

# THE SHACK DISCUSSION GUIDE



YOU'RE NEVER AS ALONE AS YOU THINK

FROM THE PRODUCER OF  
LIFE OF PI AND THE BLIND SIDE

## THE SHACK

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# THE SHACK

On March 3, 2017, Lionsgate will release a new major motion picture, *The Shack*. Based on one of the top 100 best-selling books of all time, *The Shack* follows a father's journey through excruciating pain and loss—and offers hope for healing and life after sorrow.

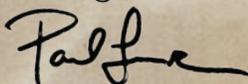
This film shows us who God is, revealing His character bit by bit until we see the full picture of our faithful Father who loves us more than we can imagine. As the main character, Mack, wrestles with trusting God and forgiving others, we are prompted to turn inward and take a hard look at our own trust and forgiveness. Bring your family, friends, and church groups to see it—*The Shack* is sure to jumpstart many worthwhile conversations.

To help guide your discussion and interaction with the film, we have provided this guide. You'll find downloadable links to the 4 scenes at our faith resources website, [TheShackResources.com](http://TheShackResources.com).

Enhance your film experience by diving into the pages of this guide ahead of *The Shack*'s March release. Choose to cover each section individually or sequentially over a number of weeks. Then, we hope you'll decide to take a group to see the movie so you can delve into a rich, thought-provoking conversation afterward.

Thank you for supporting this transformational film.

Blessings,



Paul Lauer

Motive Entertainment

It's dinnertime, and Papa invites Mack to join her in the kitchen to knead dough. Mack is overwhelmed by his pain, and blames God for letting his daughter die—for abandoning her the same way God abandoned Jesus on the cross. "If you are who you say you are, where were you when I needed you?" Mack asks. Papa gently replies, "When all you see is your pain, you lose sight of me." Papa had never left Mack's side—instead Mack's pain had clouded his view, keeping him from seeing his faithful Father.



## I NEVER LEFT YOU | GOD PROMISES TO WALK WITH US ALWAYS.

### DEUTERONOMY 31:8 (NIV)

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

### JOHN 3:16 (NIV)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

### TIME TO REFLECT:

When you were a kid, what was the single most terrifying feeling? It was being alone, right? Maybe you were in a crowded place and thought you were with your parents, only to look up and realize they were gone. Or maybe you struggled with being alone in the dark in your room at night, with no one there to comfort you. Can you remember what thoughts ran through your mind in those moments? How come my parents aren't here? I feel so alone! What's going to happen to me?

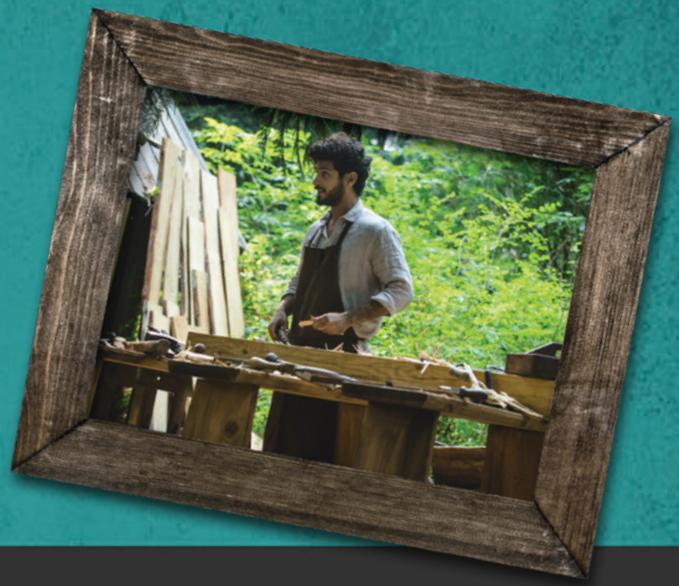
Those feelings of fear and abandonment are magnified when we find ourselves alone as adults. Only now, the fear isn't so much losing sight of our parents at the theme park or falling asleep by ourselves in a dark room. No, now the fear is that others won't show up—that they'll abandon us when we need them most. For Mack, his worst fear came true. When he needed God the most, it seemed like God abandoned him.

And Mack had been walking the lonely road of grief ever since. Christian theologian C.S. Lewis said, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." This was true for Mack, too. And perhaps it's true for you. Maybe you needed God to show up, but He didn't show up the way you expected.

Can you talk about that experience with your group? How did it feel to think God wasn't there with you in that moment—to feel like He had abandoned you?

Job knew what it felt like to wonder if God had turned His back on him. He experienced immense suffering—losing all ten of his children and everything he had. Even his health was taken from him. Like Mack, Job responded in anger, "I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me" (Job 30:20). But in the end,





the Lord heard Job's cries and responded, showing that He had actually never left him—that He had been with him the whole time.

What times in your life have caused you to question whether God was with you?

In *The Shack*, Mack is incredible angry with Papa for seemingly abandoning him. But Papa reveals the truth—it wasn't that God had left Mack all alone; he simply couldn't see God's faithful presence through his pain.

Can you relate? How might you remember to step back from the hurt for a moment and realize God is still there? Scripture makes it clear that God will never leave us—even when we feel alone. Does that bring you comfort to know He is always by your side? How would you live differently if you truly knew that God is always at your side—through every hardship and trial?

#### **TEACHABLE CONCEPTS:**

1. Our circumstances don't indicate whether God is with us. Hardship and pain don't mean He is far from us.
2. God has promised to walk with us always. He will never leave us.
3. Knowing God is with us means we have nothing to fear—we can walk confidently in His presence.

#### **FINAL PERSONAL THOUGHT AND PRAYER:**

God, thank You for promising to always be with me. I'll admit, there have been times when You felt far away, or even completely absent. When the storms of life were raging all around me, I cried out to You, but I felt utterly alone. I realize now, that when I focus on my own pain, I can't see You. Help me to recognize Your presence in those moments. Help me to understand that You love me unconditionally, even when You don't intervene the way I think You should. And thank You, Lord, for Your faithfulness.



Mack is rowing a boat across the calm lake. Suddenly, the water around him begins to turn black, and his boat starts to break up and sink. Terrified, Mack clings on for dear life. Then he hears a familiar voice. It's Jesus. Mack blames Jesus for causing the mayhem, but Jesus tells Mack that the storm is inside him, and that he can control it if he trusts Him. "Take a deep breath and listen to my voice," Jesus says.



## THE STORM WITHIN | *IN THE MIDST OF LIFE'S CHALLENGES, WE MUST TRUST GOD.*

### **MATTHEW 14:22-33 (NIV)**

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

### **PSALM 9:10 (NIV)**

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

### **PSALM 56:3 (NIV)**

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

### **TIME TO REFLECT:**

Chances are, you've seen stories of tornadoes and hurricanes on TV—people who've lived through terrifying storm situations. You hear their story of running for the storm shelter as the wind blows fiercely and the world goes berserk around them. But once inside the storm shelter, there is calm. They are safe.

It shows that our natural survival instinct is to find refuge amidst a storm—to protect ourselves from the wind and the rain. And this tendency proves true not just when it comes to bad weather, but also when we face emotional storms in life. Maybe you walked into work one day only to find out you'd been let go, leaving you scrambling to make ends meet. Perhaps you got a call from your doctor. They found something on your scan, and suddenly your future seemed unsure. Or maybe you lost a loved one all too soon, and the weight of your grief has made it hard to breathe—hard to do anything.

When these storms hit, our instinct is to retreat. We find ourselves running across the yard for that storm shelter. Maybe for you, that shelter is your family. They're who you turn to first when things get tough. Or, if we're honest, maybe it's the remote control. You hit that "next" button on your Netflix show like your life depended on it, because you think it's the only thing that will distract you from the storm raging around you. But God has promised to be our refuge. Nahum 1:7 says, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him."

Do you find yourself turning to other people or other things when the storms of life hit? If so, why do you think that is? Do you trust that God can really be your shelter in those hard moments?

Jesus tells Mack that the storm he sees all around him is actually raging inside of him. What do you think Jesus meant by that? Imagine if, in a tornado or hurricane, instead of running for the storm shelter, you started opening all of the doors and windows in your house, letting the storm inside.



Can you imagine how much more havoc the wind and the rain would wreak? It seems crazy to think anyone would do that, but that's exactly what we do when we reject the peace and calm God offers us, and instead allow the storm to rage inside us.

Have you ever let a storm rage inside of you? What were the consequences of not choosing to rest in God's peace?

In Matthew 14, Peter gets out of the boat to walk on the water toward Jesus. And he does it, putting one foot forward, then the other. Suddenly, Peter looks around him and sees the huge waves and feels the strength of the storm. He panics, takes his eyes off of Jesus, and begins to sink. Storms are scary—it's normal to be afraid. Even the disciples were terrified. But Jesus told them to take courage. "Don't be afraid," He said.

Have you ever felt swallowed by fear when walking through one of life's storms? Describe what that felt like, what you were thinking in those moments.

Scripture tells us that Peter began to sink when he took his eyes off of Jesus. Have you ever taken your eyes off of Jesus and focused on the storm around you instead? Like Peter, did you find yourself sinking? How can we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus through the hardships we will walk through in this life?

If you have trouble trusting Jesus in the midst of the storm, take a moment to ask yourself, "Do I really believe He is worthy of my trust?" One of the best ways we can cultivate trust in God is by reminding ourselves of what He has already done on our behalf, or on behalf of others. Take several 3x5 cards and jot down the ways in which you have seen God work in your life and in the lives of those around you. Put them in your car, on your bathroom mirror, and on the fridge—wherever you will see them often. Commit to asking God to help you place your trust in Him each time you read those cards.

#### TEACHABLE CONCEPTS:

1. When we walk through hardship in life, it's all too easy to focus on the storm instead of the Savior. God wants us to keep our eyes fixed on Him.
2. Even when life seems scary or painful, God is good and completely deserving of our trust. He is the only One who will not let us down.
3. When we trust Jesus fully, we find freedom from life's circumstances, knowing that God is Sovereign and in control, and that He loves us more than we can imagine.

#### FINAL PERSONAL THOUGHT AND PRAYER:

Lord, so often I feel I'm sinking like Peter did in the midst of life's storms. It's so hard to let go and trust You when it feels like life is falling apart. I find myself trying to control the situation—even though I know I can't—trying to put the pieces back together. Help me to realize that You are with me even then, even when the pain seems too much to bear. Help me to trust in You each day.



Out of His great love for us, God sent His Son, Jesus, to die in our place, bearing the judgment we deserved for our sin.

In a cave, Mack meets Sophia, a beautiful, olive-skinned woman in a flowing robe. She is Wisdom and Mack is here for judgment. But he's not here to be judged—he is the judge. In anger, Mack admits that he feels God is to blame for what happened to his daughter. Sophia explains that if it's so easy for Mack to judge God, he must judge his own children—he must choose which one will spend eternity in Heaven, and which one will spend eternity in hell. Sophia is asking Mack to do what he believes God does—choose between His children.



## PAPA'S HEART | GOD LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY AS HIS OWN CHILDREN.

### ROMANS 5:6-8 (NIV)

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

### 1 JOHN 3:1A (NASB)

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.

### ROMANS 8:38-39 (NIV)

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



### TIME TO REFLECT:

Love is one of those concepts that has been watered down by our culture. People are constantly sharing how much they love their new shoes or their favorite celebrity. When everyone loves everything, love starts to mean next to nothing.

We also see married couples proclaiming their undying love for each other, promising to love each other for better or for worse until death do them part, only to divorce a few years later, saying, "I'm just not in love with him (or her) anymore."

No wonder we struggle to understand God's perfect, unconditional love for us! Have you ever had a hard time wrapping your mind, and your heart, around God's love?

In the film, Mack struggles with understanding God's love, too, accusing Papa of abandoning Missy and him—blaming Him for what happened to his daughter. But you can imagine the angst Mack feels when Sophia tells him he must judge his own children, choosing one to send to Heaven and one to hell. In that moment, he catches a glimpse of Papa's heart, seeing with new eyes the sacrifice God made when He sent His Son to die in our place.

Paula Cichan buckled her four-year-old into the seat next to her on the airplane. It was August 16, 1987, and Paula and her daughter, Cecelia, were taking Northwest Airlines flight 225 out of Detroit. The plane taxied down the runway, with four-year-old Cecelia chattering away about how excited she was to be going up in the air. As soon as the plane became airborne, Paula knew there was a problem. As fast as it had climbed, it was now falling back to the ground below. Instinctively, Paula unbuckled her seatbelt and got down on her knees in front of her daughter. She wrapped her arms and body around Cecelia, holding onto her little frame with every ounce of effort she had. In an awful turn of events, the plane crashed, killing all but one person aboard. Little Cecelia was the sole survivor of the crash—saved by her mother's arms around her.



Paula didn't hesitate to act to save her child. Her sacrifice gave her daughter, Cecelia, a future—allowing her to live. If we, as imperfect, sinful parents are willing to sacrifice everything for our children, how much more is God willing to give for us? The gospel answers that very question. Out of His great love for us, God held nothing back, not even the life of His own Son. He deemed us worth saving, worth sending His Son to die for, so that we could spend eternity with Him.

The words of this hymn capture it beautifully:  
“How deep the Father’s love for us,  
How vast beyond all measure,  
That He should give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure.”

Have you ever felt like God didn't love you? Like, if He only knew what you've done, the things you've said, it wouldn't be possible for Him to love you? Well, here's the amazing thing: God is omniscient, which means He is all knowing, so He knows everything you've ever done and ever will do. He knew it all before you even existed, before Jesus ever walked this earth. And He loves you still—knowing everything. There's no hiding from Him, and there's no escaping His love. That's how all encompassing and complete it is. When we fully understand the depth of God's love—it changes everything.

Take a moment to dwell on the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Let the truth of His unconditional love sink deep into your mind and heart.

Are there any preconceived notions or wrong ideas you have been holding onto about how God sees you? If you are willing, share those with your group. Affirm each other as they share, reminding him or her of how much God loves them.

Romans 5 makes it clear that nothing—absolutely nothing—can separate us from God's mighty love. What burdens or past sins do you need to lay at the foot of the cross to step into the freedom of God's unconditional love?

#### TEACHABLE CONCEPTS:

1. God demonstrated His incredible love for us when He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins.
2. God's heart is the heart of a Father—He calls us His children.
3. Nothing we can do or say will ever separate us from the love of God. It's unconditional—no catches or strings attached—and it always will be.

#### FINAL PERSONAL THOUGHT AND PRAYER:

God, thank You for Your incredible sacrifice on the cross. I know I can only begin to grasp what that cost You and Your Son, but I am so grateful. Thank You for loving me, despite my failures and my shortcomings—despite not following You faithfully. You are a good, good Father and I am humbled to be called Your child.



On their way to retrieve Missy's body, Papa and Mack pause at a small boulder near the path. Mack knows he must forgive Missy's killer, but he is reluctant, unwilling to let go of his anger and hatred. Mack unleashes that anger toward Papa, "You just let him get away with it!" he says. "No one gets away with anything," Papa replies. "Everything bears consequences." Papa explains that he isn't asking Mack to excuse what his daughter's killer did, but rather to trust Papa. Still, Mack is angry and conflicted. "Forgiveness doesn't establish a relationship," says Papa, "It's just about letting go of his throat."



## FREEDOM IN FORGIVENESS | GOD CALLS US TO FORGIVE OT

### COLOSSIANS 3:13 (NIV)

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

### LUKE 6:37 (NIV)

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

### MATTHEW 18:21-22 (NIV)

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

### TIME TO REFLECT:

Mack knows it's time to forgive Missy's killer, but everything in him wants to hold onto the anger and bitterness he has harbored against him for so long. And can you blame him? I mean, can you even imagine how you would feel if someone took one of your family members away from you? I think we'd call whatever anger you had toward that person completely justified and leave it at that. But Jesus calls us to a higher standard. He raises the bar higher than we could ever reach on our own, and then gives us His grace and strength to meet it. That's the beauty of walking with Him.

When the Nazis invaded the Netherlands in 1940, Corrie ten Boom and her family began helping their Jewish neighbors. After a Jewish woman appeared on their doorstep in 1942, looking for a safe place to stay, the Ten Booms began hiding Jews in their home. They soon became a vital part of the Dutch underground movement. In 1944, however, Corrie and her family were arrested. Corrie and her sister, Betsie, were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, a women's labor camp in Nazi Germany.

Despite the harsh conditions, Corrie and Betsie held worship services and faithfully read a Bible they had managed to sneak in. After losing her sister, Betsie, in December 1944, Corrie was released at the end of the war in the spring of 1945. She returned to the Netherlands to open a rehabilitation center for concentration camp survivors.

If anyone had a right to be angry and harbor unforgiveness, it was Corrie. After all, she was wrongly imprisoned—her family forever torn apart by the Nazis. But she recognized her need to forgive them. "Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart," she said. Corrie's words reflect incredible wisdom. She realized that, even though she didn't feel like forgiving those who had mistreated her and killed her sister, she could, by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Townend, Stuart. "How Deep the Father's Love for Us," 1995, Thankyou Music.



In the decades that followed, Corrie ten Boom traveled around the world, speaking about her experiences and the freedom she had found in Jesus. What might have happened if she had chosen to hold onto her hatred instead? Thousands of people would likely never have heard her share the Good News—that Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins, and that through Him, we have redemption. By His grace, we are washed clean, made new, and called to extend the same radical forgiveness to others.

Have you ever struggled to forgive someone? What was it that made you want to hold on to your anger toward him or her?

We don't mind withholding forgiveness from others, but we are desperate to receive it when we are the ones who have wronged another person. Have you ever asked someone else for forgiveness and received it? What did that feel like? Did you experience relief knowing that person didn't hold your actions or words against you?

All throughout Scripture, we see a God who loves lavishly and forgives freely. Psalm 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Hebrews 8:12 says, "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." How does understanding the depth of God's forgiveness for you help you forgive others?

What bitterness do you need to confess to the Lord? Take a moment to share it with Him. What steps might you need to take to offer forgiveness to someone in your life? Commit to beginning that journey this week!

#### TEACHABLE CONCEPTS:

1. God forgives us freely, without finding fault.
2. God calls us to live in the same way, forgiving those who have wronged us.
3. When we ask God to help us forgive, we find freedom from anger and bitterness.

#### FINAL PERSONAL THOUGHT AND PRAYER:

God, thank You for forgiving me. I know so often I lose sight of my own sin that You have wiped away. When I focus on what others have done to me, it's easy to become bitter and grow angry toward them. I know that's not how You have called me to live. Would You give me Your eyes for others? Help me to forgive as You have forgiven. I want to walk in that freedom with You.





Based on one of the Top 100 best-selling books of all time with over 22 million in print worldwide, **THE SHACK** takes us on a father's life-transforming journey that will show him the ultimate truth about love, loss and forgiveness.

After suffering a family tragedy, Mack Phillips [Sam Worthington] spirals into a deep depression, "the great sadness," that isolates him from his family and his closest friend Willie [Tim McGraw] and causes him to question his innermost fundamental beliefs. Facing a crisis of faith, he receives a mysterious letter urging him to an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Despite his doubts, Mack journeys to the shack and encounters an enigmatic trio of strangers led by a woman named Papa [Octavia Spencer]. Through this meeting, Mack finds important truths that will transform his understanding of his tragedy and change his life forever.

For all those who have wondered where God is in their pain, for those who have questioned if God is there at all, **The Shack** presents an unforgettable encounter with a divine love Who promises to never leave us.



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