



# Talking Theology at *The Shack*

Week 4  
*Chapters 7 - 9*



## *The Nature of God?*

- ❖ Where should our theology of God begin? Perhaps with this question: “What does Jesus reveal to us about the nature of God that we would not otherwise know?”
  - That God is inherently relational: the doctrine of the Trinity
- ❖ It is this inherent relationality that drives Young’s portrait of God
  - God wants no prisoners
  - God limits himself for the sake of living in genuine relationships with the humans he has created
  - Where else with this take us?



## **The washing of feet**

- ❖ In the kitchen, Jesus drops a bowl of batter
  - Jesus then washes Papa's feet
    - ***This brings to mind Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. How is it similar? Different?***
  - All this is an example to Mack of the fullness of love and the limitations of his own love.

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## **God's foreknowledge**

- ❖ Mack doesn't see the point of talking to Papa and the others about his children. Don't they already know everything?
  - Sarayu says that yes, God knows, but God limits God's self for the sake of genuine relationship, setting aside what God knows. She uses the example of a parent who limits herself in order to be genuinely in relationship with her child.
- ❖ ***How does this strike you? Would God limit himself for the sake of genuine relationship? In what ways, might God limit himself?***
  - ***The issue isn't whether God is omnipotent and omniscient, able to do anything that can be done and knowing all that can be known. The issue is how God uses or doesn't use this power and knowledge.***

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## God's love and purpose

- ❖ Jesus tells Mack that “I am the best way any human can relate to Papa or Sarayu”
- ❖ The names
  - Sarayu is the Holy Spirit – the name means “wind”
  - El-ousia means “God-who is truly real”
- ❖ Jesus tells Mack that humanity is at the center of our love and purpose
  - ***Is this an inappropriate elevation of humanity? Or is it the place that “God is love” takes us? After all, the Son of God did give his life for us.***
  - ***How would we even know this? In the context of Scripture, I'd say this is pretty close to being right.***

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## A book and its cover

- ❖ Mack is surprised that Jesus isn't better looking
  - ***Why does Jesus' response sting Mack a bit? What are our “standards?” What are God's?***
  - ***Jesus tells Mack that “being transcends appearance.” Do you think that is really true? Do we live that way?***

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## To be “in Christ” and Christ to be “in us”

- ❖ Jesus tells Mack that his purpose from the beginning has been to “live in you and you in me”
  - ***There is hardly more puzzling language in the New Testament than the language about Christ living in us and us in Christ. It does seem so nebulous and unreal. The author grounds his understanding on a “very real dynamic and active union.”***

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## Our Participation in Christ

- ❖ The phrase “in Christ” (*en Christo*) appears 83 times in Paul’s letters. There are 47 “in the Lord.”
  - This is a distinctively Paul
- ❖ Some uses speak to Jesus’ redemptive act for us
  - e.g., Romans 3:24 and 1 Cor. 1:14
- ❖ Others are more subjective – more a “being” in Christ
  - e.g., Romans 6:11 – “You must reckon yourselves dead indeed to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”
  - e.g., 2 Cor. 5:17 – “If anyone is in Christ – New Creation!”
- ❖ Christ in us
  - e.g., Gal. 2:19-20 – “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me.”

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## **Does God love some more than others?**

- ❖ When Papa comes out with breakfast, she is again listening to an artist she is “especially fond of.”
  - But Papa also tells Mack that God has no favorites – just is “especially fond of everyone.”
- ❖ ***There is no hierarchy when it comes to God’s love. If we can’t imagine this, it is because God is God and we are not.***

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## **God’s wrath**

- ❖ Does God get angry with us? Of course, Papa says. But Mack expects to have met a more wrathful, angry God. Accept what is, Papa says, don’t bring all sorts of “pre-conceptions.”
- ❖ ***What are our own expectations of God? We all have pre-conceptions of God’s nature? But where do they come from? Would we expect what Mack expects? How might God’s anger or wrath differ from our own? How about Jesus’ anger?***

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## **Punishment for sin**

- ❖ Mack says, “Don’t you enjoy punishing those who disappoint you? Papa’s reply is, “I’m not who you think I am . . . I don’t need to punish people for sin . . . sin is its own punishment . . . It’s not my purpose to punish sin; it is God’s joy to cure it.”
- ❖ ***This is a big point. Do you think this squares with the biblical notion of “punishment?” Another way to say this would be that the punishment for sin, its deadly consequences, are “hardwired” into God’s creation.***

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## **Hierarchy**

- ❖ Mack sees the “simple beauty and intimacy” among Papa, Jesus, and Sarayu, and says he always thought there was a hierarchy with the Father being the boss. Papa says there they are in a circle of relationship not a hierarchy. Because each are “always looking out for the best, there is no need for it. A long discussion follows on authority, rules, laws, and hierarchy.
- ❖ ***Why do humans have hierarchy? Why do we crave it ( and we do!)? Might hierarchy, rules, and authority be a concession to our brokenness/sinfulness? Do you think that there is hierarchy in the Trinity?***

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## **Our “will to power and independence”**

- ❖ Papa points Mack to the “will to power and independence” as the matrix in which we operate but not in which we were created.
- ❖ ***This “will to power and independence” is another way of describing Adam and Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit. In the biblical picture, it can be seen as the root of all sin. But it is not the way we were created to be . . . sadly, we chose it and still do.***

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## **Who do you trust?**

- ❖ They have a long talk about all that Mack does not understand, how despite our choices, God’s larger purposes will be accomplished. At the end of the talk, God brings it back to the real question. Will Mack trust that God is good and trust God with what Mack cannot understand?
- ❖ ***In the end, this is the question for us all. But for far too many, we don’t trust God because we don’t really know God. That’s why all this “God-talk” is so important. Who is God? What is God really like? Is God truly good?***

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## **In the garden**

- ❖ Why has God’s good creation gone bad? Sarayu says that the humans, having taken the “ravaged path of independence” have taken creation down with them.
  - **Very Paul . . . see Romans 8**

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## **Absolutes and the Tree**

- ❖ They go on to talk about the Garden of Eden (real, not mythical) and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
  - Mack acknowledges that his judgments about what is good and what is evil is self-serving.
  - Sarayu points out that if there is no standard of good outside ourselves (absolutes) then all notions of what is good or moral become only self-serving assertions.
- ❖ ***The author seems to say that the knowledge of good and evil isn’t (1) the ability to make free choices or (2) knowing what God knows but, instead, is taking upon ourselves the privilege of making those judgments.***

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## **The two realms**

- ❖ Sarayu also says that by taking it on, the spiritual was separated from the physical.
- ❖ **Another intriguing notion. Almost separating the cosmos into two realms: ours and God's kingdom. Restoration of the cosmos then becomes putting the two back together. How is this as a way to talk about the kingdom of God?**
  - **The weakness of this approach to division (spiritual/physical) is that it implies that God's realm is non-physical, which is not the biblical depiction. We believe in the resurrection of the body. Denying the resurrection of the body would be heretical.**

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## **The good and the bad**

- ❖ Sarayu says "You must know me enough to trust me and rest in my inherent goodness."
  - **See the paragraph in the middle of p. 136. Why is it that we cannot live independently of God? Darkness is the absence of light. Evil is the absence of goodness. Death is the absence of life. God is light, goodness, and life.**
- ❖ Sarayu says that the cancer or the job loss or even the death could be the good.
  - **What do you think that the author means here?**
  - **God's victory over sin and death was just that . . . how can we speak of God's victory over the good . . . death may alleviate suffering, but it is still the enemy because it is the absence of life.**

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## **Missy's right to be protected**

- ❖ What about Missy, Mack asks. Didn't she have the right to be protected. Sarayu replies with: "Rights are where survivors go, so they don't have to work out relationships."
  - ***We are very caught up in our "rights," but I think the author is correct. In a good marriage, what need do we really have for "rights?" Do you think that "rights" are a concession to brokenness? Do we cherish our "rights" because they protect us from hierarchy? Did Jesus hold on to "rights?"***
- ❖ Sarayu tells Mack that the garden in which they've been working, messy and beautiful, is his soul. Together, she and he have been working with a purpose in his heart.
  - ***What do you make of this?***