

The Shack Journal Topics

You have 50 journals in this novel study for a total of 250 points. They will be divided into TWO grades of 125 points each, #1-25 are due on _____, and #26-50 are due on _____. Some of the entries are going to feel very personal; they are for YOUR consideration. I won't be reading those particular entries, rather I'll just be reviewing them for completion. *PLEASE do not fall behind in completion of these journals as this unit of study can become overwhelming if you do.*

ONE: Think of the most painful times in your life.

- *Give it a name, like Mack called his *The Great Sadness*.
- *Take some time to write your situation as it happened to you.
- *Try and remember the people that were involved, both those who helped and those who hurt you.
- *Has this situation been resolved, or is time the only thing that has come between it and you?

TWO: Who is God? Who is the God of the Bible? Is the God of the Old Testament different than the God of the New Testament?

THREE: At the end of Chapter 2, Mack and Missy talk about the Multnomah princess story, which leads to a discussion about God. Who understood more about the nature of God? In what ways did Missy have a better understanding of God than her father?

FOUR: In Chapter 3, we have a conversation between Mack and his new friends about the word "Papa." He says it is a little too familiar for him. Is the word "Papa" too familiar for you? What do you call God?

FIVE: Chapter 4:

Page 46 "*As he walked between tents and trailers, he was praying and promising. He knew in his heart that promising things to God was rather dumb and irrational, but he couldn't help it. He was desperate to get Missy back, and surely God knew where she was.*"

- Have you ever made promises to God during bad times?
- Why do we make promises and bargains with God?
- Do these promises and bargains make a difference?
- Read Genesis 18:16-33. Think on why Abraham pleaded with God and "bargained." Did it change God's mind?

(Something to Consider: In reading chapter 4, I noticed that Mack "sacrificed" Missy for the sake of saving his son, who was sure to drown if he did not take action. While it may not have been intentional on the part of the author, I paralleled this to God sacrificing his Son for the sake of all of us sinners.)

SIX: Page 65 - We encounter the question, "*Does God even write notes?*"

- How does God communicate with us today?
- Why has the way God communicated with us changed from the Old Testament, seemingly more "hands-on" God, to a more "backseat" God, or has it?
- What ways has God communicated with you?

SEVEN: Page 66 - We read about Mack's experience with church/religion.

- How are we as a church to respond to meet the needs of such individuals?

EIGHT: Chapter 5

Page 73 - Willie asks Mack what he thinks God looks like.

- Before reading this book, what has your "image" of God looked like?
- How has Mack's view of God influenced the life he lived?

NINE: Page 82 - Mack meets God.

- Why do you think God chose this image to appear to Mack?
- What was your initial reaction to this image of God? (be honest)
- Was this image difficult for you?
- What image would have shattered your stereo-type of God?

TEN: Page 87 - Mack begins to realize the trinity has been presented to him and he thinks, "*But two women and a man and none of them white?*"

- How have you visualized the trinity before?
- Does this image of the trinity open your mind more or is it difficult to get past your teachings and preconceived ideas of God?

ELEVEN: Chapter 6

At the beginning of this chapter, we are hit with something very interesting about the nature of God: p. 88 - "Well, Mackenzie, don't just stand there gawkin' with your mouth open like your pants are full," said the big black woman as she turned and headed across the deck, talking the whole time. "Come and talk to me while I get super on. Or if you don't want to do that, you can do whatever you want. Behind the cabin," she gestured over the roof without looking or slowing down, "you will find a fishing pole by the boat shed that you can use to catch some lake trout."

- Do you think if you were face-to-face with God that you would go fishing instead? Why do you think that God told Mack that he could do this if he wanted to?

TWELVE: On page 90-91, we encounter Papa listening to music. Mack finds it odd that God would listen to something not very righteous. Papa explains that these musicians are still children of God and "He" knows their hearts behind the music.

- If we are to be more like God, how would our church look to be more invitational for youth?

THIRTEEN: P 93 – A discussion about the revealing of God to Mack shows us the way Papa is shown is what Mack needs right now.

-Have there been times you have needed God to be revealed in certain forms?

FOURTEEN: On pages 94-95 - Discussion about freedom.

-What is true freedom?

-What limits you from being truly free?

FIFTEEN: Page 96 – “When all you can see is your pain, perhaps then you lose sight of me?”

-When do you lose sight of God?

-How do you return to God in those times?

SIXTEEN: Chapter 7

Mack is amazed at the beginning of the chapter about how God relates to the broken bowl. The book states: "Obviously, what was truly important here was the love they had for one another and the fullness it brought them ... How different this was from the way he treated the ones he loved!"

-What does this situation teach you?

-How might you live your life differently or react to life differently if you learn from this scenario?

SEVENTEEN: Read [Galatians 3:1-14](#).

-Try to reconstruct the Galatians' pilgrimage in the faith. In what ways did their behavior seem "bewitched" or "foolish"? In what ways do we try to earn God's favor in what we do?

EIGHTEEN: How should we respond to failure with others in our lives? How should we respond to failure before God?

NINETEEN: P. 107 – “Mack had to suppress a snicker at the thought of God having devotions.”

-How did this image strike you?

-If we use this to remind us of the trinity, what information can we glean about the trinity from the fact that God does devotions?

TWENTY: At the beginning of Chapter 9, Sarayu describes the garden as a fractal. view some fractals, which I found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/fractal>. (Copy the address in your search bar.)

-A fractal is basically a geometric shape that can be split into parts, each part being a reduced copy of the larger part. Think of a fern as an example or check out the many fractal patterns on the internet. What could this visual offer for us? What might it mean in this story?

TWENTY-ONE: On p. 134 we encounter a discussion about whether Biblical accounts are myth or truth. What do you think?

TWENTY-TWO: At the bottom of p. 136-137, there is a discussion about rights. What are your rights? Why do we believe we are entitled to certain rights? Who decides?

TWENTY-THREE: On p. 138 we find out that the *mess* of a garden is actually Mack. How would your garden be described right now?

TWENTY-FOUR: Chapter 10 begins with a discussion on living in the present moment and imagination. Where do you spend most of your time? Does fear, condemnation, worry or other emotions dictate "where" you spend your time? Then we encounter Mack's walk on water, like Peter. Refer to Matthew 14:22-33 for Peter's story. Mack hesitates at first but then goes for it, shoes and all.

TWENTY-FIVE: P. 145 starts a discussion on relationships and submission. How does this discussion shed new light on your thoughts about submission in relationships?

TWENTY-SIX: On p. 149 Jesus says "...my life was not meant to be an example to copy." How is that different than what you have been taught?

TWENTY-SEVEN: Chapter 11

Define judgment.

What criteria do we use to judge others?

How much of our lives are spent judging?

TWENTY-EIGHT: p. 154-155 discusses love. Is it possible to love each child in a unique way? Is every person able to love each of their children the same?

We then encounter a situation in which Mack is asked to choose three of his five children be sentenced to hell. How would you choose? What criteria would you use for this decision? (Remember when judging that every person is someone's child.)

TWENTY-NINE: What were your thoughts about the encounter with Missy?

THIRTY: Chapter 12

P. 172 – Mack says “So, I’m complex and she’s simple. Whew! My world *is* upside down.”

-How do we tend to complicate matters as followers of Christ? How does complexity enter our lives? How can we live in simplicity?

THIRTY-ONE: p. 175 – Jesus says, “What you’re already doing, Mack, learning to live loved.”

-Is this easy for you to do?

-Why do we sometimes have a hard time living loved?

THIRTY-TWO: p. 177 – There is a discussion on the image of Heaven, then a description of the Church. At the bottom of the page, Mack says, “You’re talking about the church as this woman you’re in love with; I’m pretty sure I haven’t met her.” What might we glean from this statement that would impact our church?

THIRTY-THREE: p. 181 – “This whole thing is a process, not an event.”
-How can we relate this to people saying they have been saved?
-How is this idea of a process helpful to you?

THIRTY-FOUR: p. 182 – “Those who love me come from every system that exists....”
How does this challenge your beliefs?
Does this change anything for you?
Is it possible to be a Christian and believe this section is true?
(Please remember that this is for discussion purposes and to open our minds, not a lesson on our doctrine and theology.)

THIRTY-FIVE: Chapter 13

p. 185 - God tells Mack the following:

"Mack, just because I work incredible good out of unspeakable tragedies doesn't mean I orchestrate the tragedies. Don't ever assume that my using something 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."

What were your thoughts about this when you first read it? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

THIRTY-SIX: p. 188 – a discussion on lies.
Why do we lie? Is it okay to lie?

THIRTY-SEVEN: p. 190 – “True love never forces...all evil flows from independence and independence is your choice...Love that is forced is no love at all.”
What personal experiences have you had that caused you to read this page with new insights?

THIRTY-EIGHT: p. 192 – Papa and Mack discuss God’s love for the whole world, whether or not they believe in God.
How does this challenge what you believe?
Is it ever too late to find God?
Do we have an opportunity to express our belief after we die?

THIRTY-NINE: Chapter 14

Many people struggle with the concept of the "presence of God". Some believers are almost deistic in the sense that God seems like a million miles away most of the time. Other believers can be so obsessed with *feeling* God that they will attend endless meetings and "revivals" seeking a special touch from God.

-At the beginning of this chapter, God tells Mack: "For you to know or not has nothing at all to do with whether I am actually here or not. I am always with you; sometimes I want you to be aware in a special way - more intentional."

-When and how do you feel closest to God?

-What opportunities do we need to offer as a church for people to have these various connections with God?

FOURTY: In talking about living the Christian life and of how Mack has tried hard to live it, God makes the following statement:

"The Bible doesn't teach you to follow rules. It is a picture of Jesus. While words may tell you what God is like and even what he may want from you, you cannot do any of it on your own. Life and living is in him and in no other. My goodness, you didn't think you could live the righteousness of God on your own, did you?"

Read the following Scriptures:

[Isaiah 40:31](#)

[John 15:5](#)

[2 Corinthians 3:4-5, 4:7-12, 12: 9-10](#)

[Philippians 4:13](#)

[Galatians 2:20-21, 3:1-3](#)

According to these verses, how are we to live the Christian life? How do these verses relate to the quote from the book above?

FOURTY-ONE: What would you say to someone who believes that he or she is unified with Christ, but who can't identify substantive change in his or her life?

FOURTY-TWO: Chapter 15

*What were your thoughts on the imagery provided in this chapter?

*In this chapter, we have the story of Mack's reconciliation with his father.

*What were your thoughts on this?

*Were you surprised that Mack's father was there?

*Why did Mack say he was sorry?

*What does real forgiveness look like?

FOURTY-THREE: Chapter 16

*Forgiving someone we love or a relative can be challenging (as in the last chapter). But what about forgiving someone who intentionally set out to hurt us? Mack struggles in this chapter with coming to a sense of forgiveness with Missy's killer. What are your thoughts about this?

*Some critics of the book would say that this isn't Biblical forgiveness ... they would suggest that Biblical forgiveness first requires that a person ask for forgiveness before it can be offered. What do you think? What do you think the Bible says on this issue?

FOURTY-FOUR: Chapter 17

*In this chapter we see the first burial of Missy. What do you think this represents metaphorically?

FOURTY-FIVE: *Mack is given a choice to stay or to go back to his family in chapter 17 as well. Comment on his decision and your thoughts on it. What would you have chosen?

FOURTY-SIX: Chapter 18

*In this chapter we learn more about the accident. Did this occur before or after "The Shack"?

FOURTY-SEVEN: *What do you think the second burial of Missy represents metaphorically?

FOURTY-EIGHT: *How do we see Mack living out the truths he learned while at The Shack?

FOURTY-NINE: *What things have stuck with you most from the book? Share some of your greatest insights or the things that have impacted you the most in reading this story.

FIFTY: *Has the book helped you overcome your "shack"? If so, how?