

From the February 4, 2008 Issue

A Mess of God's Greens

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" Mark 7:20-23

Into William P. Young's truth serum fiction dances the winsome and translucent Sarayu, a personification of the Holy Spirit. As she gives Mack, the main character in Young's novel, *The Shack*, a guided tour of her garden, he discovers it is actually a living metaphor of his soul.

Earlier in the day Mack over did it on a meal of greens. While this garden is a place of beauty and design by its Creator, it, along with Mack's churning stomach, is in a 'mess' at the moment. As they walk, talk, and pull weeds Mack begins to sense the unavoidable result of what he has previously 'taken in' working its way through his system. Sarayu offers him another kind of green—hand picked healing herbs:

"You'd better chew on these greens for a minute. It will counteract the natural movement of the ones you overindulged in earlier, if you know what I mean." ... "The flavor of the herb was not distasteful: a hint of mint and some other spices he had probably smelled before but couldn't identify. As they walked, the growling in his stomach slowly began to subside, and he relaxed what he hadn't realized he had been clenching." (The Shack, William P. Young, p. 129)

Like you and I, Mack's life reflects a personal value system lived out in the day to day. From birth we absorb information, stimuli, data, and experience like a sponge. We process these all—the true and the false, the good and the bad, the painful and the pleasant—and out of this process comes our own self-oriented and self-guided tour of life. But even the keenest among us discovers that trailing behind this self-guided tour is a wake of pain where cherished relationships were meant to be grown and nurtured.

Author and theologian C. Baxter Kruger writes that our hearts have been 'shredded', and both we and the cosmos are in a world of hurt. Instead of a living legacy we have passed along a death trap. When we catch glimpses of the mess we're in we seek to clean it up using Religion and other worn out methods and means with renewed vigor!

We aren't really sure how we got here, but we don't mind dabbling with religion in the attempt to find a cure. Religion inspires a forced mold and a crude clenching of the undisciplined facets of our nature into the façade of calm and control.

Though once repulsed by the thought, I find myself in tacit agreement with Karl Marx' statement that religion often serves as an opiate of the people. But this is our own doing. It won't be this way forever and God has never been about religion. We strive to hide the natural consequence of making our own way in life without the relational God who created us for His love.

"Having chosen the ravaged path of independence you don't even comprehend that you are dragging the entire Creation along with you...So very sad, but it won't be this way forever." (The Shack, William P. Young, p. 132)

God's desire is to work from our insides out to help, heal, and bring harmony to our soul's personal chaos until the curse is gone. He wants us to see Him, believe Him, and enjoy Him as the source of life—today, tomorrow, and for eternity! The Triune God is the only one who can open our clenched fists so we may grasp anew His little finger like the newborn clasps that of his parent.

The Human of Human-ity has come and dwelt among us and the creation groans for the fruits of our life in Him to be realized! The living water which began to flow 2000 years ago is still available and the healing herbs are still growing. So help yourself to seconds. A mess of God's greens is really what we need!

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. (Revelation 22:1-3, NIV)

~ Steve Schantz