

## **SESSION FIVE: GOD, HOW DOES FORGIVING MAKE THINGS RIGHT?**

### KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

--Luke 23:34

### THOUGHTS FROM THE SHACK

“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

In *The Shack*, the world that lives inside of Mack is in a real mess. There are a lot of people Mack needs to forgive. Mack is holding unforgiveness against his alcoholic father and the murderer of his daughter. Mack also needs to forgive himself. And there's another person Mack needs to forgive.

The grudges Mack is carrying serve as a blockage to the healing love of God.

Let's take note of Jesus' words:

“I tell you therefore: everything you ask for and pray for, believe that you have it already, and it will be yours. And when you stand in prayer, forgive whatever you have against anybody, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your failings too.” --Mark 11:24, 25

Francis MacNutt comments on the connection between forgiveness and healing.

“It's as if God's saving, healing, forgiving love cannot flow into us unless we are ready to let it flow out to others. If we deny forgiveness and healing to others, God's love cannot flow into us.” --Francis MacNutt

As we struggle to come to terms in our need to forgive, it is important that we understand what forgiveness is and what it is not:

Forgiveness is not excusing or justifying the action but ...

Forgiveness is not forgetting the act but ...

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation

Forgiveness not only benefits the forgiven but ...

Forgiveness is God's way of restoring us to ...

There is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is dependent upon the actions of one. Reconciliation is dependent upon the response of more than one.

An unforgiving spirit toward one or a few feeds an unforgiving spirit to many or all.

One act of forgiveness toward one can lead us to forgiving others. Papa offers this intriguing insight to Mack in chapter 16:

“Forgiving your dad yesterday was a significant part of your being able to know me as Father today.”

God in Jesus Christ extends forgiveness to the world. His words are not simply sentiments ... or kindly thoughts. They come from the heart of an amazingly compassionate forgiving God. They are also the words of authority.

Jesus unleashed the powerful effect of forgiveness on this world. His favorite saying as he healed people from all kinds of sickness, ailment, and brokenness was:

“Your sins are forgiven you!”

God has opened the way through Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation to be realized in our lives.

As papa says to Mack in chapter 13:

“All I am telling you is that reconciliation is a two way street, and I have done my

part, totally, completely, finally. It is not the nature of love to force a relationship but it is the nature of love to open the way.”

## QUESTIONS FROM THE SHACK

Discuss Frederick Buechner’s profound insight that you do not just live in a world but a world lives in you. What was Mack’s inner world like? How was forgiveness the key for Mack to unlock and have his inner world changed?

There’s a lot of people Mack needs to forgive: his father, Missy’s murderer, himself, and God. What is your greatest area of struggle? Is it more difficult for you to forgive others, yourself, or God?

God isn’t responsible for the brokenness in Mack’s life, nor in ours. Yet, why is it important for Mack to forgive God? Is there something you are holding against God that you need to forgo?

Discuss how holding resentments against “one or a few” feeds an unforgiving spirit against “many or all?”

Talk about the distinctions between what forgiveness is and what forgiveness is not. What distinction is most important to you?

Papa tells Mack that forgiving his Father was a significant part of his being able to know God as Father. How has your forgiving someone helped you to forgive the next time and become closer to God?

Discuss the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?

(What is your most important “take away” from The Shack?)

#### QUESTIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Read Luke 23:26-49

Talk about the wide varied reactions and actions to Jesus by people at his crucifixion.

What is the significance of Jesus extending forgiveness to both the one who asked for it (the thief on the cross) and those who did not (those who crucified him)? What does this reveal to us about the nature and heart of God?

Discuss how Jesus extending mercy to all does not remove the necessity of every individual's response in receiving mercy.

Discuss the relationship between our forgiving others and being able to receive forgiveness (see Mark 11:25).

How does John's story (via the video during the message) demonstrate the progressive path of our receiving forgiveness and then extending it to others? What is John's story saying to you?

Pray the Lord's Prayer together. What did you just request your Heavenly Father to do regarding your trespasses?

How is forgiveness changing the world that lives in you?