

The Shack
Week 6: Lessons from
the Garden
Mar. 22-28



ICEBREAKER: What was the most amazing sight you've ever seen? Was it the first time you saw your bride or groom on your wedding day? The first time the doctor placed your new born child in your arms? A spectacular vista from atop of a mountain or watching the sunset on a beach? What made that moment so memorable?

1. Mack learns from Sarayu about fractals. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a fractal as, "any of various extremely irregular curves or shapes for which any suitably chosen part is similar in shape to a given larger or smaller part when magnified or reduced to the same size." As Sarayu leads Mack through a garden filled with various forms of plant life, she says to him, "From above it's a fractal...something considered simple and orderly that is actually composed of repeated patterns no matter how magnified. A fractal is almost infinitely complex. I love fractals, so I put them everywhere" (129). Mack calls the garden "a mess." Can you see any significance in this passage regarding where you're at spiritually? Aren't Christians supposed to have it "all figured out" and not be "complex" let alone confused? Read **1 Corinthians 14:33**, **James 1:5** and **Proverbs 3:5, 6** and discuss what you glean from these passages regarding confusion.
2. After destroying the beautiful spot of plants, Sarayu says to Mack, "It's not the work, but the purpose that makes it special...it's the only kind I do" (131). The Theologian Thomas Merton wrote the following prayer;

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that, if I do this, You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to face my perils alone."

Did you ever experience a time in your life when everything seemed perfect only to suffer a terrible loss where it felt like the rug was suddenly pulled out from under you? At such a time did you feel as though the LORD had left you to fend for yourself? What verses of Scripture can help you through the times when you are suffering from a loss? Read **Hebrews 4:15, 16** and **Psalms 31:7** and discuss.

3. What are two of the most famous gardens found in Scripture? There is the Garden of Eden in which sin was ushered into Creation (**Genesis 2:8** and **Genesis 3:21-24**). Gethsemane, in the Mount of Olives is another one. It is the garden where Jesus was arrested the night before his

crucifixion. Read **Luke 22:39-44** and **1 Corinthians 15:45**. Compare the two Adams. What does this tell you about God's plan for all of creation, including you? In light of what you've read in Scripture, do you think there is any significance that Young uses a garden to reveal to Mack the state of his soul? (138). If your soul were a garden what would you find planted there?

4. A recent article written by Greg Laurie in "Decision" magazine, a publication of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, chronicles Laurie's dealings with the aftermath of his son, Christopher's tragic accident that left his daughter-in-law, granddaughters, family members including Laurie and his wife as well Laurie's church community where Christopher served as art director heartbroken and asking the question of "why"? A close personal friend of Laurie's told him something that helped in answering that question; "Never trade what you don't know for what you do know." Laurie began to examine what it is that he did know about God during times of trouble found in Scripture;

"... (When people ask why this happened), I would answer "I don't know, and I don't know that I ever will. I just know that I need God more than I have ever needed Him in my life....You can take the hardest things that happen to you in life—the unexpected death of a loved one or the realization that you are going to die soon—and you can know this: God will be with you. Corrie Ten Boom, who survived imprisonment in a concentration camp during WW II wrote, "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still."

Laurie encourages us to bring all our troubles out in the open and place them at the throne of God through prayer. David said in **Psalms 62:8** (NIV) "Trust in him at all times. O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." No one is immune to tragedy. But we have a champion on our side to pull us through such times; the Godhead. What can you do to remind yourself when trouble befalls you that God is aware of every aspect of your heart and soul and is helping you through the pain? Does the importance of community come to mind?

5. Craig talked about the importance of pruning in cultivating a vine. This image is found throughout Scripture. Read **John 15:1-17**. What is Jesus saying in these verses? How can you apply his teachings when you are facing troubles?