

**An Examination from a Christian Wordview of *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Author William P. Young)**

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While thought-provoking, *The Shack* has stirred up significant controversy due to its popularity and seemingly overwhelming impact on the lives of individuals who claim that reading *The Shack* has changed their lives – are there things we need to be concerned about in *The Shack*, where can we turn to for answers and the truth, and how can we be discerning taking every thought captive to Christ as we read through this or any other book? Below you will find statements or concepts from *The Shack* with personal commentary below that asks you to think about what you previously read that will hopefully assist you in your examination of *The Shack*, reading as the Bereans listened even to the Apostle Paul in **Acts 17:11** – “for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” As the Bereans examined the message from Paul, you would be wise to examine the message from author William Paul Young found in his best-selling book *The Shack*.

P. 65 – Does God even write notes?

- Here Mack is questioning a note he has received that he believes is from God – signed by Papa, this note tells Mack to meet God at the shack, the place where his daughter was brutally raped and murdered.
  
- The question Mack raises is ironic – does God write notes – to begin with, from the very beginning, God has taken deliberate steps to make Himself known to mankind – from creation that speaks of Him (**Psalm 19**), to His interaction with mankind, to His sending His only Son Jesus to live among us, to His Holy Word, breathed so that we may know that God is Truth.
  - Mack addresses God’s Word referring to it in terms of “God’s voice reduced to paper” – yet Scripture is much more than the voice of the Almighty on paper – **Hebrews 4:12** tells us, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
  - **1 Peter 1:23** tells us that God’s Word is actually an active part of our salvation – “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”
  - **Jeremiah 23:29** goes even further comparing God’s Word to fire: “Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”
  - **1 Thessalonians 2:13** informs us that God’s Word is active and at work: “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

P. 66 – He was sick of God and God’s religion, sick of all the little religious social clubs that didn’t seem to make any real difference or affect any real changes.

- We have to understand a pretty significant difference here – is Mack sick of God or sick of “religion”? This is a delicate balance that all mankind must face – in this fallen world this side of heaven, the church and those who follow Christ will never be the full and accurate depiction of the majesty of God. We are broken vessels and even God’s wonderful creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth (**Romans 8:22**). The fact is that God has chosen to redeem and restore our broken lives by His grace for His glory. The fact that we don’t like what sin has done to God’s perfect and glorious creation shouldn’t keep us from the Creator, but actually help us appreciate all the more that He would provide a way for us, even while we were yet sinners (**Romans 5:8**) and enemies of God, to be a part of His eternal family.

P. 71 – I guess part of me would like to believe that God would care enough about me to send a note.

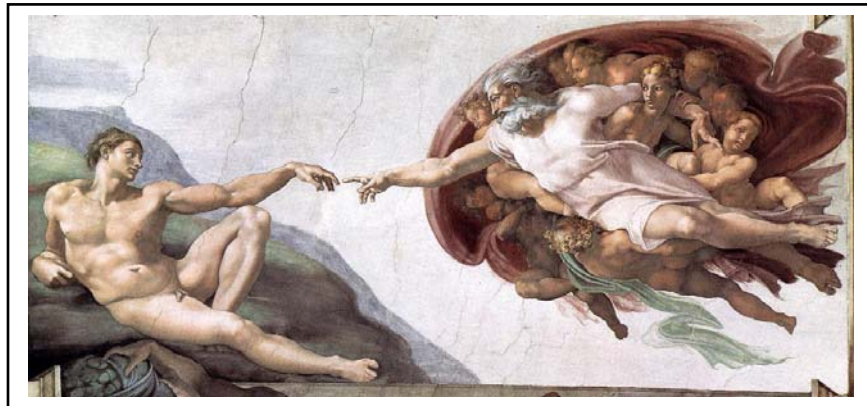
- He did! And more than just a “note” – He sent His only begotten Son...and not just to speak to you or walk with you, but to die for you and restore you to a right relationship with your heavenly Father!
- We can understand Mack’s longing to be contacted by and connected with God – we all have that longing. Augustine wrote, “O God, Thou hast made us for thyself, and ours hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” Blaise Pascal is probably best known for describing this longing as a “God-shaped vacuum” in our hearts. But as a believer in Christ, we must know that only God can fill that longing in our hearts and we must trust Him to do just that. The world will continue to offer inferior substitutes such as wealth, fame, status, beauty, health, and well-being – all fleeting (**Proverbs 31:30**) when compared to the eternal connection with a loving God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

P. 82 – Mack was looking directly into the face of a large beaming African-American woman.

- Here is the first of the more significant controversies of *The Shack* – the author’s depiction of the Trinity in human form.
- First, we must understand that the author goes on to clarify that God is neither male nor female (p. 93), but spirit, which is supported as Jesus described His Father in **John 4:24** saying, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” Therefore, we must ask ourselves some questions:
  - Is it permissible to portray in a work of fiction God as a human being?
    - Several Christians have come out and said that any depiction of God as “human” or in a visible form would be a type of idolatry – a violation of the Second Commandment not to make or worship any graven images. Since God is not human, we must heed this warning and proceed carefully whenever God is reduced to the level of mankind. However, two

significant factors are still looming – the fact that God Himself came to earth as a man and the fact that other depictions of God in a visible form have not caused such incredible backlash and cries of heresy from the Church.

- For example: Michelangelo's famous painting *The Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel (see below) – obviously the character on the left is supposed to be a visible representation of God the Father in the act of creating mankind (Adam). While the picture is not a theological statement of the creation itself, it is merely an artistic representation and is taken as such. Why then has this famous painting not created a stir in Christianity for its visible representation of the invisible God? Might Young be correct in saying that Michelangelo's imagery of God as a white male fits more with our personal concept of what God would look like, therefore we don't have any problem granting Michelangelo artistic license to create this visual image of God where Young's depiction cuts across our sensibilities and therefore we are bothered by the author's attempt to create a verbal image of God. Which leads to the next question...



- Is it permissible to portray in a work of fiction God the Father as a woman?
  - Young would argue, as he does in the book, that there would probably be no controversy if he depicted God as a white male, which obviously conforms to our stereotype of God in the Western Christian tradition – and goes exactly to the point that if Young is able to portray God as a man (which He is not), than why not a woman (which He is not either)!
- What is Young's point in portraying God the Father as a woman?
  - If Young is seeking to sensationalize the image of God by depicting Him as a woman or if he were seeking to be biblically inaccurate, there would be great reason to pause on this particular issue. However, Young goes on later to describe by God the Father is depicted as a large African-American woman – and it relates directly to the abuse of Mack by his

“religious” father. In some sense, the author is portraying God’s desire to connect and commune with mankind – Mack in particular. In a similar fashion, Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:22** that “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” The concept is that Paul was more concerned about establishing a connection than he was about his own personal appearance, well-being, identity, etc. While Scripture tells us in **Hebrews 13:8** that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, the author is probably making the case that since God has not “changed” (He is neither male nor female), if He were to “show Himself” in some physical form, He would be free to use whatever form He so desired and His intent would be to connect with those He loves.

- Is there any significance to God the Father being an African-American woman?
  - Again, it seems as if the author is seeking to shatter any and all imbedded stereotypes of one’s image of God. Just as God is neither male nor female, He is not of any nationality, race, color or creed.
- You may call me Elousia.
  - While Mack does not call God the Father Elousia, preferring instead to call Him Papa, the name Elousia means tenderness in Greek. The author later defines the name (p. 111) as meaning El (God) and ousia (being or that which is truly real).

P. 87 – Since there were three of them, maybe this was a Trinity sort of thing.

- Herein lies much of the great controversy with *The Shack* – the depiction of the Trinity. There are several more references to this Trinitarian relationship and we’ll try to address each one as it arises. Here, in the first depiction of the Trinity, when Mack asks the question, “which one of you is God?” all three of the godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit respond in unison, “I am.” Correctly stated, with an Old Testament reference to the name of God that He gave to Moses – I am Who I am – the author gives credence to the concept of a biblical trinity in this reference.

P. 92 – If you let me, Mack, I’ll be the Papa you never had.

- One of the great appeals of *The Shack* is the depiction of God as loving, tender, kind and gentle. While some who have grown up, as Mack did, with a “religious” father who was abusive and domineering turn away from the God of the Bible, this concept that God is truly loving and tender is supported throughout Scripture. In fact, the statement above is biblical – **Psalms 68:5** describes God as “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”

P. 96 – When all you can see is your pain, perhaps then you lose sight of me?

- This statement in *The Shack* reminded me of two events found in Matthew chapter 12. In verses 1-8, the disciples and Jesus were walking through the grain fields on the Sabbath. “His disciples were hungry and they began to pick some heads of grain and eat them.” (vs. 1) The next verse says that “when the Pharisees saw this” – what did the Pharisees see? Did they see the twelve hungry disciples? No. They didn’t want to see the hunger or they might have to do something about it – no, instead they saw what they wanted to be a violation of the law so they could accuse Jesus and demonstrate their own superiority to Him. Later in verses 9 through 14, we again see the Pharisees watch Jesus “violate” the Sabbath. This time Jesus saw a man in the synagogue with a shriveled hand. The Pharisees, “looking for a reason to accuse Jesus,” didn’t see the man with the shriveled hand or the opportunity to help a brother in need, they saw what they wanted to see and missed the miracle! Sometimes we can do the very same thing – in our pain, in our despair, in our troubles, we miss the promise, the hope, the healing of Christ because our eyes are not on Jesus, but on our own problems. Ten of the twelve spies returning from the Promised Land saw only the giants in the land and not the God who would protect them if they only believed.

p. 100 – Jesus, as a human being, had no power within himself to heal anyone.

- Probably the other great controversy of *The Shack* – the author’s depiction of the nature of Jesus as fully man, but not fully God. The miracles that Jesus performed, then, as a man were performed by God through Jesus – as Jesus the man allowed God the Father to live in and through him – which, according to the author, is what God desires to do in each one of us.
  - So, what’s the problem with that? Doesn’t God desire to live in and through every believer – and don’t we, as Christians, have the “power of God” at our disposal, the only thing we lack is faith – for if we had faith the size of a mustard seed, we could say to that mountain move and it would move!
  - The problem lies in the misinterpretation that some may make that Jesus was fully man but not fully God – some religions teach that Jesus was merely a deified human – or the highest level of humanity, which became as a god, to which we can all ascend if we, too, live a holy life as Jesus did.
  - The reality is that Scripture teaches and the orthodox Church has confirmed time and time again that Jesus was fully man and fully God – one person, two natures. Here, in the Council of Chalcedon, affirmed in the year 451 is the statement to that affect:

"Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; **one and the same Christ,**

**Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ;** even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us."

- Later (p. 112), the author again tackles the dual nature of Jesus issue this time stating that Jesus "chooses to live moment by moment fully human. I am fully God, but I am human to the core."
  - Confusing, I know...but here it seems that the author is agreeing with the concept that Jesus retains His divinity, but can chose to "limit" himself to His humanity.

P. 101 – Back to the Trinity.

- Here the author deals with the Trinity with biblical accuracy – stating that there are “not three gods” and that “we are not talking about one god with three attitudes” – but rather “one God” and “three persons.”
- The author goes on to explain one of the amazing attributes of the Trinity – that God is relational. We see this as God in Genesis creates man in His own image – man is not “good” or complete until a “help-mate” or companion is found so God fashions woman out of man. Man was complete – woman was made out of man, not out of something else...but man was not complete until woman was made and the relational aspect of God was revealed in His creation.

P. 110 – I am the best way any human can relate to Papa or Sarayu.

- Without saying it, the author leaves open to the reader the concept that although Jesus might be the “best way” to God, He might not be the ONLY way. In Scripture, Jesus claims to be the only way to God the Father – **John 14:6**, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
  - There are a couple of passages in *The Shack* that open the idea that “all roads lead to God” – this is one of them and the reader must ask not only if this is what the author intends, but also if this is how many people will read this passage and will walk away from *The Shack* with a very critical misconception about the path of salvation.

P. 119 – What about your wrath?

- Here, it seems that the author is trying to “Oprahfy” God – take what you want, cafeteria-style, leaving out the attributes of God you find undesirable...like his wrath! Author

A.W. Pink believes that God's wrath is an important part of His divine nature – he writes the following to justify this thought:

*It is sad to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or at least they wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the Divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight; they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the Divine wrath which is too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.*

*Yes, many there are who turn away from a vision of God's wrath as though they were called to look upon some blotch in the Divine character, or some blot upon the Divine government. But what saith the Scriptures? As we turn to them we find that God has made no attempt to conceal the fact of His wrath. He is not ashamed to make it known that vengeance and fury belong unto Him.*

- The wrath of God is biblical, even prominent in Scripture – again A.W. Pink writes:

*A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness.*

*Now the wrath of God is as much a Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It must be so, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there would be if 'wrath' were absent from Him!*

- But why is God's wrath important? A.W. Pink asks you to consider the following:

*The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.*

P. 120 – 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.

- In some sense, you can understand where Young is heading with this line of thinking... **Romans 6:23** tells us that the “wages of sin is death” which can be seen as an understanding that sinful man needs no more punishment than to be left in his sinful condition. However, you must consider if Young is saying that there is no punishment for sin other than the consequences of a life absent God – which is more than just for the here and now, but for the afterlife of eternity as well. The Bible teaches about a final judgment – and a final place either in heaven with God or in hell without God – for all mankind. You wouldn’t want to misread Young’s comment about no “need to punish people for sin” and conclude that he’s advocating a concept where there is no hell – however later in the book, he’ll introduce the concept of hell as a real place that real people go to.

P. 121/122 – the author deals with this concept of a hierarchy or chain of command as being ungodly and only for the sinful, fallen world.

- You need to ask yourself if the concept of hierarchy and relationship are mutually exclusive – Young seems to be making this point. Can you work in a business environment where there are bosses and employees as well as mutually-respectful relationships – or does the mere existence of this chain of command necessitate distrust and disharmony? Many will say that the Bible teaches that there is, indeed, a “hierarchy” even in heaven – you’ll see it with the angels and how they are organized, you’ll see it in the Garden with mankind being given dominion over the rest of creation, and you’ll even see it within the relationship of the Trinity as Jesus surrenders His will to the will of the Father (**Luke 22:42**).

P. 136 – ...the good may be the presence of cancer or the loss of income – even a life.

- One of the most powerful and profound messages of *The Shack* is that man does not understand the ways of God – and that even in what we might see and understand as a tragedy, God can use for His good. **Romans 8:28** says that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” This verse doesn’t promise that believers will only have “good” happen in their lives – we know that we live in a fallen, dying and decaying world – but the believer has a hope, a confidence that this chaotic world is not without the purposes of an Almighty and Loving God who is sovereign above all. Mack struggles to see this reality as many of us do today. One of the reasons that the Old Testament stories are so vital to the New Testament believer today is the reminder that even in the darkest times when things seemed beyond the control of God, the Bible tells us that God was and is still in control.

P. 145 – we are submitted to you in the same way.

- Here, again, the author is painting this picture of perfect unity and harmony within the Trinity – without hierarchy or rules – but now he writes that each person of the godhead is submitted to one another (we saw earlier that Jesus submitted his will to the will of the Father – which seems to raise some concern over the author’s view that no hierarchy exists – see also **John 17** where the Father grants the Son authority) – but here he takes

this concept one step further – almost making the claim now that the Trinity in some sense submits to the will of mankind. Not sure where the author is going with this, but the Bible paints the picture that God’s ways are not the ways of man – and that His ways are “higher” than ours – in **Isaiah 55:9** it says, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your thoughts.” And in the wisdom of **Proverbs 16:25** it says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

P. 149 – Seriously, my life was not meant to be an example to copy.

- Here the author is having Jesus discount the WWJD-mentality – people walking around trying to figure out “What Would Jesus Do.” In this sense, the author is saying that walking with Christ is more about abiding in Him, trust in Him, connecting to Him than trying to figure out what Jesus would eat or wear or how fast he’d drive on the Tollway! **Romans 12:1, 2** support this concept – “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

P. 158 – You will be the Judge!

- Here the author uses a very powerful tool to communicate the concept that mankind doesn’t know the ways of the Lord! Christian author C.S. Lewis used a similar analogy in his essay *God in the Dock* – where God was put on trial by mankind. It reminds one of the **Book of Job**, where God speaks to Job and his friends saying, “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.” God goes on to demonstrate to Job and his friends that man has no standing to question what God does or doesn’t do – again, His ways are higher than our ways!

P. 182 – Who said anything about being a Christian? I’m not a Christian.

- You really need to read this section carefully. Is the author saying that being a “Christian” isn’t necessary for salvation (to be put back in a right relationship with God)? Well, if the word Christian conveys the concept that this person is one who has Jesus Christ as his atonement, then you might wonder where the author is going with this – but in a couple of sentences, you’ll find that the author appears to be making a statement that “being a Christian” from the cultural sense and not the spiritual sense is the point he’s trying to make.
  - There are two very important words in the next couple of sentences – were and are. Note how the author uses them and ask yourself what message is he sending – is it biblically accurate or not? Also notice how many people can easily misread and misinterpret these sentences – to read them as they want, not as they are written.

- He says that there are those who love Him (Jesus) who come from every “religious” system that exists. The author notes that there are followers of Christ who WERE (this is important to note...not are...but WERE) Buddhists or Mormons, Baptist or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans, etc... The idea being that regardless of your background, the real importance is your position with Christ as your Lord and Savior. Is this true?
- The author goes on to continue this point that some believers in Christ ARE bankers and bookies, Americans and Iraqis, Jews and Palestinians – notice how the relationship with Christ is preeminent, the cultural position of race, wealth, employment and the like are all secondary. What about this – true or not?

P. 203 – Rules cannot bring freedom; they only have the power to accuse.

- Another excellent examination by the author who is obviously try to expose “organized religion” as lacking the ability to free a person from their sins – similar to what Martin Luther said 500 years ago! It is not the church, it is not some religious duty or function, it is not your effort or your earthly status which matters – you are bound to sin and you must be released from this bondage by the power of the resurrection of Jesus who defeated the grave and hell with his sacrificial gift and his blood as the atonement (payment) for our rebellion. We only have freedom in Christ...not in the religious institutions of man.

P. 225 – In Jesus, I have forgiven all humans for all their sins against me, but only some choose relationship.

- This becomes a far deeper theological issue addressing the issue of limited atonement. For some, the blood of Christ is sufficient for the atonement of the sins of all mankind; for others the blood of Christ is sufficient for the atonement of all those who believe. The difference doesn’t lie in the effectiveness of the blood of Christ, but does lie in the “coverage” of the atonement and what the proper response of man is to this act of forgiveness. For those who believe that the blood of Christ atoned (paid for) the sins of all mankind, then either all men are saved or there is not a responsibility on man to respond to the gracious gift of God...in other words, to accept it. For those who believe that the blood of Christ atoned for the sins of all those who believe, there is no further requirement or duty of man...God has done the work of salvation wholly and entirely...man now, as a new creature in Christ, strives to live and walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

After Words – Well, there you have it—at least as it was told to me.

- Many people have mistakenly taken the introduction and the epilogue as evidence that this is a true story...or at least a story based on true events – it is not. This is a work of fiction...from cover to cover...yes, even Willie is a fictional character and part of the story.