



The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right

Lisa Sharon Harper

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God once declared everything in the world “very good.”

Can you imagine it?

A Vision of Hope for a Broken World

Shalom is what God declared. *Shalom* is what the Kingdom of God looks like.

Shalom is when all people have enough.

It's when families are healed.

It's when churches, schools, and public policies protect human dignity.

Shalom is when the image of God is recognized in every single human.

Shalom is our calling as followers of Jesus's gospel. It is the vision God set forth in the Garden and the restoration God desires for every relationship.

What can we do to bring *shalom* to our nations, our communities, and our souls? Through a careful exploration of biblical text, particularly the first three chapters of Genesis, Lisa Sharon Harper shows us what “very good” can look like today, even after the Fall.

Because despite our anxious minds, despite division and threats of violence, God's vision remains: Wholeness for a hurting world. Peace for a fearful soul. *Shalom*.

The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right Details

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Barb Terpstra says

I initially resisted reading this book, I'm not sure why, but am so glad I picked it up, and that I bought it as a real book instead of through my kindle. I made this my lunch hour book. For me this was a perfect way to read it as it is a book to ponder, not just read through. Excellent book that will give you lots to think about.

Di says

I wanted to read The Very Good Gospel before attending a conference where Lisa Sharon Harper will speak. Well worth the time, this book is a good reflection on the Gospel and justice and the role of Christians in seeking justice in today's world.

Caity Gill says

3 stars because I just don't know with this book. On one hand, I love and agree with the message that the Bible is about much more than just our personal salvation, and that God is about social justice. But, several of her interpretations of key pieces of Scripture were views I had never heard before so I didn't know what to do with that. It led me to further research but I'm still not settled, so that's why I'm just not sure about this one.

Bob says

Summary. Through a study of the early chapters of Genesis with application to contemporary life, Harper explores the theme of shalom and how this enlarges our understanding of the good news.

Have you ever felt that there must be more to the gospel? This is a question that Lisa Sharon Harper has struggled with in her own life and for which she found profound answers as she explored the biblical theme of shalom as well as the early the early chapters of Genesis, that begin with a vision of shalom, explore how shalom was broken, and the effects of that brokenness on our relationships with God, ourselves, between genders, in the creation, in families, around issues of race, and relations between nations.

In each chapter, Harper explores the Genesis text, develops the idea of shalom, and through this weaves in other biblical material from both testaments. In the process, she weaves in her own life as a black woman, from a flawed family, experiencing issues with her own self-image, with relationships, and in the journey to pursue racial reconciliation and justice. As she does so, she develops a vision of the gospel that is so much larger than just me and my sin and Jesus rescuing me from hell so I can spend eternity with Him. It is a gospel that explains both God's incredibly wonderful intention for the world, and how our choice to love something more than God and believe a lie damaged the fabric of relationships, broke shalom. From the

sacrifice of an animal in Genesis 3 to the sacrifice of Christ, she explores how God has restored shalom, which is indeed very good news.

The final chapter was the most moving. She talks about death, and her own struggle with dealing with death, including her silence when a close friend lost her father. And she movingly describes the breakthrough she experienced when Richard Twiss, a Lakota Indian ministry leader was dying and she had a vision of anointing his feet with oil, confirmed by a friend who had a similar vision.

"On the way to the hospital, I read the story of Lazarus and the grave (see John 11:1-44) and felt called to read it over Richard. When I arrived, I learned during the day, Richard's kidneys had failed. I shared the two visions--mine and my friend's--with Katherine, Richard's wife and cofounder of Wiconi. She gave me permission to read the passage over Richard and to anoint his feet. As I read, we all wept. I never noticed this before, but the passage begins with an explanation that Lazarus was the brother of Mary, the woman who anointed Jesus feet for burial. I anointed Richard's feet and prayed.

...

"I can't help but think back to the moment when I anointed Richard's feet. It is clear now. We were anointing our brother's feet for burial. As I moved the oil over his feet, I repeated the words that Richard's editor had said to me when we talked earlier that night: "Beautiful are the feet of the one who brings good news."

I think there are many like Lisa who have feared death, who never have been alongside someone as they were dying in the hope of Christ, the hope of Jesus' resurrection, whose body with anointed feet was laid in a grave, only to walk out on those feet when the stone was rolled away. Lisa described this moment as "devastating and sweet." She describes how we both grieve and yet hope because of this very good news.

This is a book for the believing person who is wondering, "is that all there is?" when they think of the gospel, particularly if they wonder about the relevance of the gospel to the brokenness they see around them. This is a book for new believers to help them understand the fullness of what they have believed. And it is a book that the person considering faith might also read, both because of its exposition of this "very good gospel" and for the honest yet winsome account Harper gives of her own growing understanding of that gospel.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher via Blogging for Books. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

Brooke Obie says

Excellent

I loved this book and learned much from it. The explanations for our broken relationships between genders and the explanation of God's dominion vs. humans' dominion were particularly enlightening. Highly recommend. I wish all in the Church could read this and commit to bringing our selves, neighborhoods and world back to to me'od without feeling the need to legislate Christianity.

Heather Caliri says

Harper's fresh take on how God's goodness can be manifest on earth heartened me. Seeing shalom as wholeness in all our relationships (rather than just merely personal righteousness) is a game-changer.

Andrea Engle says

Showcases the shalom (peaceful wholeness) of God's "very good" creation by initially visiting the first few chapters of Genesis ... targets how we have lost the interconnectedness and shalom that God intended ... explores ways in which we may be able to retrieve the situation, looking at everything from ecology to the Black Lives Matter Movement, and makes practical suggestions ... worthwhile read ...

Richard Ryan says

The Very Good Gospel is very good indeed! A refreshing examination of the fact that the Gospel doesn't start in the New Testament, but at the outset of creation. Lisa's commentary on the first 2 chapters of Genesis alone is the best I've read on the subject. A hopeful book that wrongs can be righted.

Jeremy Copeland says

Incredible. Transformative. One of the most important books I've ever read on the reality of God's good news for all people. Christians, especially white Christians (I'm one of them) owe it to themselves to dig deeply into this book.

Christina says

I appreciated this book as a good entry point -- would definitely recommend for a Bible study at church especially with the reflection questions at the end of each chapter. Some refreshing and new thoughts on Genesis, and some good authentic stories.

Cara Meredith says

This should be required reading for every Christian.

Jonathan Newman says

The Very Good Gospel is one of the most refreshing and important books I have read, especially coming from an evangelical background and being immersed in that world in my career as well. How Lisa Sharon

Harper describes the gospel was such a relief for the cognitive dissonance I've experienced in wondering, like her, if our gospel is "good enough" if it fails to have an answer to remedy the areas of injustice and brokenness in society in the here-and-now, especially among those Jesus calls "the least of these," and let's Christians off the hook from addressing them.

For those who are tired, confused and discouraged from Christians dismissing addressing social concerns as "a distraction from the gospel" or "not a gospel issue", this is a book for you (and hopefully those who see social justice as not part of or central to God's kingdom work will be curious and read this book too).

With poetic beauty and biblical acumen, Harper unpacks the true meaning of the biblical theme of Shalom, how the gospel is not just about getting to heaven when we die (and not less than that), but more holistically it's about how everything was broken in The Fall of Genesis 3, and how God's mission is to restore wholeness from what was broken in relationships with Himself, others, ourselves, families, races, genders, nations, and even creation. She calls for a more "thick" reading of scripture (term coined by Miroslav Volf) and an understanding of the gospel that could never be so truncated as to be concerned about souls but not bodies as has happened in far too much of the Western church's history. I have been won over by this narrative of the gospel so much that I gave several copies away to other Christians to enjoy and be inspired by the good news in a new and more far reaching way.

This quote sums up main thrust of the book pretty well:

"If one's 'gospel' falls mute when facing people who need good news the most - the impoverished, the oppressed, and the broken - then it's no gospel at all."

In addition to the other chapters, I found the chapter on shalom and shame, which focuses on your relationship with yourself, to be very personally touching and impactful.

If I ever meet Lisa Sharon Harper in person, I want to personally thank her for this masterpiece.

Drick says

Lisa Sharon Harper begins the book with an excellent exegesis and interpretation of the Genesis 1-3 and its illustration of the Biblical concept of shalom. The rest of the book is then applying this concept of Shalom to various areas of life: God, self, genders, creation, family, race, nations and so on. While the concept of the book was good, I found little that was new. Given the wide range of endorsements from Allen Boesak to Michael Eric Dyson to Ken Wytsma to Jim Wallis and more, the success of the book it seems is more due Harper's network in the progressive evangelical community than the uniqueness of the book. Harper lives what she preaches and her book is filled with personal stories, but I am not sure it deserves all the raves it received

Renee Davis Meyer says

A broader, more beautiful vision of the Gospel

Lisa Sharon Harper is a wise guide, leading me beyond four spiritual laws to a gospel that begins in Genesis 1 with God's "Very Good" and ends in Revelation when all is made new. Along the way, she shares a vision

for how the very good gospel can and should transform the relationship between all things (families, genders, the earth, ethnic groups, even our relationship with death.) Highly recommend.

Irene says

Harper invites the reader to view current issues of social injustice through the lens of Scripture as interpreted by liberal Evangelical Christians. She argues that “shalom”, harmony and right relationship between individuals and groups with God, is at the heart of the Bible. Therefore, fidelity to God necessitates each person to work for political, economic and social structures that promotes the dignity of each person, equality between all groups and reverence for creation. Harper employs a tone of intimacy with the reader, sharing personal experiences of exploitation and violation. Each chapter ends with suggestions for personal reflection. I suspect I would have appreciated this more had I not been engaged extensively in Christian social justice movements for decades. This was too introductory, too superficial for my current needs. The way she developed her points, the way she employed Scripture has been done by numerous presenters previously.
