

# QUESTIONS FROM THE SHACK

## SESSION THREE: GOD, HOW CAN I KNOW YOU?

### KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the Heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” --Mark 1:9-11

### THOUGHTS FROM THE SHACK

Have you ever watched a family where loving kindness, tender respect and amazing affirmation were so obvious you wanted to join it? This is the picture we see so prevalent in the family of God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Young’s representation in *The Shack* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit being equal is NOT a modern day innovation. It is inherent in historic Christianity.

“In this Trinity there is an absolute equality. In divinity the Father is not greater than the Son; nor are the Father and the Son together greater than the Holy Spirit; nor is any single Person of the three anything less than the Trinity itself.”

--Augustine, Fourth Century

Take a look at the earliest comprehensive creed of the Christian faith—the Nicene Creed, 325 A.D. (You may Google it or read it on page 880 in the United Methodist hymnal.) It is evident that the leaders of the early persecuted Christian movement declared the Christian faith in three main categories:

God the Father ... God the Son ... God the Holy Spirit

There are two scenes from chapter seven in *The Shack* which demonstrate the affection and camaraderie of the Trinity.

In one scene Jesus dropped a large bowl of batter or sauce on the floor. In many families, there could be outbursts of anger in such scenes but not in this family. Instead there is laughter and playfulness.

Another scene finds the Trinity having devotions with each other. In the scene from *The Shack*, Jesus reached across the table and takes Papa’s hands in his ... and Jesus praises papa for his actions and patience that day.

When Mack shakes his head after witnessing how Papa, Jesus and Sarayu love on each other, he acknowledges how different this is from the way he treats his family. He is recognizing that he is indeed broken and only the kind of love that he is witnessing from the Trinity can heal him!

What Mack is experiencing is:

Conviction!

Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit!

“... I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me...”

--John 16:7-9

In a non-believing heart, the spirit works as a truth telling judge.

As we become believers, the advocate's role changes to a truth telling teacher. Jesus expands more upon the work of the Holy Spirit:

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” --John 16:13-14

It is only through humility that we are able to enter the family of God!

“Humility is not when you think less of yourself or more of yourself. It's when you are free not to think about yourself at all!” --C.S. Lewis

Imagine living in a family that feasted on forgiveness, love, and affirmation. We can not only imagine it but experience it!

Here's how!

“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”

--Revelation 3:20

## QUESTIONS FROM THE SHACK

Take a moment to recite the Nicene Creed together (p. 880 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.) Talk about the affirmations made in this fourth century creed about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. How do these descriptions of God parallel the image presented of all three persons of the Trinity in the Shack? In what ways are the creed's affirmations different from the book?

Have you ever felt like God the Father is the bad cop and Jesus is the good cop in how you view God? Jesus tells us in the scriptures that "When you have seen me, you have seen the Father." (John 14: 9) Does seeing the Father through Jesus change your image of God? If so, how does it? How do you think the appearance of papa as an African American Woman helps Mack correct his image of the Father?

When Papa, Jesus and Sarayu enter into a time of devotions, Mack is amazed as Jesus praises papa and tells papa that he loves being her Son. Is your devotional time with God something you have to do or something you want to do? Is it more about fulfilling a religious duty or is it about deepening your relationship with God?

Papa refers to Mack and many others he talks about as "one of her favorites." Do you ever feel like you are one of God's favorites? There are passages of scripture which says God sings over us...that we are the apple of God's eye. Talk about how viewing ourselves as being the object of God's affection changes the way we relate to God.

Sarayu talks to Mack about the consequences of his independence: "That's why part of you prefers not to see me. And you don't need me at all to create your lists of good and evil. But you do need me if you have any desire to stop such an insane lust for independence." (See chapter 9) Are you personally willing to give up your right to decide what is good and evil on your terms? Have you learned to trust the Spirit's guidance and give up your rights to live the way you want?

## QUESTIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Read John 16: 1-15

Why does Jesus say that “It is to your advantage that I go away...?”

Discuss the work of the Spirit being like that of a “truth telling judge” who convicts us about sin, righteousness and judgment. (The word for sin in the original language is Amartia—which means literally missing the mark as in missing the bull’s eye.) How is failing to believe in and become a Christ follower at the heart of living life that misses the mark?

The ways we are missing the mark is clearly identified when the Spirit convicts us of sin. Is there something you currently feel convicted of that you need to confess to a trusted friend, pastor or other Christian leader? Does anyone wish to name a time when you were set free from judgment as a result of confession (coming clean) about a wrong?

Discuss the blessing of “godly sorrow” that leads us to repentance (life change).

Talk about the Spirit’s work as a truth telling teacher. Name a specific time when the Spirit gave you guidance and discernment that was invaluable to you. How is the Spirit’s activity increasing in your life? How does the Spirit make your relationship with the Father and Jesus personal and intimate?

It is through humility that we enter the Family of God. Yet, we often hear misunderstandings about what humility means. According to C. S. Lewis, humility doesn’t mean we think less of ourselves or more of ourselves. It is being able not to think of ourselves at all! Has this become your experience?

What does it mean to you to be a part of God’s family?