



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kelly Hughes, 312-280-8126
kelly@dechanthughes.com

“Built on a foundation of solid biblical study, Harper provides a vital, effective contribution to the narrative theology movement. When systematic theologian James W. McClendon coined the phrase ‘biography as theology,’ he was advocating for this book: life stories that remake the way we think about God today.” —*Publishers Weekly* Starred Review

The Very Good Gospel
**New Book by Lisa Sharon Harper of Sojourners Urges Christians
to Restore God’s Vision of Shalom for a Broken World**

For many Christians, the good news of the gospel doesn’t seem good enough. They’re missing out on hope of the biblical call to shalom, says Lisa Sharon Harper in her new book, ***The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right*** (WaterBrook, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House, \$19.99 hardcover, June 7, 2016).

“At its heart the biblical concept of shalom is about God’s vision for the emphatic goodness of all relationships,” Harper says. Exploring the first three chapters of Genesis, she shows that “God’s mighty web of interconnected relationships” was not merely good, it was “forcefully, vehemently, abundantly good.”

Harper, chief church engagement officer at Sojourners, a Christian social justice organization, is a nationally recognized leader on faith-based approaches to advocacy. The catalyst for her own search for a truly good news gospel was a pilgrimage during which she encountered the brutal history of the Cherokee Trail of Tears and the African American experience, from slavery to the Civil Rights Movement. Harper, an African-American woman with Native American ancestry, was confronted by a hard truth, she says: “My limited evangelical understanding of the gospel had nothing to say about 16,000 Cherokees and four other sovereign indigenous nations whose people were forcibly removed from their lands, and it had nothing to say to my own ancestors who were enslaved in South Carolina.”

Harper’s personal pilgrimage continued for thirteen years, as she worked out her understanding of shalom and its implications for the practice of the gospel and for her work as a justice advocate. “If one’s gospel falls mute when facing people who need good news the most—the impoverished, the oppressed, and the broken—then there’s no gospel at all,” she writes.

Many Christians lack the biblical foundation needed to comprehend kingdom theology. “To live in God’s Kingdom in the way of shalom requires that we discard our thin understanding of the gospel,” she says.

Harper points to the creation account in Genesis to show how “God’s governance transformed the world from a cesspool of overwhelming darkness... into a world where darkness is limited by the light.” She says it’s not hard to see where we need God to speak today, pointing to a world

-continued-

devastated by terrorist rampages, police shootings of unarmed black men and women, a rise in the activities of white supremacist groups, economic inequality, and environmental devastation. She takes readers through nine areas where shalom is desperately needed, among them:

- **Shalom between Genders:** “The doctrine of the image of God, established in Genesis 1:26-27, has profound implications for the relationship between men and women. All humans, male and female, are created in God’s image....It is time for the church to stand up and say no more to the subjugation of...half of the image of God in the world.”
- **Shalom for Broken Families:** Harper’s parents divorced when she was young, so she knows the pain of broken family relationships firsthand. “Whether it is interpersonal dynamics of domination or systemic oppression that breaks families, God is committed to reconciling families.”
- **Shalom and Race:** “We have believed a lie whose roots run deep in Western thought. It has shaped Western worldview, structures, legal paradigms, and the church. To glimpse the way to shalom in the area of race, we must first understand the dimensions and outcomes of this lie,” Harper writes. “True witness of the reality of the Kingdom of God calls us all to embrace the very good news that black lives do matter and that there is a way to restore the dignity and repair the damage of centuries of degradation.”
- **Shalom between Nations:** “In a pluralistic democracy, we cannot impose our conceptions of God on our neighbors through the imposition of any sacred text on domestic or foreign policy. It is, though, necessary for all people of faith to draw from our principles to help us engage the world in a way that moves our nation and world toward God’s very goodness.”

Other chapters explore Shalom with God, Shalom with Self, Shalom and Creation, Shalom and Witnessing Peace, and Shalom and Death.

Harper weaves her personal story though the book: “Born black in a white world, a woman in a man’s world, I became a child survivor of bullying, sexual abuse, and divorce.” For years, she was lost, and trying her best to be okay. She writes of the transformative nature of her relationship with God, and her own search for shalom.

“There is a way back to shalom. It is the way of God demonstrated through the person of Jesus and made possible through his death and resurrection. This is the good news. This is the very good gospel,” Harper writes.

Lisa Sharon Harper is the chief church engagement office at Sojourners, a nonprofit organization committed to putting Christian faith into action in the pursuit of social justice, peace, and environmental stewardship. She is the author of several books, including *Evangelical Does Not Equal Republican...or Democrat* and coauthor of *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith*. Harper has been recognized by *The Huffington Post* as one of 50 Powerful Women Religious Leaders and is considered one of the nation’s most influential voices on a faith-rooted approach to advocacy. Harper speaks extensively, nationally and internationally, and lives in Washington, DC.

###

The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right
by Lisa Sharon Harper

WaterBrook, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House, LLC
\$19.99 hardcover ISBN: 9781601428578
PUB DATE: June 7, 2016