

The Shack-A Review

By David Anderson

I. The Preamble: This book is an allegory of a man named Mack who loses his daughter through a horrible situation and encounters the Trinity in a shack where the atrocity occurs.

II. The Positives:

- a. The book emphasizes a *personal relationship with God*. He is a God who we can talk to and relate to, like David did with God in the Psalms. There is a sweetness and authenticity to this relationship with God.
- b. It teaches that *suffering has purpose*. God is not a whipping-boy to blame for every evil in the world, never to be thanked for all His goodness and mercy, and then cursed whenever a tragedy happens. This was the best part of the book in my opinion. It takes God off the dock.

III. The Negatives:

- a. *It has a low view of Scripture.*
 - i. For example, “God’s voice had been reduced to paper... Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was the guilt edges.” 65-66.
 - ii. All throughout this book, feelings, intuition, and relationship trump the revealed will of God through the Scriptures. A high view of Scripture is nowhere to be found.
- b. *It condones irreverence in the presence of God.*
 - i. Mack snaps at God, cusses in God’s presence, sneers at God. God just sort of whimpers along.
 - ii. There is a cavalier, nonchalant, irreverence in the presence of God.
 - iii. This is a far cry from Isaiah crying out for mercy from God in Isaiah 6.
- c. *It denies the significance of a mediator.*
 - i. Jesus says to Mack, “I am the best way any human can relate to Papa or Sarayu (the Holy Spirit).”
 - ii. It implies universalism. The book says that Jesus is the simply the *best* way to relate to God. There is no clear indication that Jesus is the *only* way, the *only* mediator, the *only* savior.
- d. *It has a low view of the significance of sin.*
 - i. Papa says, “I don’t have to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring people from the inside.”
 - ii. Papa doesn’t seem too disturbed by sin. It seems more like a bummer, than a significant dilemma.
- e. *It has a warped view of God’s identity:*
 - i. This is probably the main error in the book. The central motif in this story is the identity of God. It aims to communicate a fresh new look on a timeless doctrine.
 - ii. It has a heretical view of the Trinity.
 1. It is more like modalism than the historical view that God is three separate persons, all fully God, and all one God.
 - iii. It has a distorted view of the Father:
 1. Papa is revealed as a heavy-set African-American woman known as “Papa.”
 - a. I thought a good quote from Bruce Waltke would be helpful here (HT: Tim Challies), “God, who is over all, represents himself by masculine names

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and titles, not feminine ones. He identifies himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, not Parent, Child, and Spirit, not Mother, Daughter, and Spirit. Jesus taught his church to address God as “Father” (Luke 11:2) and to baptize disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). God’s titles are King, not Queen; Lord, not Lady. God, not mortals, has the right to name himself. It is inexcusable hubris and idolatry on the part of mortals to change the images by which the eternal God chooses to represent himself. We cannot change God’s names, titles, or metaphors without committing idolatry, for we will have re-imagined him in a way other than the metaphors and the incarnation by which he revealed himself. His representations and incarnations are inseparable from his being.” Bruce Waltke

2. Papa has scars on her wrists as well as Jesus.
- iv. It mocks hierarchy and roles within the Godhead and sees it as one of the main causes of human evils in the world.
 1. Rather, roles within the Godhead are fundamental to our understanding of submission and headship. Jesus submits to the loving leadership of the Father. It is not a power-mongering display of evil; it is the loving function of the Godhead. It is good, not evil.
 2. Roles between men and women and between the Godhead are precious in God’s sight and designed by Him. The results of the Fall have distorted these distinctions, but New Testament Scripture recovers Biblical manhood and womanhood in light of the function between the Trinity. *The Shack* distorts this view and says that it is “one of the main causes of human evils in the world.”

IV. Conclusion:

- a. This is not a good book. The good parts of the book are too surrounded by error and distortion that it cannot possibly be redeemed or recommended. It simply promotes too much bad theology. This is important due to the reality that many people are saying their lives have been changed because of their new view of who God is in light of this book. Yes, there are some gems to hold on to, but not in light of all the erroneous distortions that this book promotes.
- b. Much more could be said, these are simply a few of the many things that stuck out to me, so if you want a truly *excellent* review of *The Shack*, then please read Tim Challies very thorough review at this link: http://www.challies.com/media/The_Shack.pdf