***The Shack***

**Week 1: Thinking About God**

Shack Background

* Who wrote it? Why? Credentials?
  + William P. Young, child of missionaries/pastor. Theologically educated, served in ministry. Experienced much pain in childhood, lived in and created some pain in adulthood. Lived under The Great Sadness for years. Wrote it as a Christmas gift to his children, to help them better understand God, better understand what their father had experienced. Urged by friends to share this book.
  + The Shack is a fictional novel, makes no claim otherwise. Is not a substitute for careful study and reflection of the Scriptures. Is better understood with a grasp of the Bible, and perhaps parts of the Bible are better understood after a reading of this book. Not different than what we experience regularly through preaching and teaching: To help us better understand what the Bible is saying here, here’s this story or this explanation. Primary way Jesus taught was through metaphor/story. Young functions in the way any teacher of theology does: “here is my best understanding of who God is and how God interacts with humanity.” Primary way Jesus taught was through metaphor/story.
* How does The Shack: affirm, differ, challenge my understanding? Where does it affirm or differ from: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience. Concerns from some that The Shack presents heretical teaching. There are some foundational things about The Christian Faith that, when they are changed, the belief system ceases to be The Christian Faith anymore (see Tyron Inbody’s book *The Faith of the Christian Church* for a good layout of this). Example of Mormanism and Jehovah’s Witnesses. While Young presents some ideas that are not necessarily in the mainstream of current pop-Christian theology, many respected Christian theologians find *The Shack* to be well within the bounds of the defined guardrails of Christian belief.
* God is indeed like an iceberg, we can only see a fraction, can’t begin to understand the totality. So maybe we shouldn’t try to understand at all. Or, maybe we should try to understand what we can! It’s never finished, never figured it all out. But theology is worth it: our faith seeking understanding.
* Theology affects everything in our life:
  + How we relate to God, others, nature (care of creation doesn’t matter to those who believe the end is near), self
  + True especially in the shack/the crucible/the valley
    - “the places you get stuck, you get hurt, you get damaged…the thing where shame or hurt is centered.”
  + Check out the press conference following the Overland Park Jewish Community Center shooting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxDOnqVgjas>. The person doing the primary speaking is a member of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.
* Main characters
  + Mack Phillips (Nan wife; John, Tyler, Kate, Missy children; Willie friend)
  + Papa
  + Sarayu
  + Jesus
  + Sophia
* Messages of The Shack
  + God loves each person profoundly
  + Relationships are the center of life
  + The critical role of forgiveness in our lives
  + The past is redeemable
  + The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the most critical acts in history
  + Freedom is worth the price of the possibility/probability of pain and suffering
  + God is present even in the darkest times
  + Our words and actions matter – we have a mission to live
  + Eternity will be an endless adventure of deepening our understanding of and relationship with God and others
* Small group questions
  + What scriptures, traditions, reason, and experiences are primary influencers of your theology?
    - Scripture – think about key verses, stories, teachings
    - Tradition – denomination, area of the country/world, Christianity at-large
    - Reason – your own logic, brain type, which teachers/pastors/books have shaped your approach
    - Experience – your life story, the ways you have sensed God working in and through you, the witness of other people that has impacted you
  + “Luther said somewhere that God makes theologians by sending them to hell. In hell, of course, no one is interested in mere theology. In the emptiness of grief, in the pain, the trauma of suffering, we are not interested in pseudo-promises… What we learn in hell is that we want out. We learn desperation for life, for healing, for real salvation, for a Savior who saves here and now, who reconciles, who heals our brokenness and delivers us from our shame. We need something that works.” – C. Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited.*
    - What do you think about this statement? Where do you agree, or disagree? Do you have life experience that verifies your stance?