, impetuous Peter, who once denied Jesus to a servant girl, willingly gave his life rather than ever deny Him again.

We will probably never be asked to deny Christ or die. But, every trial and difficulty of life will threaten to shake our faith. I'm excited to spend the next 8 weeks with you exploring the faith traits God instilled in Peter. Our goal for this study is to allow God to do in our lives what He did in Peter's. Are you ready?

Group discussion: What trials and difficulties have you encountered that have threatened to shake your faith in Christ? Can you see how God was working in them?

For more information on Prosperity Gospel:

Scot McKnight's article:

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2009/03/The-Problem-for-the-Prosperity-Gospel.aspx#ixzz1X64Qzc7y>

Watch a brief video by John Piper talking about the tragedy of the message of Prosperity Gospel.
http://youtu.be/PTc_FoELt8s