

Engage360 | Episode 40: Lisa Harper on Calling, Redemptive Kindness, and Motherhood

- Introduction: Welcome to Engage 360 Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life-changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.
- Dr. Don Payne: Hello, again from Denver Seminary, this is Engage 360 I'm Don Payne, your host, and we are very grateful that you would give the gift of a half hour or so to spend with us, hopefully regularly, maybe even weekly. And we really hope that what you hear is going to be beneficial to your life and your journey with the Lord. We hope you'll communicate with us. And if you like what you hear, tell somebody else about it, give us a rating or a review on your favorite podcast platform. You know, whenever I meet someone who really knows how to communicate compellingly to broad audiences and also has good theological chops, that really gets my attention. And some time ago I met one of those rare individuals and one of our doctor of ministry classes here at Denver Seminary. Actually I think our program has quite a number of those people, but I started to detect that this person was pretty widely known. And so I thought you all might enjoy hearing from her off script.
- Speaker 2: And with that, I want to welcome Lisa Harper to the podcast. You can find out more about Lisa at her website, which is Lisaharper.net. And I pulled some stuff off of your website, Lisa, and for our listeners. Yeah, but if you want to learn more about Lisa, just go to Lisaharper.net, you'll find all kinds of good stuff there. Some of which we'll be talking about in a bit, but I'm going to rip off some of the quotes from her website. She has been lauded as a gifted communicator with a style that combines sound scriptural exposition. In fact, Max Lucado or Lucado, I'm not sure how you pronounce his name calls Lisa. One of the best Bible tour guides around. Lisa's vocational resume includes six years as director of focus on the family's national women's ministry, where she created the very popular Renewing the Heart Conferences, which have been attended by, I think almost 200,000 women. And she followed that with six years as the women's ministry director at a very large church in Nashville.
- New Speaker: Lisa holds a master of theological studies degree with honors, from Covenant Theological Seminary. She is now a highly sought after Bible teacher and speaker. Lisa has about 12 books published. I'll give you a few of the titles. One is a Perfect Mess. Why You Don't Have to Worry About Being Good Enough for God. Her latest book is called Believing Jesus, Are You Willing to Risk Everything? And she also has three bestselling video-based Bible study curriculum with Lifeway, one on Malakai, one on Hebrews and one on Mark. But when you ask Lisa about her credentials what you're going to hear from her. In fact, she said this in a recent interview is that I'm so grateful for the opportunities God has given me, but don't forget. He often uses donkeys and rocks, and she went on to describe her greatest accomplishment to this point as getting to be Mrs. Mama because in April, 2014, after a really difficult two year journey, Lisa finally got to bring home her adopted daughter from Haiti and she

hasn't stopped grinning since. So in a nutshell, if it can be put in a nutshell, what's the Lisa Harper backstory, what's a bit of your journey.

Lisa Harper:

I grew up in a mostly Christian home, parents divorced when I was little. I thought when my dad walked away from us, it must be at least partly my fault. You know, that I either was not good enough for pretty enough for didn't use my inside voice enough. And it was right after my father left us that I was in a church in central Florida. And Pastor, Brother Jimmy was talking about how our heavenly father, God never walks away from his kids. And I can still remember you in a small church and I'm hanging on the back of the Pew. You know, these are long wooden benches for you millennials, and they've probably sang Just As I Am 50 times. And I walked forward because I wanted a dad who wouldn't leave. And so I became a Christ follower when I was five years old, but I thought that God didn't like me very much. I knew I needed him to deliver me from my sins, but I didn't understand. Not that I completely understand it now at all, but I sure didn't think God delighted in me. I knew as much as a five-year-old can know.

I knew I needed deliverance and I wanted the consistency of his fatherhood. And so I spent goodness, I'd say the better part of 30 years, talking a lot about God. I've always been a bit of a wind bag. Didn't think I'd go into vocational ministry, was in marketing and broadcast journalism and then got a youth ministry job soon after undergrad. And then just kept going more and more in that ministry track by the kindness of God. And also almost by mistake. And didn't realize until I was about 35, that I was an emotional agnostic, you know, that I knew some little bit of Greek and Hebrew and got to talk about who God is and got to teach scripture, but, and some corner of my heart, I really, I didn't think God was enough for me. And I definitely didn't think God delighted in me. And so the second half of my life, if you will, has been about really learning to lean into God's embrace, that's why your class and Dr. Howard's class just slayed me.

Because and I told you the summer, I'm sorry, feeling all estrogy, about to cry, but to hear again from somebody I trust who's done the work and put in sweat equity of really studying God and being with God, that he really is that kind, he really is that unconditionally loving. He is Holy, perfectly Holy as he is. He also condescends to make himself perfectly accessible to us. And he's perfectly compassionate. So I'd say that's not a synopsis because I'm not good at concise, but I am just undone by the kindness of God always have been, but I believe it more. I could talk about it when I was younger, but didn't believe it as much as I do now.

Dr. Don Payne:

You know, that reminds me that, or I guess makes me aware that a lot of us have perhaps a pretty good theology of God's forgiveness, that God is willing to forgive us. But maybe in a functional manner, we think God does that against his will. He's going to forgive us, but doesn't really want to.

Lisa Harper: Right. I mean, I wouldn't have shared it in a book or a Bible study, but I think at some level, at least subconsciously, I thought God felt sorry for me. And it was less mercy than it was, ugh, I'm God, it's my obligation in it to save this little ragamuffin. And so I could talk about grace, but I spent a lot of time and energy trying to justify myself.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. I think that's actually quite common. I hear that kind of story, some version of that story and you probably do as well.

Lisa Harper: Over and over and over again. Yeah. I think that the thing I hear most often as I travel and get to talk about Jesus is women saying in some form or fashion, there's just no way I got like that could really love a girl like me.

Dr. Don Payne: Hmm. So how did, how did you get started in the ministry you have? What's the ramp like into that?

Lisa Harper: Grace, God uses donkeys and rocks. I've always been, my mom would say I basically came out of the womb talking and so I've always been a storyteller and went to, had gone to Christian camp when I was a kid in the summers and between high school and college, I went to a Christian camp in North Carolina and I can still remember it, Dr. Payne, I'm sitting there, maybe a thousand girls and this woman got up as the, you know, the evening keynote speaker, Dr. Rebecca Manley Pippared. And she added the salt shaker into the world. Remember that?

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah I read her book.

Lisa Harper: Oh, it was awesome. And I had never heard of a woman in that context, grew up in a super conservative culture. So I thought we just had to cross stitch and bake casseroles. And then I had never heard that kind of narrative. She, I can still remember that she preached on the woman with the issue of blood and talked about. I just was like, goodness gracious. You can tell stories. And it actually illuminates scripture. And wow, I would love to do this, but I didn't think that was a vocation. I just thought I'll do that on the side. And I'll go into hospital marketing or broadcast journalism. And couple of months out of undergrad, I was working in marketing and I had been involved in a youth ministry called Fellowship Christian Athletes that was at camp FCA, and high school and college. And they called, and there was an opening for a woman in Nashville, Tennessee. And I grew up in Orlando. So I thought Nashville was like Cracker Barrel and country music and was not real excited about it, no it's Cracker Barrel, country music and blues and hot chicken. But I went to this interview with FCA and tried to sabotage the interview. Cause I thought, Ooh, I don't want to be in vocational ministry. And that'll be so boring and I'll have to wear turtlenecks and I'll be poor.

Dr. Don Payne: And everybody's kind of weird.

Lisa Harper: A lot of people are. And because I was talking smack, I'd been reading some CS Lewis and the guy who's running the ministry asked me, I think something along the lines of, do you want this position? I was like, Oh, I just want to lean in the sovereignty of God, just talking smack. And he said, he was so impressed by my trust in God's sovereignty that he just had to hire me. So it really was just almost a mistake, my first ministry hire. But I just fell in love with talking to people about Jesus. And you know, the first time you see that look cross somebody's face when they didn't think a God like that could love someone like them. And you, you get to talk with somebody about the Lord and they lean into the love of Christ. They become a Christian. They turn back to the Lord after prodigal season. That's just, you know, that's kind of spiritual caffeine for me. And so I still can't quite believe I get to do this vocationally. Obviously we're all in ministry if you're a Christ follower. I think those of us that are in vocational ministry need more incentive because we get paid at least a little bit to do what we do, but I love talking to people about Jesus.

Dr. Don Payne: So you do a lot of things. I mean you write, I looked at the titles of the books and the curricula you've written, and it's pretty widespread. I mean, in terms of the issues you hit, is there a set of central themes or rails that your ministry always seems to come back to or that propel it from inside?

Lisa Harper: I think it always comes back to the redemptive kindness of God. So I studied two years ago, I spent a year studying Job, to write a Bible study curriculum on Job. But again, the message of Job was the kindness of God. And we think it's all about suffering. Suffering is the context. But that backbone, that common denominator is even when life is really, really hard. God is really, really good. God is always kind. And so I find, I didn't think that was my message. I wanted to be more, I wanted to be smarter. I wanted to be academic, especially when I was younger. So I would study people like you and try to paraphrase what true theologians said. But I think in my own brokenness learning to lean into the kindness of God, that's the most authentic story I can tell is that he is a good, good God. I believe holiness is really us becoming more convinced that he's kind, because then we move closer into the person of who Jesus is, and we become more like him. So everything I study, I feel like I always come back to that major chord of he's kind. He is perfectly Holy and perfectly accessible. So it's the nearness of King Jesus that I talk about a lot.

Dr. Don Payne: I love that theology. Partly because I just completed a manuscript on the doctrine of sanctification and this is a not so subtle advanced plug for that, but that I didn't really say that

Lisa Harper: Listen, I'll Hawk it shamelessly Dr. Payne.

Dr. Don Payne: That really does fit well with what I've come to believe. Holiness sanctification is all about is largely the presence of God.

Lisa Harper: I was talking, it's probably been 10 years ago, but I was talking to a guy I really respected who is professor. And I had been deemed by some people for not

teaching enough about sin. And I thought, well, that's true. I mean, I'm certainly not an expert in anything. And I probably haven't taught enough about sin and repentance and I totally believe and repentance. And so I was just talking to him and I said, I'm not, I'm not an expert on any of these things, but I tend to kind of come from everything I teach usually comes from the perspective of the kindness and the accessibility of God. Who's perfectly Holy. And I said, do you think I need to study sin more, like spend, you know, a year sabbatical in Leviticus or something. And he paused for a long time. And I thought he was going to say something in Hebrew or something. And he just said, Lisa, I think if you present the love of Christ people will get Holy. And I thought, as simple as that was from this profound man, I thought if you do continually shepherd and steer and point and limpingly lead people toward the love of Christ, I believe sanctification will happen.

Dr. Don Payne: Well said I looked at, or I guess I took note of a few of the books. I want to talk about some of your books. You, I just have a few of the titles here. One is called a Perfect Mess. Believing Jesus. You've got some study curricular commentaries of sort of Malakai, on Hebrews, on Mark I think. The Sacrament of the Happy, I really want to talk about that too, but of all, I mean and there's more but of everything you've written. What is, what's the favorite? What's your favorite?

Lisa Harper: You know, I think I'd have to, well, it's probably a toss-up everything I write, even the trendy titles are kinda sorta trendy titles, my book sales would not say that I have anything trendy. I'm a very mediocre writer, but everything I've written is basically a Bible study disguised as a book. So a Perfect Mess, subtitle is why you don't have to worry about being good enough for God. It was a study of the Psalms 13 Psalms. Believing Jesus was a study of Acts because you know, you see in Acts that they didn't just believe in Jesus. They believed Jesus, you see practical theology. I love, I love the book of Acts. But I'd probably say it's a toss-up between the Gospel of Mark, which was the newness. Now that was Hebrews was the Nearest King Jesus. Now can't remember the subtitle of Mark, but it was a Bible study Mark and a Bible study on Job. And I didn't expect to fall in love with either one, frankly, the reason I wrote Mark is because Beth Moore had written out on the other three Gospels. So I thought.

Dr. Don Payne: And you got to keep up.

Lisa Harper: Yeah. Well, yeah Well, no, I had it. I wasn't going to begin to write a Bible study that that Beth had already written on. So I thought I've got to choose one that she hasn't. And I chose Mark and it had been my least favorite Gospel up until then, because it's short and I'm a windbag and it doesn't have that warm birth narrative like Luke, I just didn't resonate as much until I got into the backstory of Mark. And when you read about John Mark and you read about Pete and just the Epic failures in their past and how in the sovereignty of God, he appointed those two to write the first Gospel account. That just, and that theme of compassion in Mark, fell in love with Mark's Gospel. And then Job, I was studying happiness and I thought, okay, I want to study something that is the exact opposite or seemingly the exact opposite of happiness. And so what's the

opposite of Mykairos and Asher and I thought suffering. So I looked at pain and suffering and I thought, Oh, this is going to be awful. This is going to be like sticking your hand in a blender.

And from the very beginning, you know, when you see right there in the beginning, first of all, pain, isn't punitive, you know, it's a promotion, but I can't remember where it is. I'm sure you can Chapter one, latter part of Chapter one where it says that Job shaved his head and he tore his robe. So he was honest. He wasn't pretending, wasn't faking it when he was struggling. But then it says he shaved his head, tore his robe, and he worshiped. And I thought, Oh my goodness, what we usually think is a dichotomy to have a broken heart. And then to worship, we usually think those are opposite ends of the same continuum. And I thought if we could really learn to worship when life is difficult and to understand the presence of God. Begin to trust in the presence of God, the abiding of God, then we wouldn't have as many questions about why did this happen to me? And the whole story of Job resonated with me. I haven't been through anything like that as far as pain, but in my own little corner of the world, being an older single woman, and I used to tease and say, my husband is lost and won't stop to ask for directions.

Dr. Don Payne: I think you're going to get stuck on that or the hand in the blender, one of the two.

Lisa Harper: I know. Hand in blender, well, truth of the matter is I was just so broken and so ashamed when I was younger, that I was afraid of intimacy. And so I didn't get married because I was really drawn to abusers and God protected me from men I was drawn to in the few good godly guys. I dated God protected them from me because I was hot mess on a steak for so many years. And so just that, that loneliness with a longing for intimacy, there are just some places where my heart was really bruised and then not being a mom. Because I always thought I'd be a mom. And later in life, just coming to that reality of, I'm probably not going to have the life I longed for. And his kindness he has restored under me. The years, I just served up to locus on a silver platter through allowing me to become an adoptive mom with Missy. But, you know, there were so many seasons of disappointment. And so you said something, and again, I wish I could quote this verbatim because it was so amazing. But you said something this summer that the gist of it was that when we look back over our lives, we should find ourselves tripping over God's grace. And I think that's why I fell so much in love with both Mark and Job, because Mark, you've got these two misfits who were, had Epic fails in their stories. And you look at that redemptive trajectory of both of their lives, Mark and Peter, John, Mark, and Peter. And then, then Job, you see just the consistent presence of God.

Dr. Don Payne: And that presence is what satisfied Job even though he never got his questions answered.

Lisa Harper: Right. Well, because at the end, you know, when he says my ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. That's before anything was restored.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah and he got his day in court, and God never answered a single question.

Lisa Harper: Absolutely. Not a single question, but he was satisfied, satisfied. And then of course I love the fact that his daughters are named, get an inheritance. So I have that, that little end of Joe that makes me happy as, as a woman. But yeah, those would probably be my two highlights and Song of Solomon, I love, the Song of Solomon. Because I didn't think I could study it for years because I thought, Ooh, goodness, that's like Daniel [inaudible] in the Old Testament. But I was probably in my thirties went to the beach on just a mini sabbatical. I had a friend who had a beach house. I just went for like three or four days by myself, rained the whole time. And the only books I had brought were my Bible and some commentaries on the Song of Solomon. And I started studying, remember Craig Glickman studies on the song Solomon?

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, well I remember Greg Glickman, I don't know that I ever read commentaries.

Lisa Harper: He has several commentaries, but okay. But I had never looked at Song of Solomon. Any of that context as being about metaphorically, about the intimacy we can have with Jesus, but Chapter 4, verse 9, in the context of that wedding, between Solomon and his bride, when he says with one glance of your eyes, you captured my heart. That just filleted me because I was much more comfortable with God as a redemptive father. I could kind of grasp or think about the holiness of God, but to think of God, looking into my eyes and saying, Lisa, just one glance, you captured my heart. You know, I think Jerry McGuire stole the line from scripture. You have me at hello. That I'm still learning to really rest and believe that.

Dr. Don Payne: Wow, wow. Your book, the Sacrament of the Happy or the Sacrament of Happy that title really caught me, now is that about Job? Tell us about that book.

Lisa Harper: That no, that's well, I've been accused my whole life of being happy. And I heard when I was younger, but honestly I was a happy doppelganger for so long. I could look happy, act happy, had the inflection of happy, but was deeply, deeply sad. And I thought happiness, and I'd heard sermons on this. You know, I thought happiness was based on happenstance and joy was based on the acronym, Jesus, others, and yourself. So I aspired to be joyful and I thought happiness was kind of the redheaded superficial cousin. And I just found myself thinking, okay, I want to study if happiness is even a characteristic that is valued in scripture and as our God happy, because I think so often he's presented as this, unbrowed, you know, punitive librarian, no offense to librarians anywhere. I love our librarians here, but I'll just say punitive. And I thought, I want to change my own inner perspective. And imagine God actually looking at me with a countenance of delight, not to be too anthropomorphic, but I thought is he happy in his character and the way he considers me.

And I was just shocked by how many times happy is in biblical texts. You know, it's almost always translated as bless it in our English Bibles, but [inaudible] with

happy. God defines himself in Percyntis as a happy God. And of course the biblical definition of happy is pretty different than certainly our modern culture, right? It's not a ha, ha, happy it is that consistent fulfillment contentment. But that study too helped me understand that, you know, true biblical happiness is not based on circumstances and it's not in congruent with disappointment or difficulty or pain. It really is leaning into the love of God. So that was usually what I choose to study ends up being wildly, convicting comforting and convicting, but that really, really enjoyed studying the theme of happiness in scripture.

Dr. Don Payne: I'm really glad you brought that up, Lisa and I wish we had time to probe more into that because in some previous episodes of this podcast, I think it was episodes 26, 27, and 28. We did a three part series on the theology of suffering and happiness.

Lisa Harper: And people think they are in congruent. But when you see those usually are two halves of the same home. Absolutely. I don't think at least in my own life, I'll say this experience. Really my joy, my happiness, there was a lid on it because I was afraid to go to the sad places with God. And it's when I learned lament. And couple of years ago, well, about 12 years ago, Dr. Payne, I had just this kind of always been able to pull myself up by my bootstraps. And I had a season where I lost two primary relationships, was diagnosed with cancer. And I mean, I just, I just couldn't pull myself out of the hole and I sensed, God's saying, you know, you said I went to a PCA Seminary, so you've got to know it takes a while for me to be convinced in wonders. But I've become much more Pentecostal in my understandings later in life, I at least want to be prayed for by Pentecostals. But anyway I, since God say to me, Lisa, I'm going to take you to the basement of your life. And I'm going to sit there with you in the dark until fear doesn't own you anymore. And it's going to the really sad places in my life and trusting that God really was there that took the lid off my joy. So I think they're actually related.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. And I wonder whether, in many instances, it's the lack of a, of a robust theology of suffering that keeps us from being able to have a substantive theology of happiness. We polarize them, or we avoid one. And so then we thin out the other. And have all kinds of maybe cute little ways of saying, well, God's not, as I know this is a popular one and I hope this is not too offensive. It is fairly popular to say, God is not concerned about your happiness. He's concerned about your holiness now.

Lisa Harper: I don't think he can support that.

Dr. Don Payne: I don't know that I don't know that you can pit those against each other in quite that way, unless you have a very thin understanding of what happiness is.

Lisa Harper: Well, I think and that's what I was trying to study and hopefully begin to be able to teach through that particular study on the sacrament of happy. And in sacrament, I knew would step on toes of a lot of people, but I thought at its

broadest understanding. It is an outward expression of an inner grace. So I thought, generally speaking, you say happiness is a sacrament based on how God reveals it through scripture. But I had that thin understanding and thinking very binary when it came to joy and pain or happiness and suffering, and to see that no, those are all in the same continuum. And it doesn't mean God is any less kind when we don't feel joy. And the more I lean in to the compassion of God, the more I actually feel consistent joy, even when I'm disappointed or even when I'm sad. That joy, that fulfillment, that contentment, that happiness as the Bible would describe it, that doesn't wax and wane for me circumstantially the way it used to.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. I really appreciate that. Let me shift gears just for a second and ask you about well kind of why you're here. You are now in the doctorate ministry program here at Denver Seminary. I'll put this kind of crassly or you're on the circuit. Okay. You're more famous than me, which doesn't say anything.

Lisa Harper: 21. I'm right up there at 21.

Dr. Don Payne: Doesn't say anything, but what prompted you to pursue further education in a doctoral program?

Lisa Harper: That's a good question. I really three prompts and the first to sound trite, but they were for me very serious. One is I am 56 years old and I've got a 10 year old daughter and brought Missy home from Haiti when she was four. I want her to love learning. I want her to see me even as a middle aged woman in Spanx, just constantly enthused by God and his word. And so I thought I want to model that for my own daughter being a lifelong learner, and even more so being more and more and more in love with Jesus. Never hitting that saturation point, just always going, Oh, he's even better than I thought. Oh, he's even better than I thought. And then secondly is kind of connected with that one. I want to see Jesus more clearly. It doesn't, you know, academia doesn't necessarily carry weight if you're a female windbag, but I thought I need to sit under people like you, like a props here at Denver Seminary to understand who Jesus is. In a way that is sound, in a way that is congruent with the whole orthodoxy. And then third because I have the undeserved privilege of ministering to a lot of women. I have met at this point I think countless women who will say in part, usually in private to me, that they think because of their gender, God is less pleased with them, or they associate biblical fidelity with massaging.

And I thought, you know, I feel like the latter part of my life, but certainly my ministry is I want to help women go, Oh my goodness. I may have gotten some wrong theology or some bad acts of Jesus, but God is not any less pleased with me, in love with me because of my gender. And you could say that with race or culture authenticity, but my wheelhouse is women. And so I thought, man, what do I want to leave for the women behind me who loved Jesus? I want them to be more convinced that scripture is redemptive and I want to help bring women back toward biblical fidelity. Because the Bible is not remotely misogynistic. We've got a few people who are, and maybe a few cultures who are and a few

organizations that are, but you see that polarization today. Where I meet so many women think, to be all that God has created me to be, I've got to at least drift from biblical fidelity and I want to go, Oh no, no, no, no, no. It's actually just the opposite. The more you lean into God through his revealed word, you will actually find him to be more compassionate that you can possibly understand.

And so I want to kind of be this clarion call in what feels like a cultural wilderness and partly because of the Me Too movement. I think you've got a lot of women, especially, I'd say women under 40, who are associating gender discrimination with traditional Christian values. And that's just, it may have been interpreted like that, but it's not true based on God's character.

Dr. Don Payne: And it does. It does painfully illustrate the importance of theology of good theology affects life. It's not an abstraction, it affects life one way or the other.

Lisa Harper: Right. You say over and over again for us to get that theology is to be lived theist God logos words, conversation about God. A lot of women, I get to be with associate theology with something that is dry, that is lifeless, that is condescending or punitive. And I'm like, no, no, no, no. That's not at all biblical theology. And so to be more effective in the circles that I have the privilege of interacting, I thought I need to learn more. And that's exactly what's happened. I feel like in some ways I'm finding a fifth gear that I didn't know had.

Dr. Don Payne: Wow, that's exciting. That's a great image. Okay. So what, here's my stupid question. Well, I get into some stupid questions, I guess. What would you be doing if you were doing anything else? What's your alter ego?

Lisa Harper: Well, when I was younger, my alter ego is I always have loved nature and I kind of fancy myself. You do too. Although I've lost my capacity to do it very well, but I always fancied myself as an Explorer. I would love to be a Mountaineer, either a Mountaineer or a Marine biologist. I grew up in Florida and grew up at the beach and I, my dream was always to swim with dolphins. You know, after I saw Blackfish, I stopped wanting to ride Shamu. Cause I saw that as being so awful. But I still, to this day, when I take Missy to the beach, if there are wild dolphins near us, I'll find myself kind of encroaching in their space. Just sure that one of them is a Flipper is going to come up and we're going to be fast friends. So probably a Mountaineer or a Marine biologist.

Dr. Don Payne: I'm going to veer very briefly out of the stupid questions. Tell us just a little bit more about Missy.

Lisa Harper: Oh goodness. She's the most amazing kid.

Dr. Don Payne: Try to keep this to an hour or less.

Lisa Harper:

Okay boy, that's going to be a huge discipline. I started the adoption process in my late forties, early forties. I was praying about it. And a woman at church actually told me that I didn't have the right to become a mom because I had molestation when I was a kid. And she said, I know you've been a Christian counselor, but just in case you weren't fixed, you might unwittingly transfer some of the trauma you experienced as a child onto a child of your own. Amazing how even in Christian circles, we can have people using the Bible as a club. So that deterred me. I didn't think I could be a mom for years, but in my late forties, I started the adoption process and lost two adoptions before right after a loss that was just eviscerating. Heartbreaking. Two weeks after that, I was still deeply grieving. A friend I hadn't talked to in years, I'd known in a Bible study years before called and she said, Lisa I know that you're still grieving the loss of this child at the 11th hour. But she said, I just got home from Haiti last night. And she said, while I was in this village, one of the young moms in the village died, she died of AIDS. And she left behind a little girl. Who's two years old who is really, really sick.

She has HIV and tuberculosis and cholera. And the doctors at Port-au-Prince have told us she has less than two months to live, unless somebody, really, anybody stands in the gap for her and then she'd have the possibility of medicine. And she said, I, you know, I know you stated before that you wanted a child that nobody was really standing in line for. And not because I'm a martyr, but because I'm single. And I think best case scenario, my opinion is a kid gets a mama and a daddy. And I don't know if I'll ever marry because my eHarmony profiles all jacked up. But so I just, you know, I tell the adoption agent, if there's a child that it doesn't look like there's a great possibility for them to be adopted in a, with a two parent family I'd love to be considered. And she had heard that from another friend and she said, so I just called to see if you'd be willing to pray about stepping into the adoption process with this little girl, her name's Missy, she wasn't, Missy wasn't even in the adoption process, her mom had just died. Her mama didn't know she was sick. And I said, no.

I said, I've been praying about this for 30 years, sign me up. And then I got off the phone and said a word that is not in the Bible because I was so overwhelmed. I cried. I have no idea how to do this. I mean, I'm middle aged. I'm single. This baby's really, really sick. The doctors are saying she's not going to live. And I was like, goodness gracious, God, what did I just agree to? And six weeks later landed in her village, rural village in Haiti and put her in my arms. She was two and a half years old, 17 pounds just tiny, really sick. And she didn't like me at all at first. Cause she I'm just this huge pale stranger. And I looked at her and I don't really have language to wrap around it. I just thought, Oh my goodness, my heart just crawled out of my chest. You know, it was like stick a fork in me. I am done. And after a couple of minutes, she reached up and grabbed my pinky finger. I remember it like it was yesterday, been eight years ago now. And she went, Hello mama blanc, that's hello, white mama. And that started a two year process of adoption. And she's, I mean, I'm pathologically biased, but she really is an extraordinary kid.

She loves life and just she's she's winsome and happy. And I went to counseling the first year after I brought her home just to work with obviously there's issues with her losing her mama and abandonment issues. And after a couple of months, our therapist said, Lisa, Missy is fine, but she's totally attached. You still need to come to therapy. But she's just, I mean, Jesus is the joy of my life. Jesus is the reason I get up in the morning. So Missy is not my hope. Jesus is my hope. But man, Missy, is my salvation, she is my salvation. She is the most extraordinary gift he has allowed me to steward. Yeah. She, I mean, she wears me out, you know, cause I'm an old, older single mom. And so sometimes I think, I didn't know, I could be this tired to the utter marrow of my bones, but it's a glorious kind of exhausted.

Dr. Don Payne:

Yeah, a good tired.

Lisa Harper:

Yeah. It is a good tired.

Dr. Don Payne:

Okay. Last question. What is the fastest you have ever driven? Oh, I don't mean ridden.

Lisa Harper:

Okay. I have to qualify this.

Dr. Don Payne:

I'm not going to ask what the conditions were, whether it was legal or illegal. I don't want to know.

Lisa Harper:

So exposing my sin.

Dr. Don Payne:

What is the fastest you have ever driven?

Lisa Harper:

Well, first of all, I have to tell you it was on a motorcycle because you know, I'm a biker. When I turned 40, I told God if I didn't get a husband, I was going to get a Harley Davidson. So I bought my first street bike at 40. And also as a woman.

Dr. Don Payne:

I don't think I knew that.

Lisa Harper:

Did you not know that? Oh yeah. I've had a series of, I grew up riding dirt bikes and then started riding street bikes when I was 40. Part of it is because, you know, I grew up Baptist and as a woman who grew up Baptist, you need an excuse to wear leather pants. So yeah, I don't think that would be in your wheelhouse in your purview. But I have been, I will just say I have exceeded, I've been in triple digits on a motorcycle. I do not advise it. I don't think it was wise. And it was in a very safe area with no cars and I did wear a helmet, but it was so wrong. And so fun.

Dr. Don Payne:

That's a pretty good note, I think to end on Lisa Harper. Thanks. This has really, really been a delight. And again, you can find out a lot more about Lisa, most of it true. I think on her website, Lisaharper.net. And there, you can also see the

curriculum, the books, the the videos, all the stuff that she's produced, which I would highly encourage you to look at. It's pretty good website.

Lisa Harper: Thank you.

Dr. Don Payne: And we are really, really glad to have you here. And have you studying with us in the doctor of ministry program?

Lisa Harper: I'm really grateful, very grateful to be here.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, on behalf of, again, all of us here at Denver Seminary, this is Engage360 from Denver Seminary. I'm Don Payne, your host, thanks for joining us. And we hope you will again, next week, take care.