

## Finding God in the Shack

Begins June 14.

Big Idea: What would it be like to lose your youngest child to a serial killer? And then to have God invite you out for a conversation at the very shack where the terrible deed took place? And then imagine that the door to that shack of horrors opened . . . and before you knew it you had been swept up in the motherly embrace of a large African American woman? This most unlikely of stories, as told in William Young's **The Shack**, has become a runaway bestseller and it is easy to see why. The book brings us on a redemptive journey through the shacks' of deepest pain and suffering in our lives, guided by the triune God of Christian faith. But even as lives have been transformed through this book, other readers have sternly denounced it as a hodgepodge of serious theological error, even heresy. With one pastor urging his congregation to read it and another forbidding his congregation to, many Christians have simply been left confused.

Recommended reading:

*The Shack*, William Young

*Finding God in the Shack*, Randal Rauser

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June 14 – Meeting God in *The Shack*

Pastor Mike

Big Idea: He tried to kill Thomas and his two younger siblings. But Thomas spoiled the plan. In response, the man put Thomas' head in a vice and beat him with a hammer. How can a loving God permit such evil? It seems that God is either not all-powerful or not all-loving. But are those our only options? Is there anything we can learn about God from the death of Jesus? Is it possible that God meets us precisely in the midst of our suffering? William Young, in **The Shack**, quotes Jacques Ellul: "No matter what God's power may be, the first aspect of God is never that of absolute Master, the Almighty. It is that of the God who puts himself in our human level and limits himself." (from *Anarchy and Christianity*)

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June 21 – Three for the Price of One

Pastor Mike

Big Idea: Who is God? What is God like? Is there more than one God? Does the picture of God portrayed in William Young's **The Shack** square with Christian Scripture? Or is it filled with "heresy" [defined as *an opinion or doctrine contrary to the church's established essential truth*]? Someone has rightly said "If you try to explain the Trinity, you will lose your mind. But if you deny it, you will lose your soul." We will briefly explore this mystery of the One God who has revealed himself as Three Persons. In the next four weeks, we will dig a little deeper.

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June 28 – Faith & Imagination: Papa

Pastor Corey

Big Idea: When you think of "GOD," what image comes to mind? Why? For those raised in the Christian tradition, an image of God the Father as anything other than male is difficult. That may only serve to prove the point Marilynne Robinson makes in *The Death of Adam*: "We routinely disqualify testimony that would plead for extenuation. That is, we are so persuaded of the rightness of our judgment as to invalidate evidence that does not confirm us in it. Nothing that deserves to be called truth could ever be arrived at by such means." Can **God the Father** be portrayed as a large African-American woman named Papa as William Young does in **The Shack**? Could it be that God "accommodates" our human limitations by appearing to us in a form we can comprehend and with whom we can relate?

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July 5 – Faith & Imagination: Jesus in Jeans

Pastor Corey

Big Idea: William Young, in **The Shack**, portrays Jesus as a dark-haired, olive-skinned Jewish laborer wearing jeans and a work shirt. Soft-spoken and filled with compassion, this Jesus is a very

“down to earth” man with whom Mack can identify. This is so, Jesus reminds Mack, because Jesus is God in the flesh (incarnate). Can we reconcile the Jesus of the Scriptures and the Jesus of **The Shack**? Perhaps the faith and imagination of two other men of God can help us: “The Christian response is contained in these two fundamental dogmas: that of the Trinity and that of the Incarnation. In the trinitarian dogma God is one, good, true, and beautiful because he is essentially Love, and Love supposes the one, the other, and their unity.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar) Jesus is the living picture of Love as the one who willingly lay down his life for others. Is this kind of love what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he invited the Philippians to “make me [Paul] truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.... You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.”? (Philippians 2:1-5 NLT)

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July 12 – Faith & Imagination: See-Through Sarayu (Blowing in the Wind)

Pastor Corey

Big Idea: In John 3, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is like the wind... you can't see it but you can see its effects. In William Young's **The Shack**, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as an ethereal Asian woman named Sarayu (Sanskrit for "wind"). Mack describes Jesus as “more real, or tangible.” Then he goes on to say, “It's like I've always known you. But Papa isn't at all what I expected from God, and Sarayu, she's way out there.” That which is tangible is always more “real.” And we can identify with images we have experienced: Father, Mother. But what do we do with the Holy Spirit? Perhaps Oswald Chambers puts our experience with the Holy Spirit in perspective when he says, “Faith never knows where it is being led, but it knows and loves the One who is leading.”

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July 19 – God With Nobody in Charge

Pastor Mike

Big Idea: *Falsehood has an infinity of combinations, but truth has only one mode of being.* ~ Jean Jacques Rousseau

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July 26 – The Great Sadness

Pastor Corey

Big Idea: *Sadness is a wall between two gardens.* ~ Kahlil Gibran

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August 2 – The Great Sadness 2: The Problem of Evil

Pastor Mike

Big Idea: An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others.

~ A.W. Tozer

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Aug 9 - Here Come Da Judge [how we judge God]

Pastor Corey

Big Idea: Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the *laughter of the gods.* – Albert Einstein

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August 16 - Rules & Relationships: What does it mean to be “church”

Pastor Mike

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August 23 - The Limits of Salvation

Pastor Mike

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August 30 - Festival of Friends

Pastor Corey

Big Idea: You can kiss your family and friends good-bye and put miles between you, but at the same time you carry them with you in your heart, your mind, your stomach, because you do not just live in a world but a world lives in you.

~ Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth*

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Sep 6 - Saving Creation

Pastor Corey

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