



# Talking Theology at *The Shack*

Week 8

Chapters 16 – 18 and Willie’s  
“after words”

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## ***A morning of sorrows – Begin Ch. 16***

- ❖ After sleeping, Mack is awakened by a man – gray hair, pony tail, wiry, tall. It is Papa.
  - Why a man now? Because Mack is going to need a father.
  - ***I can’t help but wonder if the book would have been better received in some quarters if Papa had always looked like Willie Nelson!***
- ❖ Jesus, Papa, and Sarayu await Mack in the kitchen. Sarayu is carrying an aromatic bundle filled with what she and Mack had picked in the garden the day before.
- ❖ Papa and Mack head off on their hike, after Mack again comments on how much Papa loves Jesus.

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## Going for a hike

- ❖ Papa tells Mack that when Mack forgave his father the day before, it enabled Mack to know better God as Father.
- ❖ Though Papa knew that humanity would rebel, Papa also knew what it would cost God to put things right. Could God have prevented what happened to Missy? Yes, Papa says.
  - How? By not creating at all. Or by interfering in her circumstance, which wasn't an option for purposes Mack can't possibly understand now.
    - ***In the end, Mack never gets an answer to why God failed to intervene to prevent Missy's murder. As always, the last question on the table is this" Will I trust God?***
  - God didn't purpose Missy's death, but God can use it for good.
  - Does Mack trust Papa?
    - "I do trust you!" is Mack's reply.

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## Mack and the Ladykiller

- ❖ As they near the destination – whatever it is – Papa tells Mack there is one more thing that darkens Mack's heart. Mack knows what it is – he can't forgive the Ladykiller. Papa and Mack embark on a long talk about forgiveness.
  - Mack needs to forgive the killer so God can redeem him. Forgiveness is not about forgetting, it is about "letting go of another person's throat." Does forgiveness make everything ok? No . . . forgiveness doesn't establish relationship. God has forgiven everyone but that doesn't mean they have chosen relationship. Forgiveness is first for the forgiver – without it, the pain destroys joy and our ability to love fully. The killer doesn't care about Mack's pain.

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## Forgiveness

- ❖ Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting. It makes repentance and reconciliation possible but only that. Without genuine change (repentance), real relationship cannot be established.
  - ***This is perhaps the key lesson to learn about forgiveness. It doesn't make everything all right. But without it, "rightness" is simply not possible.***
- ❖ Forgiveness doesn't mean we should trust that person. But we might be surprised by what happens after we forgive – perhaps even the miracle of fully restored trust.
  - ***Never underestimate the power of forgiveness. Nor how difficult it can be truly forgive.***
- ❖ Forgiveness doesn't excuse anyone nor mean they are "getting away free."

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## Seventy times seven?

- ❖ Papa then tells Mack that Missy has forgiven her killer. How? By the power of God alone.
  - Mack then strives to forgive – saying it over and over until it begins to take hold. Papa tells Mack that he'll have to keep forgiving in this way – often and each day – until one day, Mack realizes that he has forgiven completely.
    - ***How many times might we have to forgive until it is genuine and transforming? How about seventy times seven!***

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## **Taking Missy home**

- ❖ Then Papa reveals that they have come to take Missy home. All Mack can say is “Thank you.”
  - Mack realizes they are following the trail marked by the Ladykiller.
  - They come to a cave entrance. Inside, they find Missy’s body wrapped in a sheet. They gently wrap the aromatic flowers and herbs around her and prepare to carry her body home. As they leave the cave, Mack is gently saying “I forgive you . . . I forgive you.”

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## **With Jesus in the workshop (begin ch. 17)**

- ❖ The project we’ve gotten hints about is Missy’s coffin, carved with details of her life.
  - Jesus tells Mack that Missy helped pick out what would be carved into the coffin. She will be buried in the garden that Sarayu and Mack had worked.
- ❖ In the garden, Sarayu sings a song that Missy wrote. Sarayu pours on the grave the tears she had collected earlier from Mack. Sarayu lets fall a special tear that immediately blossoms into a tree.
  - It is a moving scene, and rightly, Mack tells Papa that he still hurts a lot over Missy’s loss. Papa responds, “I know Mackenzie, I know.”
    - **Notice that neither the beginnings of forgiveness nor the recovery of Missy’s body make everything all right. It is all a process, a long and difficult process.**

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## **Mack is offered a choice**

- ❖ Mack can stay at the shack with them and with Missy or he can go back to Nan and his life.
  - Mack asks what Missy wants. Papa says she is where there is no impatience – she doesn't mind waiting.
  - Mack wants to know if he matters back home. Sarayu tells him that if anything matters, everything matters. Every time Mack forgives or reaches out, with every kindness or service he performs, God's purposes are accomplished.
    - ***Again . . . we make humanity too small, we fail to grasp that the smallest kindnesses are bloomings of God's kingdom.***
- ❖ Mack decides to go back confident that the Three and One will never abandon him.
  - Papa tells him that it is "a very good choice."

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## **Kate . . . then heading home**

- ❖ There is one more thing. Sarayu tells him that Kate blames herself for Missy's murder. It seems so obvious to Mack that he can't believe the thought never occurred to him.
  - ***Why do you think that Mack couldn't see this for himself?***
- ❖ They finish up in the kitchen and then Mack sits on the floor where he falls asleep. When he awakens the cabin has returned to its old self and Mack heads out the jeep – to the "unreal world."
  - Mack is driving home, lost in thought, unsure what he'll say to anyone, even Nan, when there is a blinding crash and Mack's broken and unconscious body is careflighted to the hospital.

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## **Back to the unreal world (begin Ch. 18)**

- ❖ When Mack slowly begins to waken, he learns that he has been unconscious for four days. At first, his memory is a mess but when Willie visits him and asks him about the note, the weekend all comes flooding back. But . . . he wasn't there for the weekend, at least by the "unreal world's" reckoning. Mack's crash was Friday night, the same day he drove to the shack.
  - It is a nice moment when Willie presses to find out if God was there. Mack tells Willie that he has a message from God for Willie: God is especially fond of him.
    - ***What if every person really believed that God is especially fond of them? Why is this so hard for us to truly know?***

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## **A final healing**

- ❖ Nan and Mack begin to go through Mack's story. Nan, of course, isn't really sure what to make of it. But Mack arranges for the two of them to be alone with Kate.
  - Mack tells Kate that she shouldn't blame herself, no one else does. Kate's unspoken guilt comes pouring out – and her healing begins.
  - Nan comes to believe Mack's story. And then Mack leads her and Tommy, the deputy sheriff, to Missy's body.
    - The forensics team finds enough information to lead them to the Ladykiller and to recover the bodies of the other four girls.

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## **Willie's final words**

- ❖ Willie reflects on the profound transformation in Mack. *The Great Sadness* is gone. Mack now lives a life filled with joy and simplicity amidst his community of relationships.
- ❖ Mack is testifying at the Ladykiller trial. He wants to visit with the killer, but hasn't been allowed yet.
- ❖ Willie is pretty sure that Mack and Nan still go to the shack now and then and wouldn't be surprised if Mack heads down to the dock and removes his shoes . . . .
  - ***How satisfying do you find Young's ending for the book? What, if anything, would you have done differently? How true do you think the ending is to what has come before?***