

# QUESTIONS FROM THE SHACK

## SESSION TWO: GOD, ARE YOU REALLY IN CHARGE?

### *THOUGHTS FROM THE SHACK*

The condition of the world has led many to believe that God isn't in charge or if God is, then God cannot be both all powerful and all loving. Here's a question that is often raised by people who reject faith:

“How can a loving God allow so much suffering in the world?”

If God has got the whole world in his hands, it doesn't appear he's doing that great job of it. When our personal world gets messy, the angst we feel only worsens.

Before we reject the idea of a loving God in the light of the world's suffering, consider the biblical view of how we got in such a mess.

God created everything good out of his overflowing love. God's favorite part of creation were human beings ... made in the very image of God!

God gave humans freedom to make choices as love does not coerce while warning us not to abuse our freedoms.

We humans disobeyed God and decided to go against God's will. God respected our freedom painfully knowing it would lead to horrific consequences.

Our independence cursed nature—human nature and creation itself and has produced an endless cycle of evil actions and reactions.

We live with broken relationships, dominated by power moves.

We appear helpless to do anything to restore our relationship with God and others.

Romans 8:28 does not tell us that God works all things but that God works in all things!

God is not the author of all things but God is the master of all things in a life that is yielded to him! God doesn't promise us all that happens to us will be good but God does promise to bring good out of the worst possible circumstances.

Mack's story of living with one of the most horrific events that could happen to anyone—the abduction and murder of his child is beyond comprehension. When we face such traumatic events, the words: “Everything happens for a reason” are not only trite; they are cruel!

What a horrific thing to put on him. What a horrific thing to put on the God of the universe! Everything happens for a reason?

It is more in line with the scriptures to conclude: Some inexplicable evil things happen as a result of a world that is in rebellion against God. When this rebellion goes unchecked in human hearts ... there is no limit to what evil practices can be done by human beings!”

A result of the indescribable suffering of his daughter's murder is Mack's formulation of misperceptions about God. It is through several episodes of conversations with each member of the Triune God that Mack's misperceptions are corrected.

It is to these accusations that papa (the Father) responds 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."

Papa's words to Mack parallel very closely Jesus' own words in John 3:16, 17.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Jesus takes it—the condemnation of the world on himself ... experiences firsthand the punishment of sin—suffers from the blows and refuses to retaliate. Instead, he forgives and through his death turns a cruel act into a transforming demonstration of love.

In a conversation with Jesus, Mack asks why Jesus just can't take the world back and fix things. Jesus explains:

"Because we gave it to 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 or others ... To force my will on you is exactly what love does not do. Genuine relationships are marked by submission even when your choices are not helpful or healthy." --Jesus to Mack, chapter 10

Bottom line: We can't put the state of the world on God! We have to take responsibility for it ourselves. Yet, God doesn't simply remove himself from the world. He is constantly seeking to work his will through us and sometimes in spite of us.

We come to understand that we are either a part of the problem or part of the solution. God calls us to confront the consequences of our own willful independence. As Sarayu, the Holy Spirit explains to Mack in chapter nine:

"Having chosen the ravaged path of independence, you don't even comprehend that you are dragging the entire Creation along with you...So very sad, but it won't be this way forever...there are billions of you each determining what is good and what is evil. So when your good and evil clashes with your neighbor's fights and arguments ensue and even wars break out."

Sarayu words: "It won't be this way forever" is the hope which hopefully will change the way we live personally. Some good questions for us to ask ourselves are:

Are we a drag on the universe or are we part of the solution?  
Are we open to God curing what ails us?  
How deep do we want to go with God?

We cannot single-handedly change the world. Yet, our personal world can change from within. Once the change begins in us, we ache for others to experience who we have come to know!

## ***QUESTIONS FROM THE SHACK***

Discuss the question: How can a loving God allow so much suffering in the world? Imagine God turning the question back to us: How can you allow such suffering in the world?

Review Jesus' explanation to Mack as to why God doesn't take the world back and fix it. In what ways do you agree or disagree with Jesus' response to Mack: Because we gave it to 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 or others. How can we move from putting the state of the world all on God and assume more responsibility for our actions?

Sarayu says to Mack about the human race: Having chosen the ravaged path of independence, you don't even comprehend that you are dragging the entire Creation along with you. Discuss ways we are a drag on creation and ways we are part of the solution. Is there one thing you are going to do to tip the scales in a more positive direction?

Talk about papa's words: "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." How do these words parallel Jesus' words in John 3:16,17? Discuss how God wants to move us from condemnation to reconciliation.

Consider the words we often hear said in response to difficult situations: Everything happens for a reason. Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why or why not? How can the statement in the face of tragedies come off trite or even cruel?

## ***QUESTIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES***

Read Romans 8:18-28 as a group and discuss the following questions:

In what ways does God remain in charge of creation? In what ways has God relinquished control according to this passage?

Do you find comfort or discomfort with the scriptural teaching that creation is subjected to futility?

In what ways do you see the world groaning or your own inner spirit groaning for the release from our current bondage?

Have you ever thought about the Spirit of God which resides in you praying to the transcendent God above about the deep matters of your heart?

How could this concept and experience transform the way you pray?

Talk about the difference between God working in all things and God doing all things. (See Romans 8.28)

There is a deep sadness for which there are not answers. Discuss Bob's story about his own father's struggle in accepting the death of his first born child. How did the words of well meaning Christians create a barrier to Bob's dad coming to faith? How did their pastor years later lead him to a different perspective.

What can we learn from this story? What can we learn from papa, Jesus, and Sarayu's response to the pain in Mack's life?