

Paul Young's book, *The Shack*, was given to me in Zimbabwe in mid 2008. After an initial negative reaction to his portrayal of the Trinity, I found the subject matter intensely interesting and helpful. I had the privilege of meeting Paul in November 2008 at Peshurst Anglican Church, where he was conducting a series of meetings with the Perichoresis people (www.perichoresis.org.au). His insight into the essentially relational nature of the Trinity coalesces with theirs. The following series of interviews were posted on the Worldwide Church of God website (www.wcg.org), the former cult around Herbert W. Armstrong, which has re-entered orthodoxy (that's another story in itself). They are downloadable there in audio and video format. I have edited out some conversational bits (Paul says, "you know" a lot!), but the essence of the interview is completely unchanged. May it bless you, as it did me, on our journey into the embrace of our loving God. Brian Rensford

FIRST INTERVIEW

J. Michael Fezell: A new novel has skyrocketed to the top of the charts capturing the imagination of Christians everywhere. What's so surprising about *The Shack* is its portrayal of God - not the solitary God of popular imagination such as the one portrayed by George Burns in the film, "Oh, God" or by Morgan Freeman in "Evan Almighty," but the God of Christian orthodoxy - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - three in one and one in three, the Holy Trinity. The result has been hailed as life-changing. What is it about "The Shack" that is capturing Christians' imagination?

Paul Young: I think that for a lot of us that grew up inside religious kinds of environments, *The Shack* allows God to become accessible and understandable in a way that hasn't been out there in the same kind of form. There's something about a story, there's something about art in general, that has a way of getting past our preconceptions and our paradigms and everything else. Music does that. It has a way of going right past our intellectuality and penetrating us in the heart.

And I think that's why parables that Jesus would use were so effective because they had a way of penetrating past people's preconceptions and their stereotypes and everything else. And I think that as a story it has a way of doing it and when you come to the character and nature of God, a lot of us - and I grew up as a missionary kid and a preacher's kid and I went to Bible school and seminary and we always try to find analogies or some way to comprehend the Trinity, and I didn't intend to write a great book on the Trinity, that was totally an accident. What I did do was want to communicate to my children, the fact that the very nature of relationship has to be embedded in the character and nature of God.

JMF: So you actually wrote this for your children to begin with - publication wasn't something you had in mind.

PY: No. I'm the most accidental author you'll ever meet and ... No. I've never published anything, I've always written as gifts, whether it was poems or songs or whatever, gifts for my children, for my friends, for events, and this was really no different. This was in obedience to my wife. She wanted me to write something for the children and she said, "I'd like you to write something that would help your kids really understand the breadth of how you think, cause you're a little bit outside the box."

JMF: There must be a reason she asked you to do that, there must have been something shaping, this is a pretty enormous undertaking and ...

PY: It's probably because I've done a lot of speaking, a lot of teaching, and those kinds of things and the transformation in my life came about through the process of the renewing of the mind, the healing process in my life, and she'd watched all that and then she also liked how I wrote. So the combination of the two things and my whole goal in 2005 was to get it done by Christmas. And get it to Kinko's put it in a spiral bound, whatever, and have it for them for Christmas. No thought whatsoever, it wasn't even on the radar that somebody would actually want to publish it.

JMF: So what happened?

PY: Well, it got out of hand, that's what happened. Even the electronic version. The first manuscript I sent to a couple of my cousins, and it had this huge impact that I wasn't anticipating. And it would spill over. People would send it to other people and we started getting this feedback about the book and I didn't know what to do about it. So after Christmas I sent it to the only "for real" author that I know and that was Wayne Jacobson and I mean, he intentionally writes books. And I just attached it to an email because one of his books had just come out that I really loved and I said, by the way, I've been working on this. And then he said, of course, you know he gets buried with these kinds of things, which I understood and I said, you know, no expectations, really.

I just had the nudge and sometimes the Holy Spirit gives us a nudge just so we learn how to hear his voice not for any outcome. But in this case he actually started reading and he promised me he'd read at least 20 pages. And called me back up and kind of freaked me out actually because I've come to know that Wayne is like this, but I didn't know it at that time... but he started off - "What were you thinking sending me this manuscript?" And I thought he was all... I thought I have pushed all his hot buttons. And I'm backing up in the basement. "Oh man, what do I do?" I said, "you know, my relationship with you is way more important than some sort of manuscript ... just put it on the shelf. And he said, "No, you don't understand. I can't print the pages fast enough. I don't remember the last time I read anything where my immediate response was I have six or seven people that I need to send this to right now. And so, I said, "I trust the Holy Spirit in you. Send it to whoever you want. And he said, "I already did." And this is from Friday to Monday. And that sort of got the ball rolling.

I went down and met with him and his buddy Brad Cummings - they do the "God Journey" podcast, and Bobby Downs from Christian Cinema came around and we began to just talk about and work on how to bring this about, which started a 16-month process because we all have jobs and busy-ness and everything else and where we very collaboratively

worked on the book – then nobody would publish it. We sent it to everybody. Nobody wanted it. Either they didn't respond, or if they did, they said, "It doesn't fit our niche." It's either too edgy or too much Jesus, depending what side of the farm they're on. But ... so the guys said, "well, we've always wanted to be a publishing company," so they created their own – with one title – *The Shack* – and attached it to a website – Wayne's and people from the podcast were the initial ones who purchased the copies, and then they'd come back and they'd buy four, and they'd come back and buy six, and then a dozen, and then a case and then we just watched this thing begin to blossom. Even to date, we've only spent a couple or three hundred dollars in marketing and promotion, total. And it's all been through relationship, which really is the earmark of the book itself. It's all about – this has got to be a relationship with God or else we're just not going to be good enough to achieve that whatever it is that we're supposed to be doing.

JMF: There's a perception of God that most people have, kind of a "God's out there, we're down here."

PY: He's watching from a distance, like that silly song.

JMF: Yeah. What do you see as that problems of that kind of perspective – that's how most people think of God?

PY: Any theology of separation creates a gap that is up to us to traverse.... Like, a lot of us grew up with an idea that everything was based on our performance. And so instead of a new covenant understanding of union with Christ, we still function as if we lived in the old covenant ... Separated from God. And when we have any perceived separation, of course, that separation's our problem, I mean, it's our fault and it's our sin, it's our whatever. And so it's now up to us through behavior to get across that separation to wherever God is – to enter his holiness. And we, even modern believers use language that is a language of separation. "We are now going to come into his presence" – as if we've been out of it. You know all of that language is still old covenant language, and the whole performance-based paradigm is definitely old covenant, but we've just modified it – changed some of the words – and now we can eat shellfish. But we also have another thousand extra little rules that we've added as well.

JMF: When you talk about relationship, then as opposed to this theology of separation, this is what you get into as you unfold the God-character in the book and the Trinity plays a very important role in that – as far as... but the Trinity is not something the average Christian thinks much about. It's a doctrine, and the church holds it as a doctrine as important and key actually but ...

PY: But again it's a more of intellectual kind of affirmation than anything else, and people don't see how crucial the reality of the relationships amongst or within God are to us, and again I didn't intend to write a book on the Trinity. But by describing them relate to each other, all of a sudden it makes sense.

JMF: That is, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

PY: Exactly. And you begin to see God within God's very character is relational and cannot be un-relational. And that God, for example, has never done anything by himself. There's always been three involved. In fact, in the creation, he says "This is a great creation, it's all good. But there's one thing that's not good. We have a creation here, a human being who doesn't have anybody to collaborate with. And that's not good." And so in God's very being, you have collaboration and relationship that's why there's verses about the Father being the creator and the Spirit being the creator, and Word, Jesus, being the creator. And we think in our independent theology – individualistic theology, that somehow we can do this by ourselves – that we're going to be alone. And it's relational for us because we are made in his image and his very nature is relational. And it begins to change everything – the dynamics of how this all works. So when Jesus comes to us, when God the Father comes to us, the Spirit comes to us, it's all about relationship and that's why to me the central passage of the new covenant in Scriptures is John 14, 15, 16, 17 when he's talking about, "this is what we've been going after. We are coming to live inside of you – we're going to make this a habitation and not just a visitation. We've been dealing with visitation but it's all going to change now and we're going to come live inside of you."

JMF: Typically people think of that in terms of rules! God has a list of rules, commandments and we obey those, and that's how we have a good relationship with God and with each other.

PY: Good luck with that. I mean if you think that it's on the basis of behavior – especially those of us who've been damaged, which would probably include most of us. But the more damaged that we've been ... behavior is not going to work for us. We have to actually have some form of transformation, or there's no hope for us. We're not people that are necessarily self-disciplined. Our flesh got hurt somewhere in the process and we don't have the bent for that or the ability for it. So if we make everything behavioral in terms of relationship with God, we're toast. This is not going to happen.

JMF: Does it take a degree of honesty though for Christians to see themselves in that light?

PY: Absolutely, and it takes time, it takes process, and for us to become honest is a process by itself. You have Jacob, right? And Jacob is... in the later part of his life and he's still not been honest. It has taken this whole time. God has been consistently working at him and present with him, and he's now going to face his brother who thinks, he thinks he's going to kill him. And he sends everything out until he's got nothing left to work with and then he takes on God. And in the wrestling match, God finally says, "I'm done. We're not doing this anymore. This is your whole life. And I'm not going to play this game anymore." And Jacob says, "Well, I'm not going to let you go until you bless me." And God say, "Ok, tell me your name." And when I first ran into that during my process of healing, I immediately went back to Jacob as a young man and he goes in looking for the father's blessing. I'm not going to leave until you give me the blessing. And his dad says, "What's your name?" And he says, "Esau." (*Gen 27:19 32:27*).

We're right back there, in that sense, but all these (20) years later – and now he's wrestling and saying "I'm not going to let you go until I have the father's blessing. And He says, "What's your name?" And he finally says, "Jacob, I'm a liar, I'm a heel-grabber, I'm a cheat, I'm a usurper, I'm all these things." And then God says, "Ok, I'm not only going to bless you by putting your hip out so that you have something that will remind you everyday of who you are and where you've come from, but I'll change your name too. You'd be a conquered one, you'll be conquered by God". And, to me that level of honesty is what *The Shack* is part of. It's about being honest. *The Shack* is a metaphor. It's the place where we got hurt. It's the place where we got damaged, it's the place that we messed up so royally – or that we've been piling all the stuff. And we don't want to go back there. We want God to come in and just yank us from where we are, to somewhere where we think we ought to be. And he says, "No, we're gonna actually begin to heal the emotions, and heal the thinking, and heal the heart, and do all these things. But to do that, we've got to go back there. For me, it took 38 years to get to the shack, it took 11 years to get through the shack, and I condense that 11 years to a weekend for Mackenzie Allen Phillips, the main character. And in that "shack," it's time for all secrets to come out, because I really believe that we are as sick as the secrets we keep. And a lot of times, the religiosity side – this performance-based paradigm, either forces us to hide our stuff, or just flat out lie about it.

To ourselves and to everyone out there. And to God. You know, it's just like somebody said to me, "Oh. I couldn't really tell God this." It's like he doesn't know. All because he is separated again – he's over there somewhere and this is just between you and I, I can tell you but I couldn't really tell God these things. And again we have that idea of God as not being inside this process with us. He is outside, seeing how good at the process we are, and judging us at every point for our inability to be perfect in it. We only feel as good about ourselves as our last moment of perfection, anyway, inside that paradigm. It's a devastating paradigm, and I think it just so false. One of the reasons I wrote the book in the first place for my children was to save them maybe 40 years of legalistic-performance-oriented baggage. I don't want them to run with 750 million pounds of weight, and they're so far ahead of where I was when I was their age, and I'm so grateful for that.

JMF: Why is it that even though we know this about God, that we tend to be so addicted to rules?

PY: I think part of it is bad theology. And maybe intended or unintended – but we got the idea somewhere along the road that we're still in the old covenant, the language changed a little bit, and I think the other part of it is that – think of where we've come from, where before Jesus Christ came to live inside of us and make us spiritually alive, all we had was the flesh, all we had was this mortality, and everything was dependent on how we looked, who we knew, how good we thought, if we could sing or not, I mean everything was performance. And everything was competition. And that's how we think about everything. So when Jesus now comes to dwell inside of us, he doesn't automatically transform the flesh. It's in a process of being saved.

I reject the Buddhist kind of mentality that says ... and it's in Christianity to a degree ... that somehow we need to disappear so that Jesus can be revealed, you know. He's already come – the Father is well pleased with the Jesus that is part of the Trinity, you know. He doesn't need a billion Jesuses – what he desires is to come and live inside of you – the epitome and apex of his creation. As great and incredible is the macro universe is, as incredible as the micro with quantum mechanics and everything else, it's nothing compared with one human being. And the intricacy and the incredible wonder of that person, he comes to make alive and then begins from the inside to transform out. We're not used to that, we're so performance-oriented that we want to take the rules and think that they are going to affect my behavior from the outside. And that's the intention of rules, is that they will modify my behavior and they'll tell me what to do. That's why we love self-discipline without understanding that it's a work of the flesh – as opposed to self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit that comes from the inside and works its way out.

So we have this natural affinity with rules, because all of our sense of worth, our value, our security, all of our understanding of reality is attached to performance. And I can judge you, I can compare myself with you or I can find somebody else, if you're better than I am. And it's all based on performance and it's what we're used to. So how do I understand significance? Behaviourally. I've got to do something in order to be significant. God says, "That's not the truth. You're made in my image. I love you. There is nothing you can do to change that. You can't add to your significance, you can't take it away." And yet the issue of significance **inside** the Christian community is as rampantly a driving force in the lives of people – especially men – as outside. And again the whole paradigm is a very coercive, imprisoning paradigm – because it all comes back to how good at this I can be. And you know what? It doesn't change us. All it does is modify our behavior. But give us enough time – it will all explode again, anyway, because all we're doing is repressing the shame and the guilt and the condemnation – you know, the things that God nailed to the cross, because he knew it couldn't achieve one ounce of righteousness. None of those things can produce righteousness.

The law can't. All the law could ever do is say, "You're guilty, I'm here to tell you." And I think in the book I used the illustration of – it's like a mirror. You've been working under the car all day, you've been wiping your face and you don't know how dirty you are until you look in the mirror. And the mirror says, "You need soap, you know." And you say, "Oh if I can just take the mirror and scrape myself clean." Which is what the legalistic paradigm says. Somehow. I can embrace these rules in such a way that I can actually accomplish them. And then Jesus comes along and says, "You know, you can't even have the desire to break one of those inside of you, because if you do, the whole thing's lost." And somehow we think, no, God gave us this whole new set of rules – the Ten Commandments plus whatever our religious environment and sub-culture has added to it – to do certain things, to not do certain things, whatever. And if we can just embrace that. And, God gave us the Holy Spirit to help us do the rules now. I'm sorry, it's not going to work. If you think you can do this? I've got a book for you. One thousand and three hundred and forty two steps to holiness. I guarantee you at step number two, you'll be dead.

JMF: Now, surely, you get objections from some sectors of Christianity that say, “Well then you’re ... by saying this kind of thing, you’re just encouraging people to sin and you’re taking away any kind of ...

PY: See I’ve got good company there. Because, is this not the question that Paul raises in Romans? “So, are you saying that we should just go out and sin so grace would abound?” And what’s his response? “You don’t have any idea who you are, do you?” Because when it comes to God, the central issue is his character – who is this God? When it comes to human beings, the central issue is identity – who are you?

We have a theology that has told us that we are still stuck in a paradigm that identifies us as an old nature. And ... but we have a new nature now – but these two are duking it out, and it’s kind of what nature are you going to feed today? But they don’t tell us if the feeder is part of the old nature, or part of the new nature. If it’s part of the new nature, it’s only going to feed the new nature. But if it’s part of the old, maybe it gets confused. In that paradigm, which comes down to performance, you’re always going to consider yourself fundamentally as the old nature. The issue is “identity.” Did anything really happen when Jesus Christ came to live inside of you? Or is it just all positional and intellectual? Because if it’s just positional and intellectual, I’m back working at this as hard as I can – just like I was before. But maybe, maybe he came to dwell inside of this flesh, not to eradicate it but to heal it. And if that begins to happen, here are some things that I won’t be... I am surprised but I ... there’s a possibility that I wouldn’t be. My emotions begin to be healed. I begin to feel things differently. My thinking obviously gets transformed. It’s renewed – as I say, you know, all this transformation takes place because of the renewal of the mind. I begin to look at people differently. I begin to touch people differently. I begin to relate to my circumstances differently. And those changes, a lot of us, we couldn’t go and say, “Well, this caused this change, or this caused it.” God is the only one inside of us who can unwrap this healing in such a way that it doesn’t destroy us.

JMF: Isn’t it like a sheer force of will, that rules are about *you* deciding you’re going to do something right. Whereas we’re not talking about that. We’re talking on actual relationship.

PY: Yeah. You cannot use the flesh to defeat the flesh. You cannot use self-discipline to become self-controlled. That’s the whole Galatians 3 thing. Paul says, JB Phillips, right? “Dear idiots of Galatia, who has bewitched you? Having began in the Spirit, do you think you’re gonna be perfected by the flesh? Don’t you understand who you are?” It’s just – to use an easier illustration that might help – there are a lot of folks that pray for patience. Do you find anybody in the New Testament that prays for patience? Can you think of one prayer in the New Testament where somebody prays for patience?

JMF: Nothing springs to mind.

PY: Exactly! Because it isn’t there. What is there is an understanding that patience is a **fruit** of the Spirit, that when Jesus comes to live inside of me, patience comes to live inside of me. And patience has wed his life with mine in such a way that my nature is now patient. But if I think I’m still the old nature, and I’m still impatient, I will continue to function because that’s what I think the truth about myself really is. Instead of beginning to understand that for me to act impatiently is to go contrary to my nature – that who I am in Christ – that’s the core of this new covenant that I’m a part of. That’s the central element of identity, is that union – relationship. I’m coming inside, in fact, not only I’m coming, the Father is coming. We’re going to make a habitation in you, and not a visitation, where you’re once in a while empowered so that you can create holiness in your life, or righteousness.

SECOND INTERVIEW

JMF: Welcome to another edition of You’re Included. Back with us for a second program is William P. Young, author of the best-selling novel *The Shack*, hailed as transformational and life-changing, *The Shack* is capturing the imagination of Christian readers everywhere with its portrayal of God – not as the God of popular imagination who is watching us from a distance – but the God of Christian orthodoxy, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What kind of people are reading *The Shack*?

PY: It’s across the board. It’s people who are from a conservative Christian framework, there are people who are totally outside. There are people in prisons, and people from every kind of walk of life you can imagine. I get, you know, 30 to 50 emails a day, now, from all over world. And it is really across the board – theologians, to people who have never ever read the Bible and so we’re getting people who are attracted to the story and it’s impacting their lives – from every walk that you can imagine.

JMF: What are some of the common themes of positive response that you’re getting?

PY: Believe it or not, there have been a lot of people who’ve been hurt by religious institutions.

JMF: That’s shocking!

PY: Totally shocking. And I don’t mean that facetiously – there’s a lot of hurt out there because of – systems have a way of manipulating people of accomplishing their goals in a very non-relational or un-relational framework. And so there’s a lot of folks that are coming with a whole lot of hurt that way. There are people who are in the middle of great sadness themselves – who have issues with their family or health and they bring that. One of my favourite quotes – not because I love it, but it was so penetrating to me. There’s a gal in Atlanta who is struggling with cancer and she said that the book really yanked her out of the depression that she was in revolving, and it’s serious. She is facing life and death. And when she wrote, she said, “I wasn’t afraid to die. I was terrified at the look of disappointment on his face when we meet.” That encapsulates for what a lot of us is our experience within religious systems. And so, you know, people are coming with their own stuff. I got a note from a gentleman who’s in prison. And got another one from the guy who is the Chaplain of

Leeds Prison in London – the largest prison in London – he was saved under Nicky Cruz – he was a Hell's Angel and doesn't like Christian fiction, but really loves this book. And it's penetrating into those areas. We're finding that it's being a bridge for reconciliation even between the African-American community and the all-conservative White community – just because, for a lot of people they've never been able to use any imagery of God other than Zeus. We've Christianized Zeus and or Gandalf with an attitude. But now for the first time it's like – let's get God out of the box that we've placed him in because he's frankly left anyway.

JMF: And the old gentleman, kind of like Gandalf with a flowing beard, out there ... judging..

PY: And, you know, with the lightning bolts and it's all our behaviours so as soon as we step aside... I had some young men, and I know about a discussion that they had about the character of God. And one particular young man who's a friend of our family was struggling last year with his relationship with God because they had concluded that God was Zeus. And that doesn't create a lot of relationship. And Kim - my wife – handed him the book last summer at a wedding and said, "Just read this." And he called me up about three weeks later and he said, "Paul, when Papa came through the door, my whole world changed." And so there is this idea of that God would... that it's not about me coming up with all the effort necessary to bridge the gap – but that He actually crosses it Himself in pursuit of us. You know, the only time you see God running anywhere in Scripture is when the object of His affection is coming toward Him – and that's the Prodigal Father – and He runs, other than that, it's all walking, it's all relationship. And I wanted, I wanted God to just come across that divide – because that's how I believe He is, and everything that I understand about Scripture says that's the God that we are in love with and who loves us, and pursues us.

JMF: You've had objections too from religious circles. And the question comes up, well, yes this is just your idea of God that really isn't biblical.

PY: Of course. You know, I wrote God as good as I knew how and He is better than I wrote Him. And so, yes, it's fiction. I mean, this was not an attempt for a systematic theology. You know, so there are things that are not in there. I wasn't trying to answer... this was a story for my kids – for my six kids. And it's a fictional account. You know, there's a lot of truth behind it in terms of – the pain's real, the process of coming to wholeness is real, the conversations are very real conversations, and the character of God is as good and as real as I could write Him. Having said all that, you know, we are getting some push back but believe me, it's very minor, and it's very small. Just some people are vocal minorities. It just tends to be that way. I have a couple thousand emails from people whose lives and relationship have changed – and stories just all the time. So that stack is what I really care about. I am not opposed to answering any of the questions at all, but a lot of times conversation doesn't push us across into loving people. It's just kind of a theological place. And unfortunately there are some folks who, when they ask you a question, they're asking for a piece of wood they can burn. You know, they're not asking for a conversation. And those are not the conversations I get involved in. They're just not valuable. But I got an email the other day and this gal writes, "Your book's the most juvenile piece of trash I've ever read. It's pedantic, it's slow..." It's whatever... I mean, she really gave it to me. And she's the kind of conversation that I love – to just step back a second. I had a fellow say to me this weekend, "When somebody asks me about The Shack, this is what I say to them: 'Your response to this book will tell me more about you than about the book.'" And I think that is so accurate. So I don't have a sense of ownership. This was a gift; all of what's happening with the book is so outside the box.

My favourite quote is from Tyson who goes to Oregon State says to my 19-y/o daughter, "Amy, this book is so far beyond your dad." That's my favourite quote. With all that in mind, when people are telling me, I have nothing that I need to protect. I don't have a territory here. You know, this is not my identity. I'm not a writer in terms of... you know, I wasn't doing this in order to be significant or because my security was involved here, my sense of worth. So when this gal writes me this note, I wrote her back. And I said... I was very careful because I wanted my response to be affirming and positive. And people who are wordsmiths, we know how to put a knife just under the surface of a word – you know what I'm talking about? Ok. So, I wrote her back and I said, "I got to tell you that I'm just so impressed that somebody would have the self-confidence to write an author and trash their stuff like this." I said, "I am so impressed." And I said, "I'm attaching about two-week's worth of emails that I get, about 20 pages, and email snippets and you may be absolutely right. This could be the most juvenile piece of trash you've ever read. But look at how it's changing peoples' hearts and lives, look at how it's bringing people into a relationship with Jesus Christ?" I said, "If it is, and the beauty of that is that God could take such a juvenile piece of trash and impact peoples' lives this way. I am so pleased to be a part of this." And, you know, four days later she wrote me back and said, "I need to ask for your forgiveness." Which is beautiful because, if I've been all defensive and said, this or that or you can't even spell all your words right or whatever... there's no relationship in that. All I've done is protected my little kingdom, my little territory, my little sense of identity or worth.

So yeah, we're getting some push back, I've been labelled a Hindu, and I've been labelled a Universalist and I've been labelled somebody who hates the local church. And again, there are folks out there and they're bringing everything they've got to the table and part of what they feel they've got is that, there are people behind them that count on them to protect them, from people like me. And, it's what they've got, this is what they're bringing to the table. I think they're wrong that the people behind them don't need protection – that the Holy Spirit can speak to them – all of that. But, it is what it is. So, we can deal with individual questions, like being Hindu, because I'm not, like being a Universalist, because I'm not. All of these kinds of things, but, it's part of the on-going conversation. But it is a small group compared with how this book is simply, in the best way, ruining people's lives – in the best way. It's just transforming and all of a sudden God in Three is becoming accessible. And it is on their side, to help them deal with their stuff and there's no shame – in that process.

JMF: The common perception of God is being a Judge and you are separated from Him until you say the Sinners' Prayer, you deal with that in pretty clear terms as the characters unfolded in the book.

PY: Absolutely. If you look even at Jesus, and I always go back to "how does this play out in the life of Jesus?" and, I mean, He called them "disciples" long time before they were alive. He even said to them, "I no longer call you servants – reflecting the Old Covenant kind of mentality – but I call you friends." They're not even alive yet. In the same passage he's saying, "I'm going to go to the cross, I'm going to come back, receive you to myself, on that day you'll be alive." And then he says, "The work that I do, you will do also." Which means, not the work that I did, "I didn't come to model this. I came to continue to do my work. But now, I'll be in you together, we'll be able to collaborate, participate together in what I'm doing."

And so, even in relationship to the disciples, you don't have this sense of separation. The whole point of the Incarnation is his identification with us – it's not a sense of separation. And this is where we've done a huge injustice to the Trinity. It's like God the Father is the Holy One. Jesus is the one that's allowed to get his hands dirty. And so God has to be at a distance – watching us from a distance because holiness means he can't look upon sin or he can't be around it or... And we're going, "how does that fit with the omniscience of God? How does that fit with the Incarnation? Isn't Jesus fully God, and fully man? If he's fully God, then God must be in the middle of it. One of the dominant metaphors or images that I used, is that there are nail scars on Papa's wrists – God the Father. And I've been given some push back about that.

But that's scriptural, and everything that is embedded in the story – and I didn't do this just by myself – I had help from some very smart theologically-trained people to make sure that the realities that are inside this parable, this story, are validated by Scripture. Well, this one's 2 Corinthians 5:19. For Papa – God, "for God the Father was **in Christ** reconciling the world to Himself not counting their sins against them." Is that separation? Where did reconciliation take place? It was on the cross! Where was God the Father? He was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. This was a collaborative event where God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in Christ was involved in getting inside all of our loss and all of our pain with the express purpose of healing us. Not, – "I'm sorry, you've got to deal with all the bad stuff, I'll be back in three days." That, again, we've got the separation. And that's what I was trying to go against.

JMF: I and my Father are one.

PY: Yeah, you've seen me, you've seen the Father.

JMF: Yeah, and yet at the same time, in the book, you maintained the distinctions, Father, Son and Spirit while also bringing together the unity.

PY: Yeah, which turned out to be so beautiful. I'll tell you, a lot of people have asked me, "Who did you read in order to portray this way?" Actually I hardly read anybody about the Trinity. I've started to read a lot more, because it's out there – and it's out there from the Catholic experience, from the Protestant experience – I mean, there are some beautiful things; Eastern Orthodox has beautiful portrayals of the Trinity. My guiding phrase was Ravi Zacharias' little phrase that is: "Unity and diversity in the community of the Trinity." That little phrase was really what framed everything that I did when I was talking about how they related to each other – how they loved each other. And I wanted my kids to stand back and say, "That's the kind of life – that's the kind of dynamic relationship that I want, not only between me and God, or involved with me and God, but I want, in terms of my experience with the people that I love. And then, with my enemies even, because it then continues to extend. And God's nature is agape. So I want my children to bask in the love of Father – and that's the central thing that I was trying to communicate, as well as His character and the consistency of His character. And then, let's take a look at some of the worst situations that we could ever imagine and let those situations ask the questions that all of us feel in our hearts.

JMF: In light of the response, the overwhelming response that you didn't even expect as the book has been distributed – word of mouth, not even by ...

PY: It's totally, it's through relationships. It's people who care about somebody who gives it to them and it's like these conversations just emerge. And the conversations... again, how you respond to the book will tell you more about you as you respond; it tells me more about you than about the book, a lot of times that's very true. But it raises conversations that have never happened before among people that thought they knew each other. There's a lot of people who respond, "This is exactly the way I always thought God must be like." And there are people who are responding and going, "I'm so afraid to believe this because I've been disappointed so many times... is God really like this? Is this a possibility?" And, there are folks who are saying, "There's just not enough wrath in this book; we want.. because there's wrath in Scripture. Yeah, of course, there is. A friend of mine who is an Old Testament professor and theologian, when asked that, says, "Can you name me one thing that God lets Mack off the hook on?" And says, "Oh, that doesn't really matter." There's nothing. God goes after every single thing.

God goes after everything in Mack's life that is wrong, everything that's not truthful, that's not honest, everything that's a lie, everything that's false, and to me the wrath of God is God's very character against everything that is wrong, you know. And the fact that a doctor comes to someone and wants to perform surgery to cut a piece of your body out because its got cancer, doesn't mean that he hates you. In fact, he's after that which is destroying you. And when you look in his face and you see that anger, you might misunderstand that He is making a value statement about you. But He's not. He is coming after everything that keeps us from being free and being whole. And the full set of His fury is against that. And even what He did in the Old Testament in terms of what we call the plagues, many times, is referred to as the miracles, or the great workings, or the wonders, the nine wonders – because He went after every point of idolatry that was locking the

Egyptians into their losses as much as it was locking the children of Israel into that bondage. And that's a beautiful thing. If we want to understand the Old Testament, we've got to first look at Jesus because he is the most obvious expression and manifestation of the character of God – "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father, I and the Father are one." All of those things are true. Now some people think that God got saved somewhere between Malachi and Matthew - during the 400 silent years. This is the same God who's been there. Just because our conceptions are so wound by performance and these kinds of frameworks that we don't see clearly, doesn't mean that he is what we thought he was. Like one gal wrote and said, "My daughter just came in, she's 21, she wants to know if she can divorce the old God and marry this new one."

JMF: Already been done. The concept of wrath itself – the definition of wrath, when we talk about the wrath of God, we like to put the definition of our own wrath when we are angry about something that's offended us – project that onto God, and so that's the way God must be.

PY: Absolutely. For a lot of us, our theology has been, maybe our own father or authority figures in our lives projected to the ultimate level. Super duper ... Angry person. Out of control, and I'm constantly disappointing him and I'm constantly failing. It's a, "You got an A-; – that's ok, but I know you can do better. Yes, you played great defense, but your offense was awful." And whatever it is, we are constantly put onto a scale, of performance and say, "You failed." What's the main question in legalism? It's "How much is enough?" And the answer is always, "More." How much is enough prayer? How much is enough reading Scripture? How much is enough giving? How much is enough? And legalism always says, "More!" We can't do that. More as in perfect. Yeah, you figure it out.

JMF: And then how do you define perfect. Your life has changed as a result of an enormous amount of... you have everything from interviews, everything's turned up-side-down, I imagine, in you life as a result of the spread of this book.

PY: Yeah, it's had a little impact, yup.

JMF: So, what do you do for relaxation to get away, hobbies, or...

PY: I have two grandbabies. Part of my relaxation is to spend time with them. Any grandparent knows. That, I think, is as close to being in heaven as you can imagine. But I have six children, I still have three at home. So I'm involved with some sports activities and drama and being involved in their lives as well. And I am married to the woman who saved my life and I think all men, for the most part, marry up, anyway. And then, I have a community of friendships and relationships that are all a part of that, that are wonderful.

And life is lived one day at a time. This is a funny, different kind of season for us and we're tracking it one day at a time. We don't have any guarantees we'll be here tomorrow. So I want to spend this day in the present, in the presence of the one who loves me best. I don't want to project it into what's going to happen into the future and be freaked out. This is where he lives with me and it goes back to the prayer I prayed at the beginning of 2005, when I come out of the shack – "I will never ask you again, Papa, to bless anything that I do, but if you have something that you're blessing that I could hang around, I would love that. Because I want to know at the end of the day, you did this". Because, my whole life is religious. At the end of the day, I couldn't tell you whether I did it or I performed it because of insecurity or a need to be significant and I coerced people into getting things done and I shamed them into doing stuff. I'm done with that now.

JMF: Isn't there a certain confidence... like Mack finally saw in the book that, regardless of what you wind up being involved with, you can rest assured that God is there with you in it – whether it might have been the best choice or not so best, He's there.

PY: Absolutely. There's a huge rest in that; plus Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, my burden is light." Where does he live? He lives inside of us. If my yoke is not easy and my burden is not light, what part of God have I picked up? I have picked up something that doesn't belong to me. Rest is the environment in which we do everything. We live our lives and that happens today. Today is the day of salvation. Today, enter my rest, **today**. Today is where eternity intersects my life.

And, I love the bride of Christ. I bash any institutional systems generally. I don't care whether they are political or religious or whatever, because frankly, they are part of the world's system, a way to coerce and manage human beings. But I love "the bride". And I don't care whether "the bride" meets in a used building or has a steeple. The church is "people." It's people, always has been. You either **are** the church or you're not. And to gather together is a gift – always has been. We were intended to be in community. How you do it is going to be different from culture to culture and situation to situation. If you are under persecution, it's going to look a whole lot different than when you're not.

So, all of that is to say, "God is decided to do something with this story." When I asked him if it would be okay for me to hang around something he was blessing, I never thought that it would be something that I did – actually wrote. That wasn't on the radar. I was just saying, "I'm available." And I said, "I don't care if I shine shoes or open the door, or clean the toilets. It doesn't matter to me, if I can just be hanging around you." Because that's where I am in my life, that's all that matters to me. And all the gifting of family and friendships and community of faith – all of that – is just the gift that He brings to encompass His presence. And that's where I want to stay, that's where I want to live.

You know, between you and I, and I guess everybody out there, if this all went away tomorrow, I'd be fine. My identity is not in this book. My significance is not connected to this. My security is not. **He's** everything. And if it goes away, great! I want to be around whatever He's blessing. This doesn't have to be it. So when somebody attacks it, and attacks me, or whatever, it's just part of being part of this process. It doesn't... They don't know me. So, they can't be attacking me. And if they knew me, they knew my history, they'll go, "Why in the world would God love a man like that?" And I'd say, "It's just the way love is. Grace is wasteful, and he wasted it on me. And he wants to waste it on all of us, and he has

already.” And don’t we love being in the middle of his embrace? Absolutely. Do we want to leave it for some temptation, for something else? Not anymore!...

JMF: Any more ideas for writing on the horizon?

PY: I write little things, so far in addition. I post them on WindRumors which is the website that I write stuff on. I’ve got ideas, but the beauty of this is that I want to walk it out a day at a time. And if I do it, I’ll do it as a gift. I don’t even know if I’ll do it under my own name. I don’t know. I don’t know any of these things today. But, I’m always thinking about stuff and working on different ideas and things, I love that.

I love the freedom too that says, “Just stay in my presence, everything will be fine, and if I get the chance to do some other things and creative stuff, if I live past today, he’ll be there, we’ll figure it out – we’ll work it out. It’s a journey and it’s a process, as much as we’d like the blue or the red pill, it’s a process... and it’s a great one. I am so thrilled with what’s going on and it is so out of the box and out of control, and I’m so glad I had no idea what I was doing.

THIRD INTERVIEW

JMF: The view of God that you present in *The Shack* is a sound biblical perspective that strangely is foreign to the way many people have traditionally thought about God.

PY: Very true. I think for one thing is that we have lost, or a lot of us have never had the conversation about the very nature of God, period. We’ve been so focused on our ability to keep the rule, or the law, or whatever and it’s all been behavioral. And we haven’t had a conversation about what is this character. We live in such world of uncertainty. Everything about our lives is uncertain. We could get a call from the boss today and what we thought we were heading toward is no longer there. A sale could go sideways, a truck comes across the middle line, changes our lives. So, we’re filled with uncertainty.

JMF: And especially about what God thinks about us, we don’t know... we’re afraid of Him.

PY: So what we try to do is create something that will get his behavior to be certain. And we come up with, “If I can just do the right things, in the right order, to the right degree, then God is rather obligated to do it” – to do whatever it is that we think we want him to do. So... that can be having enough faith, for example... whatever our formula is, to get the result... so that we can get God’s behavior to be certain. There’s a word for that and it’s called magic, you know. And God doesn’t like magic. Magic is, if I have the right formula, the right incantation, the right something, I can get the right result. And so, we try to use magic to get certainty.

If there’s no certainty in our circumstances, and there’s no certainty in God’s behavior, where is there any certainty? It **has** to be in His character. And if we get His character wrong, or if we think that He is not good, that He is not loving – and we get that wrong, we are by ourselves, and we’re back to issues of fear and control – because we try to get control over uncertainty in many, many different ways. Anger - dulling the pain of it through addictions of one sort or another, depression... there’s a million ways that we try to gain some control. And instead, if we begin to understand the character of God – that he comes into this relationship with us, for us, to heal us – that place is a place we can put our feet down and begin to stand and move forward. Otherwise, we’re just on our own.

So, the characterization of God in the book is just an attempt, in fiction, to try to describe that solidity of character that I think a lot of us have not trusted. We don’t trust... Mack’s big issue is that, he doesn’t believe God is good. But he doesn’t know to get from where he is to believing it either, and God is very gracious about that process and says, “You can’t do it by yourself, but together we can do it.”

JMF: In the midst of tragedy or great pain, that’s when it’s very difficult to believe that God is good...

PY: Yeah, because everything has become totally uncertain.

JMF: There’s a place in the book where you talk about the Father versus the Son, the Father being so holy and so great that he can’t be touched by our evil and our wickedness. But Jesus on the other hand is the good guy. Kind of the good cop, bad cop... let me just read that section briefly.

“Mack (central character) says, ‘But I always liked Jesus better than you, he seems so gracious and you seem so mean.’ Sad isn’t it? He came to show people who I am and most folks only believe it about him. They still play us off like good cop, bad cop most of the time, especially the religious folk. When they want people to do what they think is right, they need a stern God, when they need forgiveness, they run to Jesus.”

And yet as you portray the characters here, we’re not talking about two different Gods of different character, we’re talking about one God who is for us...

PY: Unfortunately we have some theology that has come alongside and said... where God the Father is... His issue is our sinfulness. He can’t hang around us. That is sort of like Jesus has made friends with us and God the Father is a little perturbed about it. And He wants to say, “Can you find a better quality of friend? They come to my house, mess it up, leave things dirty, they don’t do the dishes. If you just find a better quality of friend, I know I’ll be ok because you love them. We have that mentality that there is this... Jesus is trying to convince the Father that we’re worth enough to love.

JMF: We use the word “advocate” because he’s an advocate with the Father for us... he needs a lot of convincing.

PY: And to make even matters worse, we have this idea that God comes to us and says, “Father says you and I have a problem. Your behavior doesn’t meet up to the standards required, but I have a solution: For you and I to be ok, I’m

going to take my innocent Son whom I love more than anything else in the world, out to the woodshed, and kill him – and then you and I will be ok. Oh, by the way, trust me.” We’re going, “Is there a disconnect here somewhere? Is that what had to happen for God the Father and I to be ok?” We’re going, “That’s not it at all... that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, it was God the Father that crawls inside of this very thing.” People say, “What about, ‘My God, my God why have you forsaken me?’” And that is Christ on the cross for the first time as a human being; he experiences a sense of separation. He doesn’t believe that it’s real – because the next thing he says is “into your hands I commit my spirit.” So there is no real separation but he feels the sense of it; God is in him in that whole process. There is no abandonment like that. And that cry is a cry of those who have experienced abandonment. And for some of us that is such a hope for us.

JMF: There is this sense that you get from preaching sometimes that the Father is so angry, he’s furious; that the wrath of God is cited because the word wrath appears in Scriptures. And so, the sense is God is so angry that somebody is going to pay, so Jesus steps in and says, “Well, kill me if you’ve got to kill somebody.” We have the resolution that, “Ok, Christ died for my sins, therefore I’m absolved but there’s still that angry God that has calmed down but when is He gonna break loose again?”

PY: Exactly, we’re always waiting for the other shoe to drop and we fall back on performance, we fall back on our behavior being the basis for his mood. And we have to maintain at least an adequate amount of behavior so that he feels good about himself and doesn’t take it out on us. So we have this real schizophrenic God, we have the good cop-, bad cop-type of God. And we don’t know whether we’re waking up on the side of his love, or the side of his justice – or his holiness. We think holiness is a manifestation of his reaction against sin. The truth is he was holy before there was sin. He was other... what makes God “other” is his very nature of **love** – that’s what makes him “other” than us. And holiness then becomes a manifestation of his love, not of his justice, not of his dealing with sin. And wrath is the right response to things that are wrong. Anger is the right response when there is pain and hurt, when children are abused, when people lie to each other, when divorce happens, people taking advantage... to greed, to all of these things, it is the right response. God has that right response against everything that is his creation, that prevents the freedom of the human creation which is the object of his love, for him to come after that with everything that he’s got, is appropriate, is right.

My friend, Wayne Jacobson has a book called “He Loves Me.” And I think in there he uses the illustration of being a child running into a hornets’ nest and screaming running in the direction of his mother and seeing her coming at him with this look of rage. Well, she wasn’t after him. She was after the hornets; how dare they touch her precious little child. But if you look at her face, he’d think it was all about he’d done something wrong. And we have that mentality when we deal with God. He is angry against everything that hurts us. Jesus showing up at Lazarus’ funeral – that intense anger, compassion that comes out even though he is in the midst of raising him from the dead. This is wrong. Death is wrong. The impact of sin, as such, is wrong. So, the wrath of God is definitely an element of his love. You can’t divide his wrath from his love, as if he’s two separate characters. Everything God does is motivated by love. And everything has a loving purpose.

JMF: Now, the Scripture speaks of “the enemies of God,” and “the wrath of God against his enemies.” How does the love of God come in to his relationship with his enemies in terms of his wrath?

PY: He is constantly saying that we are to love our enemies as well. So, there is an understanding that we wed ourselves to our own lostness, to our own independence. And it’s like the surgery. There is a process that is very painful for us. And God, even, in dealing with the Egyptians, or the wonders of the plagues – that was a very painful process. And there are people that set themselves up in an independent stance and I tell you, you can wed yourself – the people in the New Testament that were most doing that were the religious people. And they were the most lost when Jesus says, “Woe, woe, woe,” and he tells them that they are dead men... the inside of them is dead. The woe idea is a warning woe. It’s saying “whoa!” almost like to a horse. “Stop what you’re doing. Don’t you understand that this process that you’re on, this path that you’re choosing – of independence, is going to drive you deeper into the darkness, not into the light that you think.”

And so one of the other questions is... that has come up about the book is, “Why isn’t Lucifer in the book – as one of God’s enemies?” And I believe in the fallen angels, I believe in the demonic, and I grew up out in the mission field. I know the reality of these things – the spiritual dimension. We don’t live in a benign universe as far as the spiritual dimension. And I don’t believe God has any rivals, I don’t believe Lucifer is a rival. I think his power was totally destroyed and now all he has is the ability to lie. And so all of those things being true, the book was not intended to be another book about Satan. It was intended to say, “This is who God is, and this is the process that we’re in – that he comes inside to bring us to healing. And we don’t need the juxtaposition in this book; like I said, there are plenty of books that deal with that, but this was not an attempt for a systematic theology.

JMF: Sure. When we talk about enemies, Christ died for us while we were yet enemies ourselves.

PY: Who among us has not been an enemy?

JMF: Exactly. Right. And then we have, like you said – we’re told to love our enemies and then we proceed with the idea that God doesn’t love his enemies but he expects us to love our enemies.

PY: Oh, I know.... So, suddenly we have this requirement that even God cannot live up to. The reality is that, he does. And the reality is that the creation he has created, he loves... and human beings as the epitome and apex of that he pursues. And all of us have been in the position of being his enemy, and in some respects we still fight him in this process, but there’s no shame to it.

JMF: I think in your book, the most poignant scene, to me is the judgment scene where everyone stands guilty. And it's very beautifully done, and thoroughly scriptural. And that's what makes it so beautiful.

PY: And part of that was to try to get the reality of this out of the abstract intellectual framework. And in just like using the loss of a child as the center core part of the story. The term "agape" is used, that God is "agape", he's this kind of love that's so different and the only verse that I can think of (and maybe there are other ones) where somebody who is apart from God, experiences "agape" which is normally... you cannot be apart from God to express it. But the closest that a human being apart from God can, is reflected in the verse, "If you being evil..." So it's talking about your core independence. "If you being evil know how to agape your children..." That's the word that's used (*unable to locate any verse that this refers to*). So the closest point that we can come to understanding the way God loves is the way that a parent loves their child and I tell you there's nothing like that – not if there's any kind of health in your life, there is nothing that comes close to that. And that is the kind of way God is, in his very character and nature. So that's why I wanted to use the thing that is deepest in us to raise the deepest kinds of questions, and (for my children) I wanted this to be the conversation around which to develop the conversation, the processing, the ideas, and the relationship with God.

JMF: I tend to be that kind of person who sees a bandwagon, I say, the last thing I'm gonna do is get on it. So, as people kept saying, "Well, you ought to read this book," I thought, "I don't read books that you gotta read." But finally I did read it. And as I read the first few chapters and this is where we get into the story of the tragedy and so on, and the very real anger and so on that Mack has.. then he enters the shack and I lost interest after God entered the shack. I thought, "I don't see how he's gonna get out of this because I'm on Mack's side here. There's not going to be a good resolution to this, I don't see how, in fictional form, we're going to be able to get from here to there, and resolve this anger without it just being facile, just some easy solution that doesn't offer – what do we call that - a platitude. (**PY:** cliché.). I eventually got back to it, and I had to do an interview with the author! So I better finish the book anyway, but then that judgment scene, to me, that, itself could be a full treatment of the subject, it was just beautifully done.

PY: Thank you. And, you know, that scene has become where the whole book leads to. From there, everything becomes resolution after that. So, it was to say, "Look, this is the reality of the heart of God in terms of how he relates to us. And let's take it out of intellectual, spiritual, religious kind of terminology and make it real to us. So for Mack to have to struggle with this big question about his own children – that becomes something very real to him, and all of a sudden it puts us into a spot going, "Are you telling me that God loves us like that?" And we're saying, "He loves you **more** than that. That is as close as we can get to understanding the intensity of that love – He loves us more than that, and more pure and better than that. So, I agree, I love that... I love that chapter.

JMF: Another section that is striking in the book is where Jesus is talking to Mack and he says, "*Remember the people who know me are the ones who are free to live and love without any agenda.*" And Mack says, "*Is that what it means to be a Christian?*" "*Who said anything about being a Christian? I'm not a Christian,*" Jesus said. *The idea struck Mack as odd and unexpected. "No I suppose you aren't."* And then Jesus says, "*Those who love me come from every system that exists. They were Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans and many who don't vote or are not part of any Sunday morning or religious institutions. I have followers who are murderers and many who are self-righteous. Some are bankers and bookies, Americans and Iraqis, Jews and Palestinians. I've no desire to make them Christian but I do want to join them in their transformation into sons and daughters of my Papa into brothers and sisters into my beloved.*" "*Does that mean,*" asks Mack, "*that all roads will lead to you?*" "*Not at all,*" smiled Jesus. "*Most roads don't lead anywhere. What does it mean... What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you.*"

Some people have taken from that or responded that, well, you're saying that being a Christian doesn't matter, they accuse you of universalism, whatever they mean by universalism.

PY: When somebody asks me if I'm a Christian, I ask them back, I'll say, "Would you please tell me what one is and I'll tell you if I'm one of those. If we're on the same page, I don't have any problem identifying myself as a Christian." Unfortunately, in the world today that has become kind of a Ziploc bag and as soon as you say the "C" word, there's no more communication, no more conversation. And what people think in their minds what a Christian is, is not what Scripture reveals as someone who is indwelt by the very character nature of ...

JMF: Become a caricature of kind of a preconceived idea depending on a person's experience of a Christian or Christianity.

PY: Exactly. For example, as Westerners we tend to think of anybody in the Middle East as Muslim. As if they believe all the tenets of Islam, etc, etc.

JMF: They're all the same. And they all fit this particular category that we have them on.

PY: Exactly. And most believers from the Middle East will still tell you they're Muslim but they're Christian. And for us that's little incongruous. The reality is that these little boxes, I wanted to get outside. Jesus died, rose again, ascended to the right hand of the Father before the term had even been created or coined. It happened probably in Antioch where it was a derogatory term that they were going, "We like this term." Right? And so for Jesus to identify himself as a Christian is moot. It didn't exist. So that was one piece of it. And then I wanted to push it even further and say, "You know it's not the label that you're identified with that is the relationship. A label is a label and I don't care what label you have, let's talk about what you mean by it. And then we'll see."

So, like I say, I have no problem identifying myself as a Christian or the validity of being a Christian or any of those things. But I want some agreement about what we are talking about. What a lot of people think of a Christian I don't want to be

identified with. Because there's a bunch of it that is not true. And it is not right. And... I want a bridge to be built in a relationship with anybody. And I don't want the word "Christian" to become the impediment that stops that relationship from being built. And I don't want it to be an impediment between them and the love of Jesus Christ either.

JMF: And that has nothing to do with faith in Jesus Christ, or belief in the name of Christ as some would want to say it.

PY: No. And very clearly, if I can say it as clearly as I can, I am convinced that Jesus Christ is **THE only** way into the embrace of the Father. There is no other name given among men through whom we are saved – that he is the sole and only road into the Father's heart and He is the Father's heart who has bridged that gap to us. And that's why actually that was the last edit that we put in to the book because somebody who read a pre-version said, "I love this book, I love everything about it but I've got a couple of friends who are going to think you're a universalist." So that little section where he says, "Do all roads lead to Papa?" Jesus smiles and says, "No most don't lead anywhere, but I will travel down any road to find you." That was the last edit that we made before it went to the printers in the first edition.

I'm so grateful for the brother who sent that and said, "What do you think?" Because I wanted it to be clear what we are not talking about... I want the centrality of atonement to be the central. This is what God has done to reconcile the world to himself. Now, as ambassadors of Christ, as if you are the very pleading of God beg, "Be reconciled back to him." Because he's reconciled himself to you. And that, to me, is the centrality and the significance of... the exclusivity – if I can use that term – of the person of God who has come in Christ in the power of the Spirit to make a way for us. And, you know, that's not being a universalist.

JMF: The subject of the Bible comes up in the course of the discussion between the Holy Spirit and Mackenzie and in one place here, they're out together in a canoe, and just reading from the book:

"Mack allowed his oar to turn in his hands as he let it play into the water's movements. It feels like living out of relationship, you know, trusting and talking to you, is a bit more complicated than just following rules." "What rules are those, Mackenzie?" "You know, all the things the Scriptures tell us we should do." "Ok," she said with some hesitation. "And what might those be?" He answered sarcastically, "about doing good things and avoiding evil, being kind to the poor, reading your Bible, praying, going to church, things like that." "I see, and how is that working for you?" He laughed, "Well, I've never done it very well, I have moments that aren't too bad, but there's always something I'm struggling with or feeling guilty about; I just figured I needed to try harder. But I find it difficult to sustain that motivation, I think virtually everyone, with any honesty would have to identify with that. "Mackenzie," she chided, her words flowing with affection, "The Bible doesn't teach you to follow rules, it is a picture of Jesus. While words may tell you what God is like and even what he may want from you, you cannot do any of it on your own. Life and living is in him and in no other. My goodness, you didn't think you could live the righteousness of God on your own, did you?" "Well, I sort of," he said sheepishly."

Anyway, you're presenting here the Bible not as the way it's popularly taught – as God's instruction book for mankind. So it comes out to rule on behaviours and to judge and to tell everyone what they're doing wrong and then goes back on the shelf. But the whole idea of Jesus in the Scriptures is often missed.

PY: Absolutely... it makes sense. If we are only flesh, if that's what we come to this writing with, then we'll drop back to see it as a behavioral kind of thing without the illumination of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit. Even those Words are dead to us. They don't produce life. We are absolutely dependent, even in the Words of Scripture for the presence and life and illumination of the power of the Holy Spirit. All of us are. We know folks who know the Words very well but have no life in them. And so there's that part of it... Jesus on the Emmaus Road with the disciples, saying, "starting with Moses he showed them **himself** throughout all of Scripture". It's a story, it's a story of his love, it's a story of his attraction to us.

I love Scripture. We are very blessed in the sense that we have this so available and just at our finger tips. Most of our brothers and sisters throughout history did not. They began with the Holy Spirit. And sometimes I'm thinking, maybe they have a little bit of an advantage because we so easily fall back into our intellectuality and don't even know how to hear the voice of the Spirit for ourselves. And we don't... Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice." And there's a lot of us who are going, "But don't we just have to hear it through whatever the leadership is, or whatever the structure is that I'm a part of, and he is saying, "No." He's saying, "You individually, **you** hear my voice." And I think that's part of what the work of the Spirit is - to tune us, to allow us - so that through the purification process, we sense his presence and we hear him speak to our hearts. And that becomes central. Then Scripture comes... He can illuminate it – but I'm not at all convinced that Scripture is the sole and only place through which God speaks. I tell you, in my life, it's been through movies even, but – music, creation, relationships, conversation, art, architecture, cultural... incredibly beautiful cultural diversity and uniqueness that happen there. And the Spirit is very able to speak through whatever the Spirit has available or what we've given the Spirit to be available.

JMF: Scripture provides a rudder, a foundation, a primary means by which God reveals Christ to us. But isn't that something that, so often, is misused in order to maintain some kind of control or to subjugate or to rule over and that isn't the Holy Spirit speaking to us through Scripture - that's us manipulating Scripture for our own ends, our own selfishness.

PY: Yeah, it goes back again, in part, to not believing that people can grow up to hear the voice of the Spirit for themselves – that we need to interpret that for them so that we can maintain control. I think a lot of people are afraid that if people move into freedom, and freedom is why Christ came – it was for our freedom –if that happens, people will go do crazy things. And frankly there is good evidence that suggests that the amount of coercion and control that's placed on people is the reason why when the control come off, they go out and do crazy things. They've just never matured inside of that framework. And so the work of the Holy Spirit is to move us toward freedom. That is his life in us.

And freedom within the context of our understanding of reality is all based in **dependence**, not in independence. Here we are - a culture that's full of independence which makes sense, and the Holy Spirit is constantly driving us toward **dependence**. That is the only place where we find freedom, because we were designed to live our life in freedom – in dependence – in that union relationship with God. Scripture is wonderful. It is definitely something through which the frame of our lives are understood. But if I was thrown in a prison, without it, I know the Holy Spirit would be present with me. And, you know, you have a teacher, you have an anointing on you and in that sense you don't need a teacher because the teacher lives inside of you and in all things will teach you how to abide in him (1 John 2:20,27).

JMF: And yet there's a submission that we all have to one another, to listen, to test our ideas, and so on and make sure that we are reflecting the self-sacrificial love of God rather than our own agenda and so on. All that works in community...

PY: Exactly, it takes us back to this relational element that exists in the very character, nature of God that our relationships are just a reflection of that unity and diversity in the community of the Trinity, you know. And the beautiful thing is that he invites us into that level of relationship. I was thinking about Christmas this year, and you have God who is working together for our redemption and they have this circle of relationship and they crack it open and invite a 15-year old little girl into it and they say, "Would it be ok if we did this?" And they wait until Mary says, "Be it done unto me." And that's the God of the universe who is in relationship with us and submitting the process to us so that we would join in that process with him. It's the same in our own hearts, the same in the process of our own healing, and nowhere does he use shame to try to produce this. He doesn't use law to try to produce it. And the beauty of it is, as we become whole, pure in heart, we begin to see God everywhere. We see his activity, he's in the details of our lives, he's in the present with us. Incredible. Is this good news or what?