

QUESTIONS FROM THE SHACK

SESSION ONE: GOD, CAN I TRUST YOU?

KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” --Isaiah 43: 1, 2

THOUGHTS FROM THE SHACK

Fear can be so debilitating. When we are afraid, we create facades of false security as coping mechanisms to hide behind. We begin to disconnect from our true selves and create false identities. We allow others to define us and tell us who we are. And the Father of lies (the enemy of our soul) has a field day. We begin to believe all kinds of things that are not true about ourselves, others and especially God. When we live under the grip of fear, we have difficulty experiencing the peace that comes by trusting God.

It is important to note that Jesus in the scriptures often addressed the fear of his disciples by constantly telling them not to be afraid. The passage from Isaiah 43 also addresses this human tendency to be afraid of God and our hesitancy in really trusting that God has our best interest at heart. Our challenge is to discard our false concepts about God and ourselves and come to that place where we really do trust God completely.

When we first meet Mack at the shack, it is clear that he doesn't trust God. As Mack unleashes his emotions through various questions and accusations, his words may resonate with the angst of your own heart:

“Maybe what happened to Missy is God's judgment for what I did to my own dad.”
(Mack utters these words in chapter 5 illustrating our human attempts to provide reasons for human tragedies.)

“Why did you bring me here...wasn't it enough to kill my baby?”
(Mack's tirade at God upon his arrival at the shack comes out like water from a fire hose once the valve has been opened)

“You abandoned him just like you abandoned me.”
(Mack accuses God of abandoning Jesus on the cross in the same way he felt abandoned by God.)

“Did she have to die so you could change me?”
(Mack wonders since God has brought good out of the tragic death of his daughter that it was all part of a plan to bring him back to God.)

What Mack suspects to be true about God is not in harmony with the witness of the New Testament or the incarnate word of God we know in Jesus Christ. God is the savior, not the condemner. God is the redeemer, not the forsaker. Redemption expresses God's powerful actions and compassionate heart in freeing us from our personal prisons.

Redemption is deliverance from the power of an alien dominion to new found freedom!
Redemption is being delivered from a false claim we believed to be true!
Redemption is being purchased and restored to our original likeness!
Redemption occurs when the redeemer pays the cost of setting the redeemed free!

God wants to redeem us from the big lie and the bigger lie. The big lie is what you have come to believe about yourself that debilitates you and robs you of life. The bigger lie is what you have come to believe about God that calls into question God's character and stands in the way of you placing your full trust in God.

The big lie and the bigger lie can emotionally cripple us and blind us to the abundant life God offers. Lies can create distance from those we love the most. Lies can keep us imprisoned in the darkness of emotional and spiritual death. As papa explains to Mack in chapter 13:

“Lies are a little fortress; inside them you can feel safe and powerful. Through your little fortress of lies you try to run your life and manipulate others. But the fortress needs walls so you build some. These are justifications for your lies. You know, like you are doing this to protect someone you love, to keep them from feeling pain. Whatever works, just so you feel okay about your lies.”

Perhaps one of the biggest lies perpetrated against God is the lie that everything that happens is his will and serves his purposes. Papa's words to Mack in chapter 13 addressing this lie are words we can all take to heart:

“...Just because I work incredible good out of unspeakable tragedies doesn't mean I orchestrate the tragedies. Don't ever assume that my using some things means I caused it or that I need it to accomplish my purposes. That will only lead you to false notions about me. Grace doesn't depend on suffering to exist, but where there is suffering you will find grace in many facets and colors.”

Another great insight that comes from the Shack is found in these words: *Living unloved is like clipping a bird's wings and removing its ability to fly.* This isn't what God wants for us. God has come to give us wings to soar! God has come to redeem our soul!

QUESTIONS FROM THE SHACK

- *When we first meet Mack, what are his feelings toward God?
- *How would you describe the relationships that formed Mack in his family of origin?
- *Review Mack's questions and accusations he levels against God listed above. Why does Mack feel as he does about God? Which question or accusation of Mack's resonates the most with the angst of your own heart?
- *How are Mack's own painful experiences with his father shaping his life and influencing his grief and relationship to God?
- *How does God's appearance as an African American woman help Mack to begin the process of relating to God the Father?
- *The message this week discusses our "Father wounds." Do you think a person's view of her/his own father influences her/his view of God? If you believe it does, how has this been true of your own life?
- *Think about the current relationships that make up your life. What is authentic and healthy about them? What is creating disharmony and disconnection?
- *How would you describe your own image of God? What are the most significant life events that have shaped what you believe about God?
- *How does Mack's eventual acceptance of papa's goodness transform his own life?
- *Do you believe that God is fundamentally good? Do you trust God completely?

Read 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21 as a group.

How does the theology of the shack parallel the teaching of this passage of scripture? Does it in any way differ?

Have you acted on the compelling appeal: Be reconciled to God?

What has become new in you as a result of Christ's redemptive work?

What are the signs that you are a new creation through your relationship with Christ?

How are you doing as an ambassador in helping others to reconcile with God?

How is God continuing to answer YES! to the question: "God, Can I Trust You?"