

The Shack
by William Paul Young

A parish book discussion designed and facilitated by Sr. Diane Morgan, OP
St Ignatius Martyr Parish, Long Beach, NY

8/18/09

Resources:

- Reviews by Bishop Emil Wcela ([LI Catholic](#)), Rev. Robert Lauder ([The Tablet](#)), [AMERICA](#) magazine 7/6/09, [NY Times](#) 6/24/08, Susan Stabile (St. Thomas Univ.) - <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com>

- *Finding God in the Shack*, Dr. Roger E. Olson, IVP Books, © 2009.

Discussion points:

1. What is it about *The Shack* that over 2 million copies have been sold? What is your own reaction to it?

2. The review by David Nantais in *America* magazine points out three themes that that are raised in the book –
 - God is interested in our lives.
(Dr. Roger Olson) p. 138 – God is good and can be trusted, not to fix everything, but to care and do his best to work all things together for my good – Romans 8: 28.

 - We can encounter God in our pain.
Theodicy: the attempt to reconcile a loving, all-powerful God with the suffering in the world.
The shack represents the place in Mack’s soul where he is hurt the most and it is here that God meets him face-to-face.

 - Forgiveness is possible.
(*The Shack* p. 224, 226-227): Papa – “Forgiveness is not about forgetting...Forgiveness does not excuse anything...What he did was terrible. He caused incredible pain to many. It was wrong, and anger is the right response to something that is so wrong. But

don't let the anger and pain and loss you feel prevent you from forgiving him and removing your hands from around his neck.”

3. *The Shack* is a novel, not a theology text. How did you react to the images of the Trinity – Papa, the Middle Eastern carpenter, and Sarayu?
 - (Nantais) The notion that God is primarily about relationships with humanity and that God is a relationship among three persons (Trinity) – is both consoling and challenging.

4. *The Shack* seems to imply that one can experience God fully apart from Christian community. Olson doesn't think it is necessary to be part of an organization or institution but that a follower of Jesus needs the fellowship of God's people, that there is no purely individualistic Christianity (Olson, p. 118). What do you think and why?

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8/18/09 and continued on 9/2/09

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Discussion points for gathering #2:

1. One of the reasons Mack is so upset with God is that the world is such a mess, and God doesn't seem to have done enough to fix it. (*The Shack* – pp. 53, 92, 161) (Olson p. 21-23)
How have you been similarly angry or upset with God?
 - Conversation with Sr. Diane and a local Oklahoma parish staff member after bombing of federal bldg. in Oklahoma City
2. How can God be all good and all powerful and evil still exist? *The Shack* suggests that God limits himself by not controlling every detail out of respect for our free will and free choices, and because love doesn't force its will on others. (Olson, p. 46). Do you think God ever forces people against their will? Why or why not?
3. Many think of God as a sweet, grandfatherly figure or a harsh punitive judge (Olson, p. 33). How do you respond to *The Shack's* attempt to correct these images of God, especially by portraying God as Papa and Sarayu?
4. In *Finding God in the Shack*, Olson points out that Jesus, the psalmists, Jeremiah, the Book of lamentations and the Apostle Paul all struggled with pain, grief, sorrow, and terrible loss. (Olson pp. 134-135).
Are these experiences normal and not un-Christian? Why?