



## *Five Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith :: Pivotal Circumstances {Andy Stanley}*

### INTRODUCTION

Life is full of surprises - some good, some not so good. But each unexpected event that comes our way is actually a divine opportunity. In this installment of *Five Things God Uses To Grow Our Faith*, we'll discover the role that *pivotal circumstances* play in the development of our confidence in God.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*These are dynamics God uses to build our faith. Growing faith is the essence of a growing relationship with Christ.*

- Practical Teaching
  - Providential Relationships
  - Private Disciplines
  - Personal Ministry
  - Pivotal Circumstances
1. Give a brief example of an event or set of circumstances in his or her life that led to feelings of helplessness or being out of control. The event can be positive or negative.
  2. As you think back on this incident, what role did God play in your thoughts? Did you pray? Did you pray differently? Were you angry?
  3. Would you say this event strengthened or weakened your confidence in God? Why?
  4. In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis writes: *God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.* In your opinion, why is it so easy to factor God out of our lives when things are good, and so difficult to factor him out when things aren't? Why does God almost always become part of the conversation when bad things happen?
  5. Read James 1:2-4. James says that trials test our *faith, or confidence in God*. How is a trial a test of our faith?
  6. James says the goal of these tests is "perseverance." The implication is that trials can create *persevering faith* in God. But why trials? Can you think of other ways God could create persevering faith in us?
  7. Read John 11:1-6. How does it make you feel when you read that Jesus *loved* Lazarus but didn't go to him in his time of need?
  8. Is the idea of God using human pain for his glory disturbing to you? Is this a new concept for you?



9. Read John 11:11-15. According to these verses, what is the relationship between Lazarus' death and the disciples' faith?
10. Does it seem to you that Jesus is asking too much of Mary and Martha? What difference would it have made had they known that Jesus was using their brother's sickness as an object lesson?

*Read John 11:21-27. Listen carefully for, or even circle in your Bible, the terms believe, believing, and believes.*

11. What did Martha already believe about Jesus? What did Jesus ask her to believe? What is the difference?
12. What difference does it make if an individual really believes that Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life rather than simply one for whom God does an occasional favor (see verse 22)?
13. Read John 11:38-45. As Jesus prays (verse 41-42), he cites the reason for pausing to pray before performing the miracle. What is that reason?
14. According to verse 45, what was the outcome of this miracle?
15. What is the relationship between the new-found faith of the bystanders and the tragedy that befell Lazarus and his family?
16. Do you think it would have been possible to incite that kind of belief any other way?
17. Respond to this statement. "When it feels like God is allowing something to happen *to* us, it is easy to lose faith. But when we accept that he is doing something *in* us, we are candidates for the grace we need to endure."
18. If God uses pivotal circumstances to build our faith in him, what should our response be next time life takes us by surprise?

### **MOVING FORWARD**

Often times, what shapes our response to these pivotal circumstances is the support that we have around us during these experiences. Is there a community? . . . Are there providential relationships? . . . that help us frame these circumstances in a way for us to see that God is not doing something to us, but is doing something in us and through us. With that in mind, close your group time by praying for the individuals or couples in your group who are currently facing a faith-stretching trial.

### **CHANGING YOUR MIND**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

James 1:2-4