

Lenten Study 2011 "The Shack" by Wm. Paul Young.

Session 1

Forward:

1. What was Mack's image of God as a child?
2. How has his childhood image of God as a child affected Mack's faith as an adult?
3. What was your image of God as a child?
4. How has your childhood image of God affected your faith as an adult?

Chapter 1: A Confluence of Paths:

1. Mack gets a note in the mailbox which reads;
"Mackenzie, it's been a while. I've missed you. I'll be at the shack next weekend if you
Want to get together. – Papa" (p.18)
Mack's immediate reaction is nausea because of the mention of the shack. He first thinks that
the note is a cruel joke and finally comes to the conclusion that it is from God.
How would you react?
2. Nan calls God "Papa" which describes her intimate friendship with God. After praying and
praying about their daughter Kate she feels like God is not listening. (p. 23) Mack reassures her
that God knows what he is doing and that everything will turn out in the end. She finds comfort
in this, he does not.
How would you respond to Nan? What would you say to Mack?

Chapter 2: The Gathering Dark

1. What is the significance of the native princess at Multnomah falls?
2. How does it fit into the story as a whole?
3. The author says that the story has "All the elements of a true redemption story, not unlike the
story of Jesus". Do you agree? Why or why not?

Chapter 3: The Tipping Point.

1. In his conversation with Sarah and Jesse, Mack describes Nan's work and talks of her
relationship with God. He suggests that Nan is comfortable calling God 'Papa' because her own
father is so wonderful. Mack cannot relate to God as 'Papa' because his father was mean, drunk
and abusive.
Are there images in your experience of family, community and church relationships which you
have found useful in relating to God? Or images you have found unhelpful?

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Session 2

Chapter 4 : The Great Sadness

1. After Missy goes missing, Mack bargains with God. “As he walked between tents and trailers, he was praying and promising. He knew in his heart that promising things to God was rather dumb and irrational, but couldn’t help it. He was desperate to get Missy back, and surely God knew where she was.”
Has there been a time in your life when you bargained with God? Did it help?
2. Did God really stop talking with people? Did we stop listening? Did our intellectual advancements get in the way? (p. 67-68)

Chapter 5: Guess who’s Coming to Dinner

1. Mack has a love/hate relationship with God. He seems to desperately want to believe but his doubts and experiences get in his way. What do you think ? Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Have you ever experienced doubt or circumstances in life that caused you to have this same sort of love /hate relationship with God?
2. Mack acts out his anger over Missy’s disappearance and murder by trashing the shack.
Who is he angry at and why?
3. In the shack the Trinity appears as a big black woman, a stocky middle eastern man and an Asian woman. These images have been some of the most controversial parts of this book, what do you think?

Chapter 6: A Piece of Pie

1. What does the God character mean when she says to Mack “ For me to appear as a woman and to suggest that you call me Papa is to sharply mix metaphors to help you keep from falling so easily back into your religious conditioning.” What do you think this means? Do you think this should apply to us as well?
2. Mack is confused somewhat when he asks the three which one of you is God and all three say I am. What do you think?

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Chapter 7 : God on the Dock

1. Jesus drops a bowl of batter/sauce which splashes all over Papa's skirt and feet. Jesus gets a basin of water to clean Papa's feet. Mack thinks to himself: "So this was God in relationship? It was beautiful and so appealing. He knew it didn't matter whose fault it was – the mess from a bowl that had been broken, that a planned dish would not be shared. Obviously what was truly important here was the love they had for one another and the fullness is brought them. He shook his head. How different it was from the way he sometimes treated the ones he loved. "

What do you think of the author's representation of the relationship between the three persons of the trinity?

What do you think?

2. Both Sarayu and Papa (p.99) talk with Mack about limitation. God limits Godself to facilitate their relationship with Mack. Do we as humans do this kind of limiting of ourselves to foster healthy relationships? Should we do this?
3. Jesus and Mack lay on the dock and wonder at the night sky and stars. Mack says it was too holy. Have you ever had an experience of this type of holy Moment? Where was it? Were you alone, or with others?

Chapter 8: A Breakfast of Champions.

1. Papa says; "Dreams are something important you know. They can be a way of opening up the window and lettin' the bad out? (p. 120)

What do you think about this statement?

Do you think that our dreams tell us something?

2. Papa says to Mack "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.

The three talk with Mack about the authority within the trinity and say that no one member is the final authority. What do you think? **Chapter 9: A Long time ago in a Garden Far Far Away.**

1. In the conversations in the garden between Sarayu and Mack they discuss good and evil. Evil is described as the absence of good . Sarayu says that "Both evil and darkness can be understood only 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 from will result in evil apart from me, you can draw only upon yourself. That is death because you have separated yourself from me: Life” (p.138)

What do you think of this description of good and evil?

Do this fit with what you have been taught in the church?

2. The garden where Mack and Sarayu work is Mack’s soul.
What do you think of this image for the human soul?

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Chapter 10: Wade In The Water

4. Jesus tells Mack that his imagination gets in the way of trusting God fully. This then leads to fear and in particular a fear of the future. What do you think?
5. P. 146 Jesus talks about the earth and our human responsibility to take care of it. What do you think? Is this accurate? Is this a fair statement?
6. Jesus says, “To force my will on you (he replied) is exactly what love does not do. Genuine relationships are marked by submission even when your choices are not helpful or healthy.” He then goes on to say that, “Submission is not about authority and it is not obedience; it is all about relationships of love and respect. In fact, we are submitted to you in the same way.” P.147 What do you think?

Chapter 11: Here Come Da Judge

1. Mack is able to trust Jesus fully when he walks into the dark room in side the rock face. “in the end he believed that Jesus would not have sent him in here without a good purpose.” P, 154 What has changed for Mack in his time at the shack? Do you feel that you are at a place where you could trust Jesus completely?
2. What is the significance if any, of wisdom being Hispanic?
3. What do you think of the discussion of Judgement that ensues between Mack and Wisdom? Does it ring true to your experience in the world and of God?
4. In their discussion of pain and human freedom wisdom tells Mack “ She (Papa) doesn’t stop a lot of things that cause her pain. Your world is severely broken. You demanded your independence, and now you are angry with the One who loved you enough to give it to you. Nothing is as it

should be, as Papa desires it to be, and as it will be one day. Right now your world is lost in darkness and chaos, and horrible things happen to those she is especially fond of.” P. 166
Further, she states that it was not a part of Papa’s plan for Missy to die saying that she has never needed evil to achieve good.

What do you think? Is it accurate?

Chapter 12: In The Belly of the Beasts

- 1 Jesus and Mack have a detailed discussion about the church. P. 180 - 181 Jesus basically says that the institutional church is not of his making and that the church of his creation is really about relationship. Do you think that this is true or not? Do you think the church as we know it is what Jesus intended for the church?
- 2 Jesus tells Mack that people have come to love him through every system that exists. When Mack asks if every road leads to Jesus he replies by saying that he will go down any road to meet an individual. Do you think this is true? Are all the world religions valid or is Christ the only way to God and salvation?

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Session 5

Chapter 13: A Meeting of Hearts

1. Mack and Papa have a discussion about Missy’s death. Mack asks if Missy had to die in order for him to change. Papa says that she doesn’t work that way. She says to Mack “just because i work incredible good out of unspeakable tragedies doesn’t mean I caused it or that I needed it to accomplish my purposes.” P. 187
This point comes up often. Why do you think the author brings this point up so often?
2. Papa says to Mack “He Came to show people who I am and most folks believe the qualities he portrayed were unique to him. They still play us off like good cop / bad cop most of the time, especially the religious folk.” P. 188
Do you think that this is an accurate representation of the relationship between humans and God and Jesus ? Where does the Holy Spirit fit in?

Chapter 14 : Verbs and Other freedoms

1. Sarayu shows up in the bow of the boat and surprises Mack. A conversation ensues regarding the fact that Sarayu is always with Mack. P. 197 -198
Can you please share a time in your life when you have sensed or known the presence of the Spirit in our life?
2. Sarayu and Mack have a discussion about the laws and rules. She says, "It (the law) grants you the power to judge others and feel superior to them. You believe you are living to a higher standard than those you judge. Enforcing rules, especially in more subtle expressions like responsibility and expectation, is a vain attempt to create certainty out of uncertainty." P. 205
What do you think?
3. Sarayu tells Mack that God is a verb. What do you think?
Does this make any sense to you?

Chapter 15 : A Festival of Friends

1. When Mack's eyes are "opened" he sees coloured lights coming from every living being. Each of the children and adults walking toward him are beings of light. The beings are souls or spirits some even angels. There is then an explanation given that we each have the same light surrounding us and that when we connect with others we love our lights mingle together.
What do you think about this?
2. Mack and his father reunite and reconcile. What steps has Mack taken in his time in the shack to come to this point where he is able to meet his father and finally forgive his father and himself?
3. Jesus walks into the midst of the crowd and speaks with as many of the individuals who come forward as need to speak with him and time stands still. What do you think?

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Chapter 16: A Morning of Sorrows

3. Papa has taken the form of an older man and Mack is told that he will need a father that day.
Do we experience God as one who changes for us based on our needs?
4. Mack tells Papa "I trust you." Mack then realizes that he has come to fully trust in God.
What steps has Mack taken to get to this point?
Could you say the words "I trust you " to God?

5. As they are discussing forgiveness Papa says to Mack “Forgiveness is first for the forgiver, to release you from something that will eat you alive, that will destroy your joy and your ability to love fully and openly.” (p. 227)

Given this understanding of forgiveness then, what does forgiveness mean for ?

Chapter 17: Choices of the Heart.

1. The garden in which they bury Missy’s body is the garden of Mack’s soul. (p. 140) What significance if any, is there to burying Missy in the garden of Mack’s soul?
2. Sarayu uses Mack’s tears to plant flowers and a tree on Missy’s grave. Mack’s tears of grief, joy, and of forgiveness all bring forth new life and provide healing for Mack.

Has there been a time in your life when you have experienced such tears of healing?

Chapter 18: Outbound Ripples

1. Mack is told by Nana that the accident happened on a Friday and not on a Sunday as he thought. This makes Mack question briefly whether or not his experience was real or a dream while he was unconscious.
What do you think?
Does it matter if it was a dream or not?
2. Why does it matter to Mack that Nan believe his story?
3. Overall, what have you learned from the book?
How has it enhanced, deepened, enriched, challenged your faith?
4. What is the significance of the native princess at Multnomah falls?