

THE
SHACK

BY WILLIAM P. YOUNG

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REFLECTIONS ON THE SERMON:
QUESTIONS TO PONDER
AT HOME...

1. One of the reasons Mack is so upset with God is that the world is such a mess, and God doesn't seem to have done enough to fix it. How have you been similarly upset with God?
2. The problem of evil is one of the most difficult questions facing Christians. Some believe every act -- even evil ones -- are God's will. Pastor Jeff & the Shack suggest an alternative. Which perspective resonates with you and why?
3. Pastor Jeff suggests that Jesus' death on the Cross is God's answer to evil and God's plan to redeem the world. Yet the mystery of "how" often remains. How might the Crucifixion be God's answer to not only individuals' salvation but to the redemption of God's creation?

ARGUING WITH GOD:
HONESTY OR HERESY?

BY REV. LAURA E. RAINWATER

"Is it okay to be angry with God? Can we ARGUE with God?" These are questions I encountered while reading *The Shack*. Mack is quite open and frank with God. We know that Mack had a bad relationship with his father. We don't know the particulars, but it seems some of his childhood experiences were traumatic. We also know that Mack's youngest daughter, Missy, was abducted and murdered by a serial killer that preys on little girls. This is a man who has experienced the worst in humankind. Many might agree he has a right to be angry -- but does he have a right to be angry at God?

Mack has many interesting conversations with God, but in Chapter 8 he asks God,

"What about your wrath? It seems to me that if you're going to pretend to be God Almighty, you need to be a lot angrier. . . . Weren't you always running around killing people in the Bible? . . . if you are God, aren't you the One spilling out great bowls of wrath and throwing people into a

burning lake of fire?" Mack could feel his deep anger emerging again, pushing out the questions in front of it, and he was a little chagrined at his own lack of self-control. But he asked anyway, "Honestly, don't you enjoy punishing those who disappoint you?"

Haven't we all wanted to ask God, Why? Whether it's why someone suffers, or why someone seems to be punished by God, or why the God who says, "love one another" hurts or allows others to hurt people so. Each of us can think of a situation in our own lives -- whether something happened to us, to a loved one, or to a friend. Or the news makes us wonder, "Why, God, do you allow airplanes to crash into the ocean? Were you mad at someone on that airplane, and that justified the killing of hundreds of others?"

We do believe that God is holy and just. That righteousness is what God asks of us. But not out of a perverted "I'm holy and you're not" way. God the Father, Papa, responds to Mack's anger.

"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." Mack responds with, "I don't understand." Papa continues. "You're right. You don't."

When we beg God for answers, we presume that we are able to understand God's mysterious being. But we aren't designed to do so, though we try. Maybe the underlying question is, can we try? Can we approach God with all our questions, doubts, and even anger?

All we need to do is look to scripture for a clue. Two books of wisdom call out to us. First, the Psalms. How many times does the psalmist, filled with emotion, cry out to God? Look particularly at some of the verses in Psalm 88.

*You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
But I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. O Lord, why do you hide your face from me?
Your wrath has swept over me; your dread assaults destroy me.*

*You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;
my companions are in darkness.*

Remember, these scriptures are God's revelation to us. This Psalm ends abruptly. In other Psalms, the writer may call out, as in Psalm 22, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" but proclaim in verse 22, "I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." Anger and pain may begin the conversation, but trust and praise end it. As the Psalms teach us, expressing our emotions with God continues the relationship, rather than cutting it off. I also believe that God is big enough to receive all we feel – whether anger, fear, trust or love.

But it's what we do with what we feel and our relationship with God Almighty that is most important. Job is the ultimate questioner. Job's life is, perhaps, even more tragic than Mack's. Job trusts God, even in his lack of understanding and struggling faith. He finally gives up trying to understand why and confronts God. "I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me" (23:4-5). God responds, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. (38:4) Shall a fault finder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond." (40:2). God's response reminds us that we can dare to ask Why. The asking doesn't anger God. The presumption of being equal to or more righteous than God does.

By the end of The Shack, Mack experiences God in such a way that his questions no longer obsess him. Instead, his relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is healed so that Mack can live into God's love for all the world. Many have said, "When I get to heaven, I can't WAIT to ask God about this, that, etc." My belief is that when our earthly life is over, the questions won't last, but the relationship we have with the God of love will continue, now and forever. Amen.