

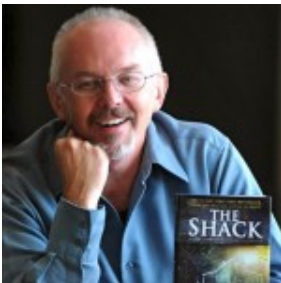
# Bestselling author reveals truth behind 'The Shack'

By Kathryn Reed

CHICO – It wasn't supposed to be a bestseller, let alone No. 1 on the New York Times' list. "The Shack" started out as a letter to Paul Young's kids at the request of his wife who wanted him to put his ideas in writing as a living conversation.

He didn't even have the money to get 15 copies run off for it to be a Christmas present. So his family had to wait even longer.

But then something happened. Family members shared it with others. He started receiving emails from strangers telling him how much the manuscript moved them.



Paul Young

Since "The Shack" was formally published in 2007, Young has been on the speaking circuit. His last stop was in May at CSU Chico.

"The weekend in the shack represents 11 years of my life," Young told the more than 300 people in attendance.

The back of the 252-page paperback gives this as a description of the book, "Mackenzie Allen Philips's youngest daughter, Missy, has been abducted during a family vacation and evidence

that she may have been brutally murdered is found in an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Four years later, in the midst of the Great Sadness, Mack receives a suspicious note, apparently from God, inviting him back to that shack for a weekend. ... In a world where religion seems to grow increasingly irrelevant 'The Shack' wrestles with the timeless question: Where is God in a world so filled with unspeakable pain?"

Young tells the audience Mackenzie and Missy both are partly autobiographical.

After I read the book a couple years ago I described it as "thought-provoking". Forgiveness is the overwhelming theme I was left with.

So much of what gets published these days seems so trivial. Perhaps this is because big publishing houses want something safe. This book is not safe. Some would call it controversial.

As Young explains, the book is a conversation starter about God, which is different than religion. The subject matter was a turn off to 20 publishers. They all said no.

Friends of Young decided to help him self-publish. More than 14 million copies of "The Shack" have been sold.

Young is a better writer than a speaker. He's not sure if he has another book in him, especially considering this wasn't intended to be one. But he is working on a screenplay. That and wanting to be home have him off the lecture circuit for the time being.