

The Shack

Sermon Manuscript:

Trailer – 2:30

When was the last time you **cried** at the movies? For me and for my small group, this was it! And if you know me and my previous at the movies messages, then you know that I always choose a movie that I **REALLY want you to see**. Well, this is the movie! And in this movie, you'll cry throughout. This isn't a weepy ending movie, it's a full box of tissues, ugly cry kinda movie. And it's so worth it. But you've been warned!

But I'm not talking about the Shack today simply because it makes you cry. I'm talking about the Shack today because I think it's a movie and a message for a lot of us that don't always get talked to at church. This is **a movie for the down-and-out**. For people who feel that if God loves them, He definitely love other people more. People who are jealous of the Christians who seem to be blessed at every turn. Those who wonder why they not only don't have it easy, they have it hard. Robbed of opportunities, robbed of extra, sometimes just robbed, with no sign of justice. If you're that person, then today's message is especially meant for you.

The Shack is based on a book written by a man who wanted to answer the question for his kids:

If God exists, why does He allow bad things to happen to good people?

That's not simply a question, often times, that is THE question. Or rather, this is the question:

**If God exists, why did He allow bad things to happen to me
(or someone I care about)?**

People who don't know God—this is often their big hangup, their reason for choosing something else... and Christians who suffer tragedy or see it, also get stuck on that question.

There is **no simple answer** a question like that. Sometimes we need to tell **a story**. In this case, Paul Young chose to write one, and epic one. One so powerful and compelling that even a bunch of people who don't share our beliefs were willing to try and portray the characters and their struggles. Most of the actors in the movie are not Christians...but they are asking and trying to help answer this question, the same as you and me.

Did you know that **God's answer** looks a lot like Paul Young's? No where in the Bible does a single passage try to answer the whole question: why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Instead God takes us on a journey through real lives and real tragic events, stories where we see some answers, but where **we mostly see that God can be trusted**, even when the reasons aren't clear.

(4 Pictures – Abusive Father, family picture, Mac chasing his daughter, dress)

The Shack is a story about one man, Mac or Mackenzie, who is just emotionally ripped to shreds by the events of his life. As a kid, he is raised by an abusive father who uses faith to beat his family into silence and submission. As an adult, he builds a good life and family of his own, then he loses his youngest daughter to a murderer--one of the most unjust events we can even think of. Then, as he is facing all the anger and pain and hopelessness of these events, God meets Him. And the way God chooses to answer him: not with answers to questions alone, but with a personal encounter, with conversation, laughter, adventure, and a few difficult conversations. It's a great story...and it follows the tradition of a lot of writers who've sought to do the same thing in generations past, C.S. Lewis did the same a generation ago, and his books: the Chronicles of Narnia, the Space Trilogy, The Screwtape Letters, and the Great Divorce are some of my favorite stories that address similar spiritual truths.

[Disclaimer]

I want to share enough of William Young's story and enough of God's story with you today, to compel you to dig deeper into both. But be warned: **fiction has its limits**, William Young's work can't give you all the answers, it might even confuse you a bit as it stretches our idea of God, but it is intended to point you to Scripture, where the true answers lie. If you get online after this and encounter all the haters or critics of the Shack, I don't want you to ignore them, but just keep in mind that the Shack is just a tool to get you to Scripture. Don't take it too seriously, don't expect every detail of the story to correlate precisely to Scripture, and look to the Bible for the ultimate clarity on any idea it puts into your head.

In answering the question, Why do bad things happen to good people, God does two things that I want to give you a glimpse of today:

- He helps us see past our pain.
- And He calls us to trust Him.

First, He works to help Mac see past his pain. Pain distorts who God really is. It makes us believe He is **cruel or untrustworthy**. Mack has seen enough of true faith that he genuinely wants to believe...but he's also seen enough messed up religion to be confused and defensive. Like many of us, he goes to church and he seeks an answer that will take his pain away. He has just enough faith to look for help. But Mack's hurt from his childhood and the loss of his youngest daughter is a mountain of pain that blocks any chance for him to know God for who God really is. In his heart, Mac believes he is not worthy of love, but when God finally gets a chance to speak clearly to Mac, He never stops telling him how much He loves Mac...or as Paul Young chose to phrase it, "that God is especially fond of you." God refuses to be anything but kind to Mac in their first encounters. **He meets Mack where he is.** And God does that for us too.

(Picture – God in three persons, Papa and Mac as a kid)

In the Shack, Mack, goes back to the shack where his daughter was murdered and has conversations with each person of God: The **Father, the Son, and The Holy Spirit**. Jesus appears as a young middle-eastern guy, much like might we expect, aside from a slightly more modern wardrobe. The Holy Spirit is a quiet mysterious woman...which also matches our typical experience the Holy Spirit. However, God the Father chooses to appear in a more unique, controversial form...as a motherly african-American lady. Mack had a terrible father growing up, so it's a little weird, but it's Paul Young's way of showing

how God tries to meet us in a way we see Him for who He really is. Oh, and instead of calling Him “God or Father”, in the movie, everyone calls Him, “Papa.”

Throughout His time here on earth, Jesus encountered person after person who’s pain formed a wall that kept them from having more than just a little faith. In Matthews account of Jesus life, in chapters 8 & 9 where we are looking today, we see Jesus meet person after person after person with genuine compassion: He not only heals a leper, He touches the man. He not only heals an army general’s servant, He commends his faith. He heals everyone who comes to Peter’s house in the town of Capernaum, taking away physical and mental illnesses. Not only does he seek to heal the pain of the sick, he seeks out the socially outcast too. Jesus calls the most despicable of people to follow him: tax collectors. And He does the unthinkable in the ancient world: he stays, eats and parties with all them and their friends!

As all these acts of compassion and outreach pile up, the stuck up religious leaders look on with disgust, and a few sincere people caught in between the two groups ask Jesus why He doesn’t push those followers into more structured faith practices like fasting. Jesus response, I believe is powerful. Jesus uses two analogies to talk about how God’s approach takes into account each person’s spiritual status. Look at what He says:

16 No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse.

17 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. But they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”
(Matt 9:16-17, HCSB)

These words to meet reveal Jesus desire to meet people where they are, with what they need to hear most. So while many of us who are farther along in our faith walks might need a direct, even harsh rebuke, to those who’s faith in Him is fragile, who can’t see past their pain, or who don’t know Him, God does not seek to introduce himself through harsh words, confrontation, or punishment. Jesus first goal is to make everyone aware of His great love for them.

Every person is introduced to God through the beauty and complexity of His creation, even the wondrous complexity of their own body. Hopefully they see the impact His followers make in this world, working for everyone’s good. Most can read the Bible, where it tells of just how hard God has worked in this world and how much He has sacrificed to redeem them. And above all, they should know that the same Jesus who was compassionate in person, also gave His life to save theirs.

God is especially fond of you. I hope you know that. No matter who you are, what you have been through, you’ll take a moment and simply believe that. That is the truth that will help you see past your pain long enough to see God. Believing that truth opens up the channel of communication that blocks us finding the answers we seek. Before God lets you engage Him in a debate, He wants to engage you in an embrace. He loves you. He needs you to know that above all else...

(Clip – Mac and God talk about pain 4mins)

Mac spends a lot of time just getting this sense of love down, and opening up to God. It takes people who are hurting a long time to take this crucial first step. **Great hurt cannot be processed in a hurry**...and I know some of you carry HUGE hurt so heavy its nearly impossible to talk about or even revisit.

For Christians, hurt like this shows up unexpectedly after we begin to follow God, and it can stall our faith or **send us backward**. Some of us will suffer daily from an illness we can't cure, or sometimes that can't even be diagnosed. Others will lose a loved one tragically. Some will kill or be killed in a battle thousands of miles from home, or carry their experience in battle with them the rest of their lives. **It's easy to drown in that kind of pain** – to let anger, guilt, shame, hurt, hatred, or regret overwhelm us and shut down our walk with God.

(Picture)

At one point in the movie, **Mac almost sinks** in a boat that represents his pain. It's that close to overwhelming him...Don't let your pain cut you off from God. Don't stop talking to Him and believing he loves you. God loves you. God loves you.

[Counseling Disclaimer:]

And one more VERY important note from someone who walks through tragedy with people as a pastor. There's nothing glamorous or intellectually challenging about this crucial first step, and too often people who mean good tend to rush people past or even skip this step. The funeral is not even over and people are saying things like:

"Everything has a purpose."

God is still on the throne.

Remember to give thanks in all things.

God is preparing you for something better.

"God never gives us more than we can handle."

"God must have needed a ____ in heaven."

All we can think is, "I hate him right now. How could He let this happen? He's not good, He can't be."

Don't be that person. **Don't rush people past this step**. Be content to love people who are far from God without expecting some immediate change in their heart or behavior. We often have people sit in our services for months and even years—they need to soak up God's love for that long, just to begin to believe He loves them. We're not about rushing that step. If that's you, take your time...and when you are ready, let us walk through that step with you.

[Pause]

The second thing God does in Mac's journey is that He challenges Mac to **trust God's judgment**, and realize just how limited his own ability to judge really is.

(Picture – Sarai in the garden)

In the garden, Mac stumbles upon a deadly weed. When he questions its presence in the garden, God explains that it is deadly by itself, but becomes medicinal when mixed with another flower. Mac begins to see the limitations in his judgement.

Later, Mac is given the chance to sit in **the judgment seat** as if He was God. Condemning them to heaven or hell. It's easy at first when confronted with true criminals, but when he is asked to judge his own two remaining kids, Mac can't pass judgement. Look instead as his solution...

(Clip – Mack is the Judge – 5mins)

When Mac truly begins to understand that **only God can judge fairly**, and also that **judgment is painful for God**—that God truly hurts when He must act, Mac is able to stop trusting in himself and he begins to trust in God. He embraces God's love, even without all the answers to his questions. Knowing God is good and that He love Mac, is enough for Mac to take **the leap of faith** to God, and to dive into a relationship with God with an open heart. He finally begins to trust God. He let's go of his need to have all the answers.

The decision to trust God for the first time is a HUGE one. Most of us remember making it, because it shook our whole world up. Our **great burden** was lifted and we felt alive like never before. The Bible equates that moment to **being reborn**, and I don't know that there's a better description for what happens.

In Matthew's gospel, this is evident in the stories that immediately follow Jesus comments about meeting people where they are. I think these might just be the most emotionally packed moments in Jesus whole ministry to other people. Let's read this together:

As Jesus was saying this, the leader of a synagogue came and fell before him. "My daughter has just died," he said, "but you can bring her back to life again if you just come and lay your hand on her." So Jesus and his disciples got up and went with him.

*Just then a woman who had suffered **for twelve years** with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe, for she thought, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed."*

*Jesus turned around, and catching her gaze, he said, "**Daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well.**" And the woman was healed at that moment.*

(Matthew 9:18-22)

The distraught father loses all sense of his dignity and rank, falls at Jesus feet and begs him to bring his daughter back. Here is a man whose great love for **his daughter** causes him to look past the reservations his leaders, the Pharisees have with Jesus, possibly even putting his job on the line, because he trusts God and wants healing.

Then, Jesus is interrupted again. It's another epic need: this woman has been suffering for twelve years! In her condition, there's not a person or thing she can touch that the Jews wouldn't consider unclean—so she has been **isolated for twelve years**. Afraid to be visible in the crowd, because they could run her off—she sneaks up, reaches out and touches Jesus cloak as He passes, believing that the act will heal her. Jesus, in His love, doesn't let her go unnoticed. He turns and says something I want to make sure we see: in front of the whole crowd, He calls her, "daughter." "**Daughter**," the same love relationship that drove the synagogue leader to beg Jesus, Jesus uses to address her. A God who loves us that much, must be worthy of our trust.

Picture: Jesus on the Cross

How much does God love us? This much (**hands spread**) Like Mack, the maker of the universe would rather give His life for you, than live without you. A God who loves us that much, is worthy of our trust.

(Picture – Waterfall)

As the sadness begins to lift off Mac, you see incredible joy take its place. Mac hugs Jesus for the first time. He rushes back to embrace Papa. He sleeps peacefully for the first time in a long time. And Mack is able to see that God can make **incredible good come out of incredible tragedy**.

By the middle of the movie, Mac has taken some HUGE steps...but **God's work is just beginning**. Living in relationship with God, knowing God loves him, trusting that God is good, and knowing God wants what is best for everyone—Mackenzie finds he has the capacity to love, and even the capacity to forgive, that he never would have thought possible. God leads Mackenzie to face his father and to face his daughter's murderer, and **heal past hurts**. God leads him to **finish grieving** for his dead daughter. And Mac awakens with the strength to love and **lead his older daughter** through the grief and guilt she feels toward her sister's death. What Mackenzie can do, and what God does through Mackenzie is just as big a miracle as what God did in Him...but for that, you're going to have to watch the movie for yourself.

I want you to understand three very key things today:

Firstly, when **great pain** comes to us, we must work hard to keep it from distorting our ability to see God, and that He is good.

Secondly, we must believe that God is not only good, but that He loves us too much not to be **worthy of our trust**, no matter what we go through.

As Charles Spurgeon once said it,

**God is too wise to be mistaken, and He is too good to be unkind.
When you can't trace his hand, you can always trust His heart.**

As we wrap up today, I want to ask you some very important questions:

Firstly, **when was the last time you felt God's love for you, personally?** God loves you, but have you experienced that lately?

If you haven't done that in a while, make sure you simply spend some time with God this week. If you've been too busy, or too distracted, if you have to go to bed early and get up before everyone else, give Him a chance to speak to you, one on one. Block out some time. No matter how long you've been a Christian, no matter how involved you are at church or in the community, nothing can ever replace or build you up like time alone with God.

I also challenge you to use the name, "Papa" this week when you talk to God. Think of Him differently this week, and ask Him to draw close.

If you are wondering where to start or how to connect with Him, as you leave today we are going to give you a letter from God to us. It's a bunch of lines from Scripture put together as if God wrote it to you. Take time to meditate on it this week and ask yourself if you truly believe all the things it says God thinks about you.

(Letter)

Secondly, **what is keeping you from trusting God right now?**

Are you angry? Hurt? Do you feel guilt? Is there a question you need an answer to? Why didn't God stop this? Why must I face this pain? Why couldn't I do better? Could I have saved him?

Are you a Christian who stopped trusting God because something bad happened? Are you avoiding faith in God altogether because of things you've experienced or witnessed?

I would encourage you to take these struggles to the cross, and talk with God about them in light of His sacrifice. See if that won't help you work through them.

[final disclaimer]

Should you expect God to appear and spend the weekend with you to help you sort things out? No, probably not.

God has a different plan working in the world today: it's called, "YOU" God uses us to be His representatives on this earth. We are to model His love, and meet people where they are. We are to be the ones who love so well, that people see God's love through us.

If you need to feel God's love, you spend time with God's family, the church, and you'll find He is as real and close to you as the God of the shack. oneChurch exists—we do what we do—so that people experience the God who loves them and the transformation that brings, every day.

If you are at a good place with God, you feel close to Him and you trust Him—then I hope you are showing His love to others. This community is full of hurting people. We are called to go and be the church! We need to model God's love to those who are hurting!