

The Shack

Companion Guide

Introduction

The Shack by William P. Young can be compared to a wood chisel. A wood chisel is a very helpful and beneficial tool. It is used to carve out intricate details. In the same way *The Shack* is a very helpful tool as well.

This book is a well-written, down-to-earth narration of the developing relationship between Mack and God. Mack is introduced to the actual God of the universe, not the version of God he had constructed in his own mind. *The Shack* provides a fresh, mold-breaking look at God's nature. The fictional story is about a man named Mack who is invited to meet with The Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the aftermath of his daughter's brutal murder. The author makes the complex simple focusing on the ideas of God, humanity, and evil.

This book is a great tool for understanding weighty topics such as where God is when bad things happen to good people and the line between God's sovereignty and man's free will.

But a wood chisel can also be very destructive if it isn't handled properly. In the same way, *The Shack* can lead the reader to draw conclusions about God, His nature and intentions that are a misunderstanding of the author's intent. It is important to distinguish the author's points from the comments and thoughts of Mack. Just because Mack says or believes something doesn't mean that's what William Young wants us to know about God. Mack is a character in the story, but he represents real people.

In a similar way, the book's events and conversations must be understood in the context of Mack. God is addressing a fictional character's circumstances and beliefs, not a real person's.

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In addition to misunderstanding the author's intent, it must be noted that there are some instances where the author does make a point which are erroneous.

This is a book which needs to be read with discernment. It isn't intended to replace the Bible as revelation of God's character. There's only one Bible, and *The Shack* isn't it. It's merely a fiction story that challenges us to think outside the box, stop looking at God as a distant, disinterested being, and recognize how completely He loves us and longs to reveal Himself to us in such a way that brings healing for our past and hope for our future.

The highlights and cautions below are designed to help you think through the book (not replace your reading it) and match it with Scripture and your understanding of God. The format is designed for parents to aid them in coming alongside their teens as they read through *The Shack* as a part of our summer curriculum. This book is climbing the bestseller lists and is making a buzz in the younger generation because it addresses questions and concerns they have which they don't see being addressed by their parents' generation. It is our hope that this summer will be a time of greater connection between parents and teen.

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Chapter One: A Confluence of Paths

Talking Points:

Mack: *“Honey, I’m sure God knows what he’s doing. It will all work out.” The words brought him no comfort but he hoped they might ease the worry he could hear in her voice.” (22)*

Mack is using God as a lucky charm, a tool employed to fix our problems. Mack doesn’t believe his own words, he just knows it’s what his wife, Nan, would like to hear.

Is that what God is, the magic word to fix things we can’t fix ourselves?

Do you ever use God in this way?

Chapter Two: The Gathering Dark

Talking Points:

The book compares the princess’ sacrifice to Christ’s sacrifice.

It had all the elements of a true redemption story, not unlike the story of Jesus that she [Missy] knew so well. It centered on a father who loved his only child and a sacrifice foretold by a prophet. Because of love, the child willingly gave up her life to save her betrothed and their tribes from certain death. (29)

Is this a valid comparison? How is this story like Christ’s redemption of us? How is it different?

What does this say about God?

That night in the tent Missy asks Mack a question:

“Is the Great Spirit another name for God—you know, Jesus’ Papa [God the Father]?”

Mack smiled in the dark. Obviously, Nan’s nightly prayers were having an effect. “I would suppose so. It’s a good name for God because he is a Spirit and he is Great.”

“Then how come he’s so mean?”

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Ah, here was the question that had been brewing. “What do you mean, Missy?”

“Well, the Great Spirit makes the princess jump off the cliff and makes Jesus die on a cross. That seems pretty mean to me.” (31)

Mack seems content with the God of the Bible being the same as the Native American’s Great Spirit. Is that true? Do all religions lead to the same God? Our relativistic culture answers “Yes.”

Was Missy’s question offending to God? Is God threatened when we ask difficult questions? While some Christians are threatened, God never is. Wait until you read how this question of God/bad things/good people is answered!

Chapter Three: The Tipping Point

Talking Points:

This conversation occurs between Mack and two nearby campsite occupants.

“I guess she [Nan, Mack’s wife] thinks about God differently than most folks. She even calls him Papa because of the closeness of their relationship, if that makes sense.”

Of course it does,” exclaimed Sarah as Jesse nodded. “Is that a family thing, referring to God as Papa?”

“No,” said Mack, laughing. “The kids have picked it up some, but I’m not comfortable with it. It just seems a little too familiar for me. Anyway, Nan has a wonderful father, so I think it’s just easier for her.”

It had slipped out, and Mack inwardly shuddered, hoping no one had noticed, but Jesse was looking right at him. “Your dad wasn’t too wonderful?” he asked gently.

“Yah.” Mack paused. “I guess you could say he was not too wonderful. He died when I was just a kid, of natural causes.” Mack laughed, but the sound was empty. He looked at the two. “He drank himself to death.” (37-38)

How do you feel about “familiar” names for God? Is it irreverent to refer to God as Papa? (Rom 8:15)

There is a hint here at Mack's hard past, especially his relationship with father. How do past experiences shape our understanding of God?

Chapter Four: The Great Sadness

Talking Points: As the authorities band together in the search for Missy, there is significant emotion about the situation:

...it seemed that everyone who spoke was deeply affected by the situation. Something in the heart of most human beings simply cannot abide pain inflicted on the innocent, especially children. Even broken men serving in the worst correctional facilities will often first take out their own rage on those who have caused suffering to children. Even in such a world of relative morality, causing harm to a child is still considered absolutely wrong. Period! (59)

Why do we cringe so deeply when pain seems so brutally inflicted?

The tragedy had also increased the rift in Mack's own relationship with God, but he ignored this growing sense of separation. Instead, he tried to embrace a stoic, unfeeling faith, and even though Mack found some comfort and peace in that, it didn't stop the nightmares where his feet were stuck in the mud and his soundless screams could not save his precious Missy. (65)

Pain is a reality in our broken world. The tendency is to distance God from the pain in our lives. Yet, only Christianity gives hope in the midst of pain that God is at work bringing about His good purposes.

Try as he might, Mack could not escape the desperate possibility that the note just might be from God after all, even if the thought of God passing notes did not fit well with his theological training. In seminary he had been taught that God had completely stopped any overt communication with moderns, preferring to have them only listen to and follow sacred Scripture, properly interpreted, of course. God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects. It seemed that direct communications with God was something exclusively for the ancients and uncivilized, while educated Westerners' access to God was mediated and controlled by the intelligentsia. Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was that guilt edges? (65-66)

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What does this say about the Bible? Is it wrong to have a nice Bible with gilt edges? Is the Bible about making people feel guilty? If God can communicate to us in various ways, is it necessary to have the Bible? Absolutely. Scripture testifies that there are false teachers and prophets. How do we know if all someone needs to say is “God revealed to me...” How do we know if a dream or feeling is God’s leading if there is no absolute standard by which all things are measured? What about those who claim that the Bible was made up and propagated by men? What about different translations? These questions have answers.

Check out <http://www.apologeticsinfo.org/papers/trustworthinessofthebible.html> for starters.

But in spite of his anger and depression, Mack knew that he needed some answers. He realized he was stuck, and Sunday prayers and hymns weren’t cutting it anymore, if they ever really had. Cloistered spirituality seemed to change nothing in the lives of the people he knew, except maybe Nan. But she was special. God might really love her. She wasn’t a screw-up like him. He was sick of God and God’s religion, sick of all the little religious social clubs that didn’t seem to make any real difference or affect any real changes. (66)

Can a person feel like God has favorites? Can a person feel that their mistakes leave them on the outside of God’s love? Mack was sick of God and God’s religion. Was Mack a victim? Does he have any responsibility for change in his life?

Chapter Five: Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner

Talking Points: Chapter five opens with these words:

There are times when you choose to believe something that would normally be considered absolutely irrational. It doesn’t mean that it is actually irrational, but it surely is not rational. Perhaps there is suprarationality: reason

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beyond the normal definitions of fact or data-based logic; something that only makes sense if you can see a bigger picture of reality. Maybe that is where faith fits in. (67)

What does Hebrews 11 say about faith?

Can we have faith about circumstances we fully understand?

Is seeing believing? Or is believing seeing? How does this affect how we view God?

As Mack is packing to go up to the Shack he humorously thinks about what to pack.

He reasoned that he wouldn't need much if God had sent the invitation, but just in case, he loaded up a cooler with much more than enough for the miles he would be traveling and then added a sleeping bag, some candles, matches, and a number of other survival items. (69)

Mack's friend Willie helps him load the car and points out:

"Jeez, Mack, if you think God is going to be up there why all the supplies?"

Mack smiled rather sadly "I just thought I'd cover my bases. You know, be prepared for whatever happens....or doesn't." (72)

What does real dependence on God look like?

Does this mean sometimes we have to do the unreasonable because of faith in God?

How do we know the difference in being irresponsible and trusting God to provide the impossible? Like the stories in I Kings 18 and Acts 3.

Compare Mack's ample preparations with Abraham's in Genesis chapter 12 or 22.

As Mack finishes packing he shares his heart with Willie:

"Maybe what happened to Missy is God's judgment for what I did to my own dad." (71)

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Do you think bad things happen as a result of our actions? Read 2 Samuel 12:13-20. Now read John 9:1-12. What is the underlying reason for the “bad things” in these passages? (2 Sam. 12:14 & John 9:3)

On pages 77-80 Mack finds his way into the Shack and is overcome with emotions. He reacts with violent anger and spews intense hate at the indifferent God who has plagued his life. He blames God for causing the terrible things that have happened to him.

Which do you think is a better reaction to being angry at God? 1) Keeping all of your emotions bottled inside because it is inappropriate to be angry at God. Or 2), choosing to be honest with Him and communicate your anger.

On pages 82-87 Mack encounters the Trinity. A shocking experience for Mack, God is nothing like Gandalf. Mack is introduced to an overweight African-American woman who says her name is Elousia, but asks to be called Papa. Next comes a small Asian woman who has an ethereal appearance that makes her difficult to see. She is dressed like a gardener and offers her name as Sarayu. The third character, clearly Middle Eastern, is a carpenter. Mack quickly realizes who he is: the Shack’s Jesus. Still confused, Mack clarifies by asking,

“Which one of you is God?”

“I am,” said all three in unison. (87)

What is the author’s message: (A) God loves me so much that he is willing to take on another form in order to reach me? (B) I can make God be whomever I want him to be in order to feel good about worshiping Him? Which of these two views would be consistent

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with the teachings of Scripture? Explain the difference between idolatry and making God out to be what I want him to be.

Is this goddess worship? Explain why.

Chapter Six: A Piece of π

Talking Points: Chapter six starts with this quote from Jacques Ellul:

“...no matter what God’s power may be, the first aspect of God is never that of the absolute Master, the Almighty. It is that of the God who puts himself on our human level and limits himself.”(88)

The Shack’s Trinity is missing an important degree of glory. Glory as a motivation for His actions (Is. 48:9, 11), and glory as a central character trait. Nowhere in *The Shack* do we read of the majestic God, the one seen by Isaiah (6:1-8) or in Revelation. We don’t read about the God who shakes the earth with His voice and whose gaze pierces through all subtleties. The God who declares His sovereignty to Job, and speaks the words of destiny. The God who commands fear by his presence alone, not the fear of mere respect, but knee-shaking, soul-wrenching fear; as He holds all eternity in His grasp. Fear that paralyzes because of the immensity of majesty. That God, whom no one can withstand, and all creation honors, does not appear in *The Shack*. While it could be the author’s intent to emphasize the relational aspects of God, he misses the greatest evidence of God’s relational nature. The completely unapproachable aspect of God makes His approach to us so much more incredible. This God, who spins all the galaxies in His palm, chose to limit Himself and become human! What dignity is ascribed to mankind to be the recipients of such love.

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At one point in this chapter Mack says to the Shack's Jesus that he feels obligated to go speak with Papa. The Shack's Jesus replies:

Oh, don't go because you feel obligated. That won't get you any points around here. Go because it's what you want to do. (89)

This seems to indicate that our feelings are what should lead us. Is faith greater evidenced when I do what I feel like doing or when I do it even though I don't feel like it, but I do it because I know it's right?

On page 92 Papa offers:

*"If you'll let me, Mack, I'll be the Papa you never had."
The offer was at once inviting and at the same time repulsive. He had always wanted a Papa he could trust, but he wasn't sure he'd find it here, especially if this one couldn't even protect his Missy. A long silence hung between them. Mack was uncertain what to say, and she was in no hurry to let the moment pass easily. (92)*

What does this offer say about God's desires towards us? What are some obstacles we put in the way of our fully realizing this side of God?

Chapter Seven: God on the Dock

Talking Points:

In Chapter 7 Mack is watching the stars and enjoying conversation with the Shack's Jesus. The Shack's Jesus is explaining Sarayu to Mack.

*"Speaking of Sarayu, is she the Holy Spirit?"
"Yes. She is Creativity; she is Action; she is the Breathing of Life; she is much more. She is my Spirit."
"And her name, Sarayu?"*

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“That is a simple name from one of our human languages. It means ‘Wind,’ a common wind actually. She love that name.” (110)

Young describes aspects of God with a strong Mystic or New Age overtone, especially Sarayu. There is a strong connection with Native American beliefs in Chapter 2, and that them seems to run through the rest of Young’s depiction of God. Sarayu is always described very nebulously; almost as a force and not a being.

What do you think about Sarayu? Is she a good representation of the Holy Spirit? Explain.

Chapter Eight: A Breakfast of Champions

Talking Points:

On page 119 Mack asks about God’s wrath:

Weren’t you always running around killing people in the Bible? (119)

And later,

Honestly, don’t you enjoy punishing those who disappoint you? (119)

Sometimes it’s easy to see the Old Testament God as “running around killing” all the different “ites” (Amalakites, Edomites, etc.) and miss the story of His unending grace. Think about the stories of Joseph and Daniel. What happened to the gentile nations who trusted in God? Or what about the story of Jonah? It’s often easy to think God only cared about the Jews, but what about Melchizedek (Gen. 14) He was a priest, of God, but he wasn’t an Israelites at all. Neither were Rahab (Jericho) or Ruth (Moab), but God’s redemptive mercy is so thorough that both of those women were key individuals in the lineage of Christ!

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On page 120 Mack and Papa discuss punishment.

I am not who you think I am, Mackenzie. I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish it; it's my joy to cure it. (120)

Do you think God ever punishes people? Is that cruel of Him? How far is God willing to travel in order to redeem you? If punishing you for sin would help reveal your need for Him do you think He would? Read Hosea 7:12-16; Psalm 39:11; and Psalm 94:12. What do these verses say about God punishing sin?

As they sit around the breakfast table (121), Mack questions which one of the three is the “boss?” The question begins a long conversation about the nature of authority and hierarchy. Papa says that they are completely unencumbered by chains of command, and that is how humans are supposed to be, too. Hierarchy has no place in the Shack's Trinity, only unity.

Hierarchy and the power it affords is abused, but does that mean that all hierarchy is wrong? In dancing is it ok if both partners lead? In football can everyone call the play in the huddle?

Read Gen. 2:15 – 3:24. How many hierarchy relationships can you identify? What about Philippians 2:5-11?

Christ says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18).

How does this fit with Young's Trinity?

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At the end of the chapter Papa says,

The real underlying flaw in your life, Mackenzie, is that you don't think that I am good. (126)

Here Young surfaces a great insight into a struggle we all face which is do we really believe that God is good? How different would our lives look if we did?

But is this the “real underlying flaw”? If it is then why did Christ have to die? Why doesn't God simply parade His goodness before us like He did with Moses in Exodus 33?

The question boils down to either we sin because we doubt God's goodness or do we doubt God's goodness because we are sinners?

Chapter Nine: A Long Time Ago, In a Garden Far, Far Away

Talking Points:

Mack is in the garden of his soul with Sarayu and they are clearing some beautiful flowers out of the way to make room for something new to grow. Sarayu hands a particularly poisonous stick to Mack. Mack recoils until Sarayu assures him it is OK.

Mack gingerly reached out and took the poisonous twig. “If you had not told me this was safe to touch, would it have poisoned me?”

“Of course! But if I direct you to touch, that is different. For any created being, autonomy is lunacy.” (132)

What implications does this have on our lives about what is safe and what isn't?

Can you think of other stories where God directed someone to do something that man's wisdom said “wasn't safe”? How did it turn out?

Later, still in the garden Mack and Sarayu discuss evil.

Mackenzie, evil is a word we use to describe the absence of Good, just as we use the word darkness to describe the absence of Light or death to describe the absence of Life. Both evil and darkness can only be understood in relation to Light and Good; they do not have any actual existence. I am Light and I am Good. I am Love and there is no darkness in me. Light and Good actually exist. So, removing yourself from me will plunge you into darkness. Declaring independence will result in evil because apart from me, you can only draw upon yourself. That is death because you have separated yourself from me: Life. (136)

How often have Christians been faced with the question, “Did God create evil?” Here Young gives an excellent answer that evil is not created is the result of an absence of God just like darkness isn’t something created but the absence of light.

A final thought from the garden as Mack turns the conversation directly to the pain of Missy’s death.

“But,” Mack could feel his control getting away as he drove his shovel in hard, “didn’t Missy have a right to be protected?”

“No, Mack. A child is protected because she is loved, not because she has a right to be protected.”

That stopped him. Somehow, what Sarayu had just been saying seemed to turn the whole world upside down, and he was struggling to find some footing. Surely there were some rights that he could legitimately hold on to.

“But what about...”

“Rights are where survivors go, so that they won’t have to work out relationships,” she cut in.

“But, if I gave up...”

“Then you would begin to know the wonder and adventure of living in me,” she interrupted him again.

Mack was getting frustrated. He spoke louder, “But, don’t I have the right to...”

“To complete a sentence without being interrupted? No, you don’t. Not in reality. But as long as you think you do, you will surely get ticked off when someone cuts you off, even if it is God.” (137)

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To what rights are you holding on that hinder God's work in your life? Do you feel entitled by a "right" to money, friends, protection, comfort, or even life?

Chapter Ten: Wade in the Water

Talking Points:

In the beginning of chapter ten, The Shack's Jesus gives Mack an opportunity to step out in faith, literally. As Mack hesitates at the choice, the Shack's Jesus asks him what he is afraid of. Mack admits his fear of looking like an idiot. He continues by describing what he imagines only to be interrupted by the Shack's Jesus.

"Mack, do you realize that your imagination of the future, which is almost always dictated by fear of some kind, rarely, if ever, pictures me there with you?" (142)

This brief discussion raises some deep questions. How would it look if we faced our difficulties really imagining that Christ was right there beside us?

The Shack's Jesus says,

"Have you noticed that even though you call me Lord and King, I have never really acted in that capacity with you? I've never taken control of your choices or forced you to do anything, even when what you were about to do was destructive or hurtful to yourself and others." (145)

What is the definition of "king" as used by Young? Is this a good definition? How does this view of Christ fit with John 13:13 and John 18:37? What is Christ's first instruction after claiming to be Lord (See John 13:14)? How does this fit with the Shack's Jesus?

In talking about the hindrances as a result of the fall, The Shack's Jesus explains:

"The woman's desire—and the word is actually 'her turning.' So the woman's turning was not to the works of her hands but to the man, and his response was to rule 'over' her, to take power over her, to become the ruler."(147)

The idea that Genesis two presents the woman as simply "looking towards" her husband in a misguided attempt for fulfillment instead of Christ is not supported by scholarship. In Genesis four, the same word is used when God warns Cain that, "...sin is crouching at the door; and its *desire* is for you, but you must master it." It hardly seems reasonable to think that God was telling Cain that sin was turning towards him in a misguided attempt for fulfillment. Instead, there seems to be the idea of consuming with evil intent.

Is the author, supporting a feminist viewpoint? A few paragraphs later, we read:

"'I've always wondered why men have been in charge,' Mack pondered. 'Males seem to be the cause of so much of the pain in the world. They account for most of the crime and many of those are perpetrated against women and,' he paused, 'children.'

'Women,' Jesus continued as he picked up a stone and skipped it, 'turned from us to another relationship, while men turn to themselves and the ground. The world, in many ways, would be a much calmer and gentler place if women ruled. There would have been far fewer children sacrificed to the gods of greed and power.'"(149)

What does this statement say about the problem in the world today? Is the problem men who abuse power or sin which leads to the abuse of power regardless of gender? Are women immune or less immune to abusing power when they have it?

A few pages later, Mack asks this question of the Shack's Jesus:

"You mean," Mack interjected a little sarcastically, "that I can't just ask, 'What Would Jesus Do'?"

Jesus chuckled. "Good intentions, bad idea. Let me know how it works for you, if that's the way you choose to go." He paused and grew sober. "Seriously,

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my life was not meant to be an example to copy. Being my follower is not trying to 'be like Jesus,' it means for your independence to be killed." (149)

In I Corinthians 11:1 the Apostle Paul exhorts us to “be imitators of me as I imitate Christ.” If the apostle Paul said he seeks to imitate Christ (i.e. “be like Jesus”), why would the author seem to poke fun at the idea of someone wanting to be like Jesus? We are told to “be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1). Paul commends the Thessalonian believers for imitating the Apostles, and says they have become an example for others (1 Thes. 1:6). The writer of Hebrews admonishes us not to be sluggish, but to imitate those who had faith and patience. He says they “became imitators of us and of the Lord.” In fact, Christ Himself charged the disciples to follow His example (John 13:15). That sounds a lot like “being like Jesus.” Our culture embraces the idea that freedom means following no one but ourselves. How can that hinder our Christian walk?

Chapter Eleven: Here Come Da Judge

Talking Points:

This chapter contains one of the great insights in the whole book. On page 163 Mack is in the midst of an intense conversation with personified Wisdom named Sophia. Sophia forces Mack to face some of his presumptions about God’s judgment. At this point in the discussion Sophia forces Mack to choose two of his children to be allowed into heaven while the other three will be condemned to hell. Mack is in total desperation. He breaks down and begs to be sent to hell instead of his children. Sophia smiles at Mack

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lovingly stating that he has judged well because now he is thinking like the Shack's Jesus.

Does this encounter make you think differently about God and why people go to hell? Do you see God as an angry tyrant, flippantly damning people to hell?

On the next page Sophia discusses Papa's choice of the cross.

"He chose the way of the cross where mercy triumphs over justice because of love. Would you instead prefer he'd chosen justice for everyone? Do you want justice, 'Dear Judge'?" and she smiled as she said it.

"No, I don't," he said as he lowered his head. "Not for me, and not for my children." (165)

This quote makes it sound like justice is a bad thing. Sophia describes the cross as the place "mercy triumph over justice." Does this mean that God set aside justice in light of the cross? Read Micah 6:8. According to this word from Scripture, are justice and mercy contradictory as Sophia presents them? We read there that God wants us to demonstrate both; is God asking the impossible of us to taunt us? Would love do that? Do we really want a God who denies justice?

As Mack leaves, Sophia states:

"Mackenzie, judgment is not about destruction, but about setting things right." (169)

Does this view of judgment surprise you? The most quoted verse in culture today is "Do not judge." Why is judgment perceived so negatively? Is "setting things right" always a pleasant experience?

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Chapter Twelve: In the Belly of the Beasts

Talking Points:

Mack and the Shack's Jesus begin the walk back across the lake to the shack. Mack forges ahead into the water, but he seems to be sinking in. Quizzically he turns to the Shack's Jesus who comes to join him stating:

"This always works better when we do it together, don't you think?" (174)

What lesson is implied here? How do we know when we are moving with Christ instead of blindly assuming He will follow? Remember, Christ said, "Follow Me" (Matt. 4:19).

On page 181 the Shack's Jesus says:

"Remember, the people who know me are the ones who are free to live and love without any agenda."

Define "agenda." Did Jesus have one? Are we truly to live "without any agenda?" Read John 15 with this in mind. Does it sound like there is purpose in Jesus' words? Read Matt. 28:18-20 in light of the "no agenda for people who know Jesus" viewpoint.

As the Shack's Jesus describes what it means to know him, Mack asks:

"Is that what it means to be a Christian?" It sounded kind of stupid as Mack said it, but it was how he was trying to sum everything up in his mind. "Who said anything about being a Christian? I'm not a Christian." The idea struck Mack as odd and unexpected and he couldn't keep himself from grinning. "No, I suppose you aren't."

They arrived at the door of the workshop. Again Jesus stopped. "Those who love me come from every system that exists. They were Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans and many who don't vote or are not part of any Sunday morning or religious institutions. I have followers who were murderers and many who were self-righteous. Some are

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bankers and bookies, Americans and Iraqis, Jews and Palestinians. I have no desire to make them Christian, but I do want to join them in their transformation into sons and daughters of my Papa, into my brothers and sisters, into my Beloved."

"Does that mean," asked Mack, "that all roads will lead to you?"

"Not at all," smiled Jesus as he reached for the door handle to the shop.

"Most roads don't lead anywhere. What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you." (182)

Do you agree with this definition of a Christian: Someone who trusts Christ to forgive his or her sins and then follows Him? If you agree with this, then of course Jesus is not a Christian. He's God. Why does Young point out that Jesus is not a Christian? What message is he sending? Why does the author seem critical of the idea of being a Christian or being like Jesus?

Does it bother you that some followers of Christ were Muslims, Palestinians, or murderers? What were you before Christ redeemed you? Not all roads lead to Christ, but He will travel any road to find you. How does that make you feel?

Chapter Thirteen: A Meeting of Hearts

Talking Points:

Mack sits on the porch with Papa and honestly admits:

"But I always liked Jesus better than you. He seemed so gracious and you seemed so..."

"Mean? Sad, isn't it? He came to show people who I am and most folks only believe it about him. They play us off like good cop/bad cop most of the time, especially the religious folk. When they want people to do what they think is right, they need a stern God. When they need forgiveness, they run to Jesus." (186)

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Do you feel this way about God, more drawn to a loving, gentle Christ and repulsed by a wrathful, just Father? Is this a proper view of the Trinity? John 3:16 says *God* loved us so much He sacrificed His only son in our place. Why do we only see the Sons sacrifice? Why do we so easily envision just a soft Jesus and forget that He beat the merchants out of the temple with a hand-made whip (Mark 11:15-17)?

Mack's conversation with Papa begins making him feel guilty and he says so. Papa responds, "*Let me know how that works out for you. Seriously, Mackenzie, it's not about feeling guilty. Guilt'll never help you find freedom in me.*"(187)

Do you think this is true? What does scripture say? While certainly God would prefer a guilt-free relationship with us, doesn't guilt serve a purpose? In Hosea 5:15 God is speaking and he says, "I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me." According to this verse, what is God's main purpose for guilt?

On page 191 Papa says, "*Mackenzie, my purposes are not for my comfort, or yours. My purposes are always and only an expression of love. I purpose to work life out of death, to bring freedom out of brokenness and turn darkness into light.*"(191)

What does Isaiah 48:9, 11 say about God's purposes? Does this sound selfish to you? Whose glory should God be concerned about? Ephesians 1:6 describes God's purposes. It says, "to the praise of the glory of His grace." What does that mean?

Chapter Fourteen: Verbs and Other Freedoms

Talking Points:

Mack calls out after Sarayu on page 199, “*So please, help my live in truth.*” When was the last time you prayed like that to God? Do you need to ask Him to help you live in truth, or love, or faith? What are you waiting for?

Mack is struggling with why God loves him since he has nothing to offer the completely self-sufficient Trinity. The Shack’s Jesus responds by saying,

“If you think about it, Mack, it should be very freeing to know that you can offer us nothing, at least not anything that can add or take away from who we are...That should alleviate any pressure to perform.”(201)

What do you have to offer the Trinity? Do you serve God to repay Him for your salvation? If so, that is a debt you can never pay, and trying only cheapens the gift.

In a conversation with Sarayu Mack hears her say, “*That is why you won’t find the word responsibility in the Scriptures*” (205). The word responsibility does appear in Scripture (Num. 4:16, I Chron. 9:31, Ezra 10:4 [NAB]; Matt. 27:4, Acts 6:4 [NIV]). Why do you think Young so blatantly disregards truth? What point is he trying to make here? Do you believe him?

Chapter Fifteen: A Festival of Friends

Talking Points:

Page 215 tells the emotional story of Mack's reconciliation with his father. This reconciliation provides peace and growth for Mack in his walk with God. What is the importance of reconciliation? Scripture tells us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Conflict debilitates our ministry and relationship, what do you need to do to fulfill your responsibility to be at peace with others in your family, at school, at GVBC? Do it.

Chapter Sixteen: A Morning of Sorrows

Talking Points:

As Mack and Papa hike out into the woods this conversation occurs:

"Mack, for you to forgive this man is for you to release him to me and allow me to redeem him."

"Redeem him?" Again Mack felt the fire of anger and hurt. "I don't want you to redeem him! I want you to hurt him, to punish him, to put him in hell..." His voice trailed off. (224)

We are good at ranking our sins so that we aren't as desperately in need of Christ's atonement as the next guy. But Scripture makes it clear that there is no scale of redemption, we are all guilty of breaking the entire law! (Jas. 2:10). Yet sometimes we forget how much we have been forgiven, and we become jealous when God chooses to forgive others (like the story of Jonah). Christ commands us to pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:27-28). After all, isn't the best option for that person to come to

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Christ just like you did? Is hard to imagine God forgiving someone like Bin Laden, the Columbine shooters, or your next door neighbor? Who do you need God's help to forgive?

Chapter Seventeen: Choices of the Heart

Talking Points:

Chapter 17 begins with this quote from Bob Dylan:

Jesus tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Bob, why are you resisting me?" I said, "I'm not resisting you!" He said, "You gonna follow me?" I said, "I've never thought about that before!" He said, "When you're not following me, you're resisting me." (231)

Jesus' call to everyone is "follow me." (Luke 5:27) What are you doing with that call?

As the time at the Shack draws to a close, Papa gives Mack the option to stay, or return back to his home. Mack carefully considers and decides to return,

Then I'll go back. I don't think that anyone will ever believe my story, but if I go back I know that I can make some difference, no matter how little that difference might be. (235)

Mack's choice to return follows the pattern shown by Christ on earth. He called people to be with Him and learn from Him. But after a time He sent them out to teach. (Mark 3:14 & John 20:21) Have you allowed Christ to send you?

Chapter Eighteen: Outbound Ripples

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Talking Points:

Chapter 18 begins with this quote from Oswald Chambers:

Faith never knows where it is being led, but it knows and loves the One who is leading.

Sometimes we become so concerned with finding clarity in our lives we miss the wonderful blessings of faith. What choices are before you that will give you an opportunity to exercise faith?