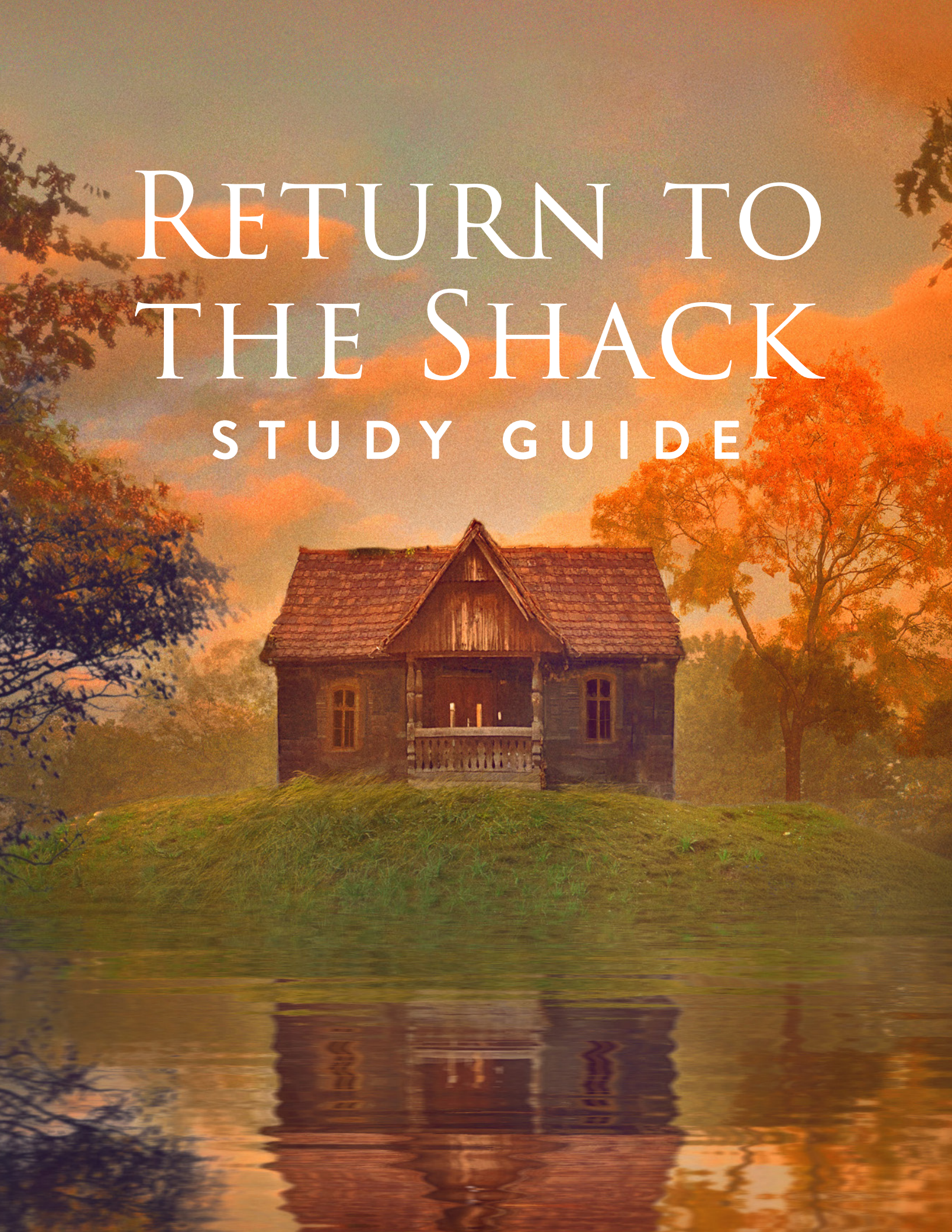


RETURN TO THE SHACK

STUDY GUIDE



A NOTE TO THE READER

DEAR READER:

We are inviting you into a story full of hope, despair, grief, and trust. As you open the pages and continue learning about Mack and Nan's story, we hope you learn just as much about yourself. Through these reflection questions, may you engage more deeply with what the story is doing in your heart!

Feel free to omit or alter questions to best fit your book club's time limitations and atmosphere.

ENJOY THIS GREAT ADVENTURE WE CALL LIFE!

OPENING QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

- Have you read *The Shack*?
- What expectations are you bringing to *Return to the Shack*?
- What do you hope to gain out of this experience?

FIRST WORDS

- The first sentence of *Return to the Shack* states, “I don’t think I’ve ever met a person who has no issues about faith, God, suffering, or death” (1). Which of these existential concerns do you most struggle with? What personal experiences have led you to feel this way?
- Willie and Mack have been best friends for decades. Who is your “Mack”? What about them earns that spot? If you had to describe your best friend in one sentence, what would you write?
- “As I think about it, he [Mack] is more like almost every man in the Hebrew scriptures...who sometimes almost despite themselves, keep stumbling into the Love of God” (1). What does it mean to stumble into the Love of God? Has this ever happened to you?
- Willie discusses his love for journaling as a way to “...externalize my thoughts while keeping a log of memories, conversations, and events” (2). Do you enjoy journaling, or do you have another practice for processing your thoughts and experiences?
- “I have come to believe that each encounter leaves a mark, a residue of love or fear, control or trust, good or evil” (2). What encounters (or people) have left a mark on you? How have these encounters shaped you as a person?
- *Return to the Shack* explores the concept of forgiveness. Do you find yourself quick to forgive and forget? Do you think forgiveness requires that you forget? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 1: A LETTER FROM HOME

- Mack begins the chapter with a letter to Missy, his daughter who passed away. Have you ever lost someone you loved? If you were to write a letter to them, what would you say or ask?
- Do you think it’s easier to write a letter to someone you know won’t receive it, or someone who will? Why?
- Do you find it easy to articulate your feelings—similarly to how Mack does in his letter (7–9)—or do you feel more confused?
- Do you prefer to think, speak, or journal your thoughts?

- Why do you think Nan made a birthday cake, and why did she drop it off on Mack's porch (9)? And why do you think Mack let it dissolve in the rain? Ignorance? Apathy? Grief? Or something else entirely?
- Mack was so transfixed by the melting cake that he missed the sunshine and rainbow above (10). Do you remember a time when your sadness narrowed your perception or acted as blinders to the good around you?

CHAPTER 2: CROSSROADS

- The phone call between Mack and his daughter, Kate, shows us a glimpse into their family dynamic (11). How does your family dynamic relate to or differ from Mack's?
- Kate admits to Mack, "But, Dad, I still struggle with the God thing" (14). Where are you on the journey of trusting God? Unsure but curious like Kate? Pondering but believing like Mack? Something else?
- Mack responds, "I think we need to just do the next right thing and see how it all plays out" (15). What do you think it would look like for you to "trust the next right thing" in your life? Is there a big decision looming over your head? Or are there smaller, everyday hurdles you're facing?
- Kate tells her dad that she wishes she had quick fixes for her life, rather than the slow process Mack describes: "I just wish it wouldn't take so long" (15). Do you relate to Kate? What do you wish could be a "quick fix" in your life?
- Mack agrees but responds to Kate with, "But I think human beings are so incredibly crafted that quick fixes aren't an option" (15). What "quick fixes" are you prone to go to when life gets hard? (Working out, eating too much or little, drinking, bingeing shows, packing your schedule, etc.?) Do any of them really seem to work?

CHAPTER 3: THE ASK

- At the beginning of chapter, Mack is greeted by surprise visitors (16). Despite being unprepared, Mack immediately goes into hosting mode—scampering to brew a fresh pot of coffee and offering cookies baked by Nan. What does this show about Mack's character? Do you relate to Mack's hospitality, or are you more thrown off by unplanned visits? Do you enjoy hosting?
- After complimenting Mack's coffee, Sam reveals why the police have visited him (20). How do you think you'd respond to Sam's explanation and request? What apprehension or feelings might resurface?
- Sam describes how the family of Sallie (the little girl who was abducted in Kansas and found by J's description) now, "...have some closure that hopefully will allow them to move on with their lives and heal" (21). When in your life have you needed closure? Did you get it? How did that affect your ability to heal and move on?

- At the end of the chapter, Mack whispers, “Papa God, I need you, I really need you!” (23). When was the last time you felt the rug pulled out from underneath you? Did you have a conversation with God, like Mack, or react in another way?

CHAPTER 4: FADE TO BLACK

- The chapter opens with Mack taking in the golden hour (24). Do you prefer sunrises or sunsets? How often do you make the time to take in a full sunrise or sunset?
- When talking about grieving her child’s death, Nan says, “...but I also knew it would take a long time to find my way out and I’d probably take some others with me down into that hole” (27). Do you relate to the feeling of dragging others down into your sadness?
- How does grief affect you—your personality, memory, drive, and capacity?
- Nan describes how no one could get through to Mack because he felt like a failure for letting his family down (28). Where do you feel like a “failure” or that you’re letting someone down?
- Mack describes how he tries to sound “strong, protective, and in control” (29) because that’s how men are supposed to be. How has toxic masculinity negatively affected the way men view themselves?
- Mack asks for a few days to process his decision before meeting Nan and Willie to discuss the decision further (29). Are you the type of person who needs time to process decisions, or do you prefer to talk through problems right away?

CHAPTER 5: THE RETURN TO THE SHACK

- What do you think Mack means when he says, “But there was a knowing deeper than knowing” (32)? What experiences do you relate to feeling inexpressible joy? Do you believe that is tied to Jesus?
- “A wave of grief rolled over him, but it no longer suffocated him, isolated him, or threatened to disempower him” (33). Describe the different types of grief. Why does Mack still feel grief, and why may it no longer be suffocating?
- As Mack approaches the shack, “Slowly, he took a deep breath, hoping the weight of this place wouldn’t pull him under” (34). Is there a certain place you either go to when you want to feel closer to God or hope never to have to go back to?
- Mack finds himself angry and frustrated when God isn’t physically present at the shack. He says, “You know I need you, so where are you?” (34). Later he says to God, “Why don’t you just do what...I want you to do,...when I want you to do it?” (37). Have you ever had a moment like this where you wanted God to show up, or answer a specific prayer you had, but you felt alone? How did you react?

- ✦ Mack stumbles into the hotel, wet, muddy, and discouraged, only to be met with a wall-mounted glass display case containing Missy's photo and articles about the abduction and arrest (36). Have you experienced "coincidences" like this in your life? Do you view them as coincidences, or intentional plans from God?

CHAPTER 6: GROWING UP IS HARD TO DO

- ✦ What do you think about the chapter title? Why is growing up hard?
- ✦ Mack and Jesus take their time sitting by the lake, because "Mack was in no hurry, and he didn't remember Jesus ever being in a hurry...ever" (39). When was the last time you were in no hurry?
- ✦ Do you/would you ever talk to Jesus the way Mack does in this chapter? What about their relationship feels foreign or familiar?
- ✦ Jesus tells Mack, "You can't, Mack, at least not alone you can't. Apart from me, all you can *do* is nothing" (41). Where in your life are you trying to do something apart from God?
- ✦ Jesus asks if Mack ever thinks they're separated from one another. Mack responds, "It sure feels like it sometimes!" (42). Do you ever feel separated from God?
- ✦ Mack begins to say, "But what if I make the wrong...[choice?]" (50). Do you feel like there is a wrong choice to make in life?

CHAPTER 7: IN ONE ACCORD

- ✦ Mack tells Nan and Willie the truth, that he's scared (53). Do you find it hard to admit to your friends and loved ones when you're scared?
- ✦ Willie asks Mack, "Can you trust the God you met at the shack?" (54). Can you trust the God who has shown up in your life? Why or why not?
- ✦ Mack asks for Willie's and Nan's opinion on how to proceed, saying, "I don't know if it's fear or if it's God, but it's saying don't go" (54). Do you go to friends or family for guidance when you're confused? How have they helped you discern your next steps?
- ✦ Nan tells Willie how thankful she is for the way he has shown up for Mack (56). How do you think our friendships would benefit from open lines of communication and gratitude for one another?
- ✦ Willie says, "Ya just never know what sort of ripples can come from a single stone" (58). What does Willie mean by this?
- ✦ Mack mentions how he's started going to therapy for himself (58). What do you think about therapy?

CHAPTER 8: BEGINNINGS

- ✦ After Missy's death, Mack threw himself into work instead of taking time off (59). Do you relate to throwing yourself into work instead of making time for grief?
- ✦ Sam says, "Seems suffering's a common thread that runs through all our lives" (60). Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
- ✦ Mack jokes, "You can tell a lot about a person from the coffee they drink" (61). If you were sitting at the table, what drink would you have requested? Do you prefer coffee, chai, tea, or another drink?
- ✦ After some joking, "Mack realized it had been a long time since he had felt the powerfully cleanings tide of deep laughter among friends" (64). Describe the last time you were in a room with friends and belly laughed. What did it feel like?
- ✦ When Sam is discussing the victim's families, she says, "They'll only know that they're the recipients of a miracle, as severe as that mercy will be" (66). How often do you think of how many things in our lives happen because of something else we know nothing about?
- ✦ Mack closes the chapter with, "I think that in this moment, I have everything I need" (67). When's the last time you felt this way?

CHAPTER 9: WHAT IS WEAK: NOT LOVE

- ✦ Mack begins the chapter by sleeping in (68). What is your relationship with rest? When was the last time your body made you sleep in?
- ✦ Discuss this question among your peers: "Do you think some people are so far gone that there's no hope they could ever change?" (70).
- ✦ Dr. Mason tells Mack, "We can say whatever we want, but it is the way we live day to day that reveals our actual assumptions..." (70). What do you say you believe, and how does your life reflect this?
- ✦ Mack realizes that "Most of the time he was trying to control fear and did not trust love" (70). In your life, what would it look like to trust love over fear?
- ✦ Mack tells Dr. Mason, "What if I need some people to be irredeemable?" (73). After reading Mack's explanation, do you have anyone in your life that you want, or need, to be irredeemable?
- ✦ Do you agree that true forgiveness is the way to heal (75)? How do you know you've truly forgiven someone?

CHAPTER 10: ENTER HERE ALL YE WHO ABANDON HOPE

- Willie thinks that “Missing Nan was a gift, and he accepted it” (81). Have you experienced being far away from someone you loved? How did the physical distance affect you?
- Nan made sure that Mack’s hotel room was stocked with his favorite things, even though she didn’t tell him (82). Do you have someone that knows you better than you do?
- Mack says, “I think my imagination of this place is far worse than being here” (87). Terry responds, “Proximity changes things” (88). Discuss how this is true in the narrative itself, and then extend Terry’s statement into our daily lives.
- Terry tells Mack how, “Every morning when he [Kevin] gets out of bed, he starts his day by sayin’, ‘Today is the best day of my life’” (89). Can you imagine being in Kevin’s shoes and thinking this? Is there any part of your life where Kevin’s outlook could be useful for you?
- What do you think about the two photo albums of your soul, which Terry discusses (94)? Is there someone in your life who could benefit from you revisiting the good photo album, and is it easy to do so?
- Akil mentions how “A bunch a’ us, like Terry here, have a relationship with the families they harmed” (96). Can you imagine having a relationship like that with someone who caused immense harm to you and your family?

CHAPTER 11: PARABLES AND OTHER MYSTERIES

- Sam comforts Mack by telling him he doesn’t have to do anything about the way he’s feeling toward J post-visitation. She says, “Maybe just let it sit there inside and do its own thing” (99). Do you find it hard not to be able to do anything but sit with your thoughts?
- Mack runs into Amelia Walker in a dream, and she tells him, “Sometimes it is simpler to trust than to try and figure everything out” (104). How could trusting God be easier than figuring out life on your own? Why do you think trusting is so hard for most of us?
- In Mack’s dream, he opens a door and instantly feels a strong sense of belonging (104). God tells Mack the place Mack picked in his dream is “the safest place that you know, in the deepest part of your soul” (105). If you opened a door (inside a dream) and instantly knew you belonged there, what would be behind that door?
- When Jesus explains parables to Mack, Jesus describes how sometimes we can get too deep in the weeds of what a story means. When this happens, Jesus points to a child and says, “...from where a child stands, mountains look simpler, and their vision is often clearer” (107). Where in your life could you benefit from having a childlike viewpoint?

- What do you make of the dream that Mack had? Start with the different rooms, then discuss his encounter with Jesus, and consider the parable he's left contemplating.
- In Jesus' parable, one pastor "bravely admitted, 'I don't understand'" (111). Why was this brave of him to say that?

CHAPTER 12: THE SNIPER'S SHOT

- Do you think Mack did the right thing by not telling Kate the facts of where he is and what he's up to (112)?
- Mack asks Amir, "Well, you know when you have one of those mind-altering, change-your-perspective experiences?" (113). Have you had an experience like this before?
- Mack has conversations about faith and Jesus with the FBI agents on Mack's case (114). Do you ever have conversations about faith and belief with friends or peers who share differing viewpoints? How can this be scary, and how does this conversation show its potential for good?
- Mack tells Billy, "Billy, sometimes it's better not to be too familiar with a parable" (116). Did you grow up learning church stories, or are you unfamiliar with them? Share your experiences and how they've led you to encounter Jesus differently.
- Billy shares with Mack his interpretation of the parable, boiling it down to a deep sense of belonging we all desire (116). Do you think we really all crave to belong (118)?
- Billy asks Mack, "But do you think J is lost, or do you think he never belonged? (118)." How would you respond? Do you have anyone in your life you could replace J's name with?

CHAPTER 13: THE RAGES OF REMEMBRANCE

- J opens the conversation with Mack giving some ground rules and explaining how he wants Mack's forgiveness (123). Why would J go to all this trouble just for that?
- During his conversation with J, Mack hears, *Rest in me as I rest in you* (124), words from Jesus echoing in Mack's mind. How has Jesus or scripture met you in moments of distress and grounded or strengthened you?
- Mack did not expect J to look or act how he did. What were your first impressions of J? Were you surprised by how J was described to look, or the way he spoke and interacted with Mack?
- We discover the sad reality that J has no one who truly knows him (125). Who deeply knows you right now?
- Mack begins a response to J with, "How dare you ask anything from me after you have taken everything from me?" (126). Were this response and shift in Mack's composure surprising to you?

- ✦ Mack shares his story about his dad with J, and about how Mack was in the military (131). What layer does this add to the relationship between Mack and J if we consider Mack to potentially be a “murderer”? Were Mack’s “murders” justified? Is there ever “necessary” evil?

CHAPTER 14: BACK TO THE SHACK...WITH A GUEST

- ✦ Sam says to Mack, “Mack, it was sacred, and life-changing, to witness such a powerful grief” (135). Have you ever thought of someone else’s grief being powerful or sacred? What does that mean?
- ✦ J tells a story about how Kevin met him in his cell and finished the conversation with, “J, we are praying for you too and sending you our love and strength too” (136). J says he’s “trying to understand all this, and I can’t seem to get my mind around it” (136). To some extent, we can relate to J—God’s love and grace can feel hard to wrap our minds around. When in your life have you struggled to understand God’s kindness toward you when you didn’t feel like you deserved it?
- ✦ Mack says he could have sent J *The Shack* to explain the events that led up to Missy’s death, but J says no: “It’s not the same as looking into the eyes of a real human being to tell if they’re speaking the truth. And something happens face-to-face that can’t happen in any other way” (136). How does J’s argument—that there’s something sacred about face-to-face storytelling—ring true in our digital age? How have technology and written words hindered our relationships built on connection?
- ✦ How do you relate to this admission Mack told J: “And truth be told, most of my life, I’ve avoided difficult conversations—scared someone might point out I wasn’t perfect” (140)?

CHAPTER 15: YOU’RE NOT HERE WITH ME

- ✦ Mack picked up the phone in the middle of the night for his daughter, Kate (144). He took the time to listen, ask thoughtful questions, and guide Kate to the next best step for that night. How do you think his relationship with his daughter could reflect a glimpse of Jesus’ relationship with us?
- ✦ Mack tells Kate after her relapse, “Kate, the relapse itself helps you admit that you’re powerless. Calling your sponsor is admitting it. Calling me is admitting it. And here’s more good news—you’re not alone” (146). Why is admitting we are powerless a *good* thing? Would you find Mack’s advice comforting?
- ✦ What does it mean to you that “there is no step zero”?

CHAPTER 16: SLIP SLIDING AWAY

- ✦ Wrestle with Willy's statement: "I suppose that's the downside of actually getting to know someone. Two-dimensional people have no depth and no personhood. They're easy to hate—but impossible to love" (151).
- ✦ Billy feels that J may be trying to trick them all. What are your predictions for J's intentions?
- ✦ After Mack tells Nan he was a sniper, she responds with, "I'm sorry too, Mack. That must be a hard burden to carry. I can't imagine" (152). Why do we keep secrets from those we love, and how do secrets turn into burdens?
- ✦ After Nan finds out that Mack has been going to therapy, she hangs up the phone. Despite this response, Mack thinks, "...it was out in the open now, and it was a relief" (153). Describe a time when you held on to something and finally told someone.

CHAPTER 17: INSECTS

- ✦ Josh calls Mack at the beginning of the chapter to check in on him (155). Have you ever had an impulse to text, call, or check in on a friend, or has someone you loved checked in at the perfect time?
- ✦ After Mack's phone call with Josh, he thinks, "What an incredible way to start the day" (156). Describe the last time you did something out of the ordinary in your morning that really set the tone for your day: getting a workout in, meeting a friend for breakfast, waking up with enough time not to be rushed, etc.
- ✦ Mack tells J, "There comes a point when we find Jesus in our hearts and not someplace 'out there'" (157). Have you encountered Jesus in your heart?
- ✦ By Mack's definition of Love—"a fire determined to heal us" (158)—he believes that "there's hope for all of us" (158). Do you believe there's hope for everyone?
- ✦ How do you think Mack is able to talk to his child's murderer about Jesus' great love for all?
- ✦ Were you surprised to learn that J's mark was not a ladybug, but the broken wing of a butterfly? What does the butterfly's importance reveal about J? Do you believe his story?

CHAPTER 18: CURSES AND CONFESSIONS

- ✦ What do you think about Mack's response to Billy, "I think that although J is very lost, he has always belonged and always will" (164)? What about Mack's conversation with J led Mack to believe this?
- ✦ Mack and the police go grab some lunch together and debrief, offering some lighthearted banter with Loretta and enjoying great food (165). How do meals bring us together?

- Why is prayer so important to Mack when stepping into the prison's observation room to hear J's story (167)? How is prayer important to us in our daily lives? What is prayer?
- Do you agree with Mack's attitude toward his feelings? "Don't you get it?" he tells J. "My feelings are not yours to hurt or fix. They're mine, and I will deal with them. No matter what you do or say, they belong to me" (172).
- Have you ever considered the difference between profanity and curses (172)? Which of the two is more painful?
- Why does J say to Mack, "I forgive you" (174)? How is this moment so powerful that even the guard has tears in his eyes?

CHAPTER 19: MERCY AND MOMENT

- Interact with this quote: "Tears have a language of their own and the power to close any sense of distance between one human being and another" (176). How have you seen this ring true in your life?
- Why do you think Mack asks for Nan and Willie to come (177)? What about his experience in the last chapter may have triggered this, and why would Mack need Nan and Willie in Nashville?
- Mack retreats to a local church because he needs "a refuge, a safe place, a sanctuary" (178). Do you have a safe place you go to when life feels too overwhelming?
- Mack hits a breaking point in the church, fully coming apart since arriving in Nashville. Why does this happen in a church, and what do you make of his experience or vision in the church?
- How did you feel when reading Mack's lament?
- The woman holding Mack in the church has "softened his grief—or perhaps taken it and put it somewhere safe, somewhere holy and forever treasured" (185). How can someone else "soften" our grief?
- Who is the man—the Protector of Hearts—that Mack encounters in the second part of his dream at the church? What do you make of The Moment (190)?

CHAPTER 20: GOD IN OUR SHADOWS

- How could Mack have gotten into a locked church, and why does he hear and see a choir? (194).
- J decided to meet with the FBI outside of his time with Mack so that J's time with Mack could be more personal (196). Why do you think J wants their time to be personal?
- After she'd served for years in her field, and worked with Mack and Nan to find their baby girl, it was J's confession that shattered Sam. Does it surprise you that J's confession is what almost drove Sam to quit her job (197)?

- ✦ Mack reflects on his time in the church the night before and ponders, “I’m convinced we’ll never find a sufficient answer to the ‘Why?’ questions that will satisfy the human mind” (197). Do you agree with that?
- ✦ Where in your life can you change your “why” to “what now” (197)?

CHAPTER 21: THE SOLACE OF CONFESSION

- ✦ Do you often find yourself experiencing “future-tripping” (199), as Mack calls it? Do you find it easier to give in to worry about the future, or easier to live in the moment?
- ✦ Mack decides to engage with Nan to see if she’s mad at him, rather than letting it play out (201). Are you authentic and open or avoidant?
- ✦ During Mack and Nan’s argument, Mack works hard to stay present, not disappear, and to ask questions (202). How hard is it to break habits that have been formed in relationships?
- ✦ For those who read *The Shack*, what was it like hearing Nan’s side of her experience with Mack following Missy’s death (202)?
- ✦ Mack recounts his church experience to Nan and Willie as they listen in person, rather than over the phone (206). Why is a support system so important, and how is someone’s physical presence more impactful?

CHAPTER 22: JUSTICE

- ✦ J thanks Mack for Mack’s confession, stating, “There’s a little boy in me somewhere who hasn’t spoken in years, and you not only gave him a chance to be heard but made his voice matter” (208). How did Mack’s admission touch J this way? Have you ever had a childhood wound healed by someone else later in life?
- ✦ On the way up the mountain, Missy spoke to J about Jesus (209). Have you ever listened to a child openly talk about Jesus? What was that like?
- ✦ Why would Nan want to talk to J alone and without the sound turned on in the observation room (210)? What impact did Nan have on J that Mack maybe didn’t?
- ✦ How do we struggle with justice? Why is it so hard for us to make our enemy our brother (212)?
- ✦ Mack, through a miracle, verbally forgives J to his face. Yet J doesn’t want Mack’s forgiveness (213). Have you ever felt that you or someone else wasn’t worthy of forgiveness?

CHAPTER 23: WHY NOT?

- Nan begins to tell Mack where she sees their relationship, and Mack jumps in with a “But—” (217). Do you, too, find it challenging to sit and listen during hard conversations?
- Mack and Nan both repeat “I do” when deciding to save their marriage (218). How does this reflect back to the promises they first made in marriage and mark an important moment in their relationship?
- Mack and Nan eat at Loretta’s restaurant, and at the end of the meal, Nan says, “You have no idea what you’ve meant to us today.” Loretta replies, “Isn’t that the point? We never know the whole story, so why not love all the time?” (219). How has Loretta cared for Mack and his friends while they are in town, and how does Loretta demonstrate the importance of caring for anyone you encounter?

CHAPTER 24: FREED WILL

- On the way to Portland to meet J, Mack sleeps through half the car ride (226). Do you find it easy to sleep in the car on long road trips, or do you, like Nan, prefer to drive?
- How could Mack have forgiven J hundreds of times over the last year, but finally there is a sense that forgiving him has been accomplished (232)? Do you relate to Mack’s journey of forgiveness?
- Did J’s escape catch you by surprise (234)? Why would Mack run after him (236)?
- After his escape, J tells Mack while sitting on the boulder, “Mackenzie, in my entire life, I’ve never been able to make one choice on my own and for myself” (237). Can you imagine never having made a choice for yourself? What would that personal prison be like?
- When Mack is convincing J not to jump off the boulder, he says: “J, can’t you see it? If you jump, it means you are still owned, by your shame and your fear. To jump is imagined control and a disempowering lie. The risk of trust and relationship? That is a free choice” (238). We all have had our own journeys with mental health struggles or supporting a loved one with mental health struggles. How does this quote affect you?
- Did you know the Protector of Hearts was J before this moment (238)?

CHAPTER 25: SEEING EYES

- Based on Nan’s reaction, do you think she knew what J had set out to complete (239)?
- Interact with this quote from Willie: “You can’t appreciate the grace that is given when you are looking in from the outside” (240).
- What do you think about the relationship between Willie and Sam (241)?
- Sam tells Mack and Nan how her time with them has changed her life for the better

(241). What experience or friendship comes to mind when you think of someone who has deeply impacted your life, just by who they are?

- Reflect on Nan's experience in the shack. Why do you think she decided to go right then? Why was it important she went in alone?
- Why do you think Papa restored the shack for Nan, similarly to how he had for Mack all those years ago (245)?

EPILOGUE

- When Jesus and Mack are discussing J's experience on the cliff, Mack responds to Jesus with, "Yeah, I suppose taking the risk of trust is like jumping off a cliff" (247). Reflect on a time in your life when you took a jump of trust, rather than a step into what had been usual!
- Jesus tells Mack, "Control is a harsh taskmaster, Mack. It's an understandable addiction, especially when you have never known you were loved" (247). Do you feel enslaved by control?
- The ending of *Return to the Shack* discusses suicide. If your group feels comfortable with this topic, leave some time to discuss how relevant it is in our society or even to someone in the group.
- Did you ever ponder why J chose to go by that name (248)? Why did he relate to Judas?
- What do you think about the fact that even those who are lost have always belonged (249)?

AUTHOR'S NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Did you learn anything new about the author or the story?
- How does knowing that Terry, Kevin, and Akil are real people on Death Row (252) affect you or change the way you view these individuals in the book?
- Discuss the impact of reading Terry, Kevin and Akil's letters. Just by reading these letters alone, would you assume they're on Death Row?
- What do you think about the author's interpretation of "The Moment" (254)?
- Would you have guessed "Protector of Hearts" was created out of a child's conversation (256)?

REFLECTION

- What expectations did you bring to *Return to the Shack*, and how did this story take you by surprise?
- After learning about J, is he redeemable in your eyes? Does that matter?
- Pick one character from *Return to the Shack* and describe how you relate to them or how they impacted you.