



"This book brings together everything I love about Lisa. She is profound and hilarious, wise and wonderfully authentic."

—SHEILA WALSH,
author of *The Shelter of God's Promises*

stumbling INTO grace

Confessions of a Sometimes
Spiritually Clumsy Woman

LISA
HARPER

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

© 2011 by Lisa Harper

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Author is represented by Anvil II Management, 12175 Network Blvd., Suite 150, San Antonio, TX 78249.

Thomas Nelson, Inc. titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fund-raising, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from THE ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION. © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version. Public domain.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson. © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NCV are from New Century Version®. © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are from *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation. © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Page design by Mark L. Mabry

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Harper, Lisa, 1963-

Stumbling into grace : confessions of a sometimes spiritually clumsy woman / Lisa Harper.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8499-4648-6 (trade paper)

1. Harper, Lisa, 1963- 2. Christian biography. 3. Christian women--Religious life. I. Title.

BR1725.H23915 A3 2011

277.3'082092--dc23

[B]

2011017948

Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 16 RRD 6 5 4 3 2 1

chapter 1

EWE SCARED?

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, help me cling to You when I'm afraid, instead of hiding in the dark by myself. Teach me to trust You no matter how scary my journey gets. I want to find my greatest treasure in Your constant presence. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What are three physical, tangible things you're afraid of (e.g., spiders, snakes, clowns)?
2. What are three emotional, less tangible things you're afraid of (e.g., abandonment, conflict, being misunderstood)?
3. When it comes to admitting fear, on the scale of one to ten below—with one being "stoic" and ten being "scaredy-cat"—circle the number that represents where you would place yourself:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. What do you think your closest friends and family would say are your greatest fears?

5. Describe a recent experience that really scared you.
6. Reread Luke 12:32. What does Jesus' term of endearment "little flock" mean to you in this season of your life?
7. Read Isaiah 43:1–3. How would you condense the theme of these verses into a song or movie title?
8. What's one practical thing you can begin doing today to apply that theme to your own life?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about what I'm really afraid of, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 2

THE VERY REAL PROBLEM WITH PANTYHOSE

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, please forgive me for being a modern-day Pharisee and for often being more concerned about how spiritual I look instead of how to love other image-bearers well. I need Your Spirit to slay my attempts to justify myself and remind me that my only hope is in You. I also need Your Spirit to tutor me in the practice of Sabbath, of resting all my attention and affection on You. Thank You for fresh mercy this morning, and help me to live today in heightened awareness of Your words: "For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners" (Matthew 9:13 NLT). Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you tend to be more of a rule-follower or a rule-breaker?
2. What are a few rules and conditions, beyond those you think God commands in Scripture, to which religious authority figures (perhaps well-intentioned) have attempted to get you to conform to in the past?
3. Have you ever rebelled against what you considered to be unbiblical regulations? If so, how did you "push back"?

4. Why do you think the Pharisees put more energy into legalistically adhering to religious guidelines than in loving the needy people all around them?
5. Describe some ways you've observed a healthy church (or individual Christians) giving people priority over policies.
6. Read 1 Corinthians 8:9–13 and 9:19–23. Describe a chapter in your story when you chose to follow rules you didn't really *have* to as a Christian, in order to better reflect God's love to someone who was more behaviorally conservative. How do you think "stumbling block" theology is most often distorted or manipulated?
7. Read John 8:36. What are three specific areas in your life where you would like to experience more freedom (e.g., being more demonstrative in worship, taking dancing lessons)?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about areas in my life where I need more liberty, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 3

TAKE A LOAD OFF

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, I really am hungry for intimacy with You! I want to experience what David exclaims in Psalm 63:3–5: “Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you” (UPDATED NIV). Please help me crave Your presence more than anything or anyone else and be completely satisfied by Your spirit. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What are two or three running themes of the unhealthy thoughts that most often clog your heart and mind (e.g., weight, finances, relationships)?
2. How do you typically pig out (e.g., food, shopping sprees) when you’re stressed out by the circumstances of your own life?
3. If you could choose just one particularly toxic thought or coping habit from which to fast, what would it be?
4. Read Proverbs 3:9–10. Using the context of heart and mind instead of finances, how would you paraphrase these two verses?

5. Describe a recent terrible-horrible-no-good-very-bad-day when you *didn't* "hustle for chocolate chip cookies outside the temple" and instead went immediately inside to let God soothe the hunger in your soul.
6. Read Psalm 63. What adjectives, illustrations, metaphors, or movie scenes best depict how intimacy with God satisfies your soul better than anything else?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about dropping a few pounds of _____, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 4

NO FANGS ALLOWED

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, please give me the wisdom to tell the difference between broken people and biting people. Help me learn who to approach and who to avoid, to know when to step toward and when to step back. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. Have the “snakes in your story” been mostly family members or not related to you?
2. With regard to the fight-or-flight theory, do you typically engage dangerous people head on or run like the wind the moment they bare their fangs?
3. What kind of venom—verbal, physical, emotional—has been the most painful for you in the past?
4. When it comes to slithery people, are you more wary of big biters like Herod or smaller, less obvious serpents like the Pharisees and Sadducees? Why?
5. Read Psalm 139:13–14 and Proverbs 4:23. How is our divine description in Psalm 139 related to the active command in Proverbs 4?

6. Read Luke 6:27–36 and 2 Corinthians 6:14–16. How would you describe the difference between loving your enemies/abusers and allowing yourself to become a victim of your enemies/abusers?
7. What are some tangible ways you’ve found to “turn the other cheek” when dealing with dangerous people without losing your whole head in the process?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I’ve been thinking about handling human snakes in a way that honors You, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 5

CAT APPRECIATION DAY

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, forgive me when I'm so greedy about big gifts that I overlook all the small ones. Thank You for the heat that's coursing through my house right now on this cold night. Thank You that there's milk that hasn't expired yet in the refrigerator. Thank You for the clean sheets that will greet me when I go to bed. Thank You for giving me life and breath and keeping me in Your perfect care for one more day. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What are the first five things that come to your mind for which you want to thank God?
2. What are you thankful for that took place today?
3. Read James 1:17. Wherever you are—gathered around a table with your small group or sitting in the bathtub (one of my favorite places to read)—take thirty seconds to inventory everything around you for which you're thankful.
4. Who in your life most resembles Anna or Simeon—someone who receives even the most diminutive gifts from God with obvious gratitude?

5. For what little gift have you waited the longest (e.g., a haircut or dental crown during tough financial times)?
6. Read 2 Peter 3:9. What is it about waiting for a gift that makes it more precious when we finally receive it?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about the infinite list of little gifts with which You've blessed me, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 6

JOHNNY COME LATELY

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, I'm so humbled and convicted and glad You don't give me what I deserve. Instead of taking me out, You take me into Your loving arms. Please forgive me for smugly thinking I deserve more grace than the other sinners in my story. And help me to see them in the light of how precious they are to You, even on their worst days. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. Are you more comfortable with the concept of God as the Creator of the universe or as your heavenly Father? Explain.
2. Would you be more likely to kneel before God in obeisance or crawl up into the safety of His lap?
3. What do you think are the top three or four attributes of a good dad?
4. How would you describe the "idol of deservedness"? How does it typically rear its ugly head in your life?

5. Read Ephesians 2:8–9. How would you explain the basic message of these verses to a child? How would you condense it into a three- or four-word book or movie title?
6. If you feel comfortable doing so, describe the character in your life story whom you'd vote as the "least likely to come to faith in Christ."
7. Read Romans 12:17–21. Mark Twain wrote, "Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it." In light of his poignant metaphor, on whose heel have you left the most perfume? Whose perfume has wafted from your heel?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about the lavish gift of forgiveness You extend to sinners of all shapes and sizes, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 7

GETTING OUR SQUEEZE ON

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, thank You for truly seeing me and for always engaging me and never dismissing me. I look forward to the day when I get to actually see You face-to-Face in glory. I look forward to the day I get to literally feel Your holy arms around me. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. On the scale of one to ten below in regard to being comfortable with physical affection—with one being “frosty” and ten being “hugging helpful salespeople at the mall”—circle the number that represents where you would place yourself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. What is your favorite (nonsexual) form of physical affection?
3. How often would you guess you get healthy physical affection (e.g., a hug or holding hands during prayer) on a weekly basis?
4. How often do you think you need to receive healthy physical affection on a weekly basis?

5. Who gets the lion's share of your hugs?
6. Read John 21:20. When was the last time, figuratively speaking, that you leaned into the embrace of Jesus?
7. How did the conclusion of this chapter—"Jesus modeled the restorative effects of touch two thousand years ago. He typically used His *hands* to *heal*. Don't you think it behooves us as His disciples to keep the squeeze on?"—resonate with you? Were you encouraged, skeptical, or convicted? Please explain your answer.

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about the gift You modeled for us of physical affection, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 8

THE BRIDE WHO TRIPPED DOWN THE AISLE

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, thank You for choosing to look past my faults and false starts. Thank You for being slow to anger and rich in good humor. Please help me to be more like Peter—to use Your undeserved compassion as a catalyst to live out my faith with more vim and vigor. May the grace You have for my gaffes motivate me to lean more fully into You. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What typically gets you tickled?
2. Describe the last time you laughed so hard you cried?
3. What are some of the *hints of God's humor* you've noticed in the world around you?
4. Read Proverbs 17:22. Why do you think humor is good for our hearts?
5. Read Luke 6:21. Why do you think Jesus connected the dots between weeping now and laughing later?
6. How can good humor help us keep an eternal perspective during earthly trials?

7. Do you think people who are able to chuckle at their own frailties are more compassionate when their friends and families make mistakes? Why?
8. Read Proverbs 31:15. Do you think those closest to you would say that verse describes you too? If so, why are you able to grin at the calendar?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about Your good humor, how Your eyes probably crinkle at the corners when You're watching me, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 9

WHO'S GOT YOUR BACK?

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, thank You for the gift of friendship. For the dear men and women who've helped lug me through life when I was too weak or scared or overwhelmed to propel myself alone. Please help me to be a better friend to my "pallet pals" by being slower to take offense and faster to forgive. And please help me to be more sensitive to those who need a lift, the ones who are having a hard time getting close to You on their own. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. Who would you describe as integral members of your tribe in this season of your life?
2. If you had to choose a tribe mascot, what would it be? What does your mascot symbolize about your community?
3. Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. What's the most authentic and supportive multicorded community (three or more close-knit friends) of which you've gotten to be a part? What do you think was/is the key to your cohesiveness?
4. During His earthly ministry, Jesus engaged in relationships in a concentric model of intimacy (like a

target). For example, God the Father and the Holy Spirit were His bull's-eye, the very center of His circle. The three people closest to Him—Peter, James, and John—formed the second innermost ring. The third “band of connection” included the other disciples. The fourth ring included dear friends like Lazarus, whom Jesus loved but didn’t spend as much time with, and so on. Do your relationships fall into a similar target-type pattern?

5. Have you ever experienced one of those especially tough seasons when, if you had tried to lean on just one person, you probably would have flattened her? If so, who were the friends who “hacked through the roof” for you?
6. Read John 13:34–35. Author Henri Nouwen wrote, “Everyone who returns from a long and difficult trip is looking for someone waiting for him at the station or the airport.” Who do you think would name you as their faithful “airport friend” this year?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about Your generous gift of true friendships, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 10

BUSYNESS ISN'T A SPIRITUAL GIFT

Living in Light of His Story

Slow me down, Lord.

Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind.

Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time.

*Give me, amid the confusion of the day, the calmness of the
everlasting hills.*

*Break the tension of my nerves and muscles with the soothing music
of the singing streams that live in my memory.*

*Teach me the art of taking minute vacations—of slowing down to
look at a flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to smile at
a child, to read a few lines from a good book.*

*Slow me down, Lord, and inspire me to send my roots deep into
the soil of life's enduring values, that I may grow toward my
greater destiny.*

*Remind me each day that the race is not always to the swift; that
there is more to life than increasing its speed.*

*Let me look upward to the towering oak and know that it grew
great and strong because it grew slowly and well.*

—WILFRED A. PETERSON

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. On the scale of one to ten below regarding busyness—
with one being “couch potato” and ten being “racing

around like a chicken with your head cut off”—circle the number that represents where you would place yourself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Read Psalm 23. Now reread verse 2. What do you think David meant when he wrote that the Shepherd “makes us lie down”?
3. How would you grade yourself on the subject of real rest? Does learning to be quiet in God’s presence come naturally for you, or do you have to work at it?
4. Do you think real spiritual rest always involves a complete cessation of activity? Explain your answer.
5. Read Hebrews 4:11–13 and 1 Corinthians 10:1–13. How would you describe the relationship between obedience and rest?
6. Describe your own personal “green pasture” and “still waters”—the places and spaces where you go when you need to unwind and be alone with God.
7. What are the most practical ways you’ve learned to practice the art of rest, of being still and knowing that He is God in the midst of your busy life?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about the much-needed gift of real rest You offer us, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 11

EMPATHIZING WITH ENEMIES

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, the woman caught in adultery reminds me so much of myself. My sin is every bit as black as hers; I've just never been publicly exposed like that. Thank You for disciplining me privately and forgiving me lavishly. Thank You for applying holy ointment to my wounds instead of rubbing salt in them. Only the velvet chains of Your love can keep my wandering heart faithful. So I pray as David, please hem me in behind and before, Lord. And help me to extend some small measure of the grace You've given me to the people You place in my path. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What's at the very top of your this-bugs-me list?
2. How would you paraphrase Anne Lamott's assertion: "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do"?
3. Describe a situation in which you were tempted to sling a stone at someone's reputation. What happened?

4. Read 2 Samuel 16:5–14 and 2 Samuel 19:14–23. How would you summarize the moral of this true story about being unfairly pelted with rocks?
5. What verbal rocks are you most prone to throw? What verbal rocks thrown at you have left the darkest bruises on your heart?
6. Do you agree or disagree with the statement that “Christians are the only ones who shoot their wounded”? Explain your answer.
7. Read Ephesians 4:29 and Romans 12:15–16. Describe how someone used words to help you heal—instead of adding insult to injury—during a difficult season?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about becoming less critical and judgmental, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 12

LIAR, LIAR! PANTS ON FIRE!

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, thank You so much for Your promise to be close to the brokenhearted and near to those whose lives are crushed. Help me to remember Your proximity and process all my feelings with You instead of shoving select ones into the recesses of my soul, where, like shards of unremoved glass, they'll eventually cause infection. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What's the biggest lie you remember being caught in when you were little? What were the consequences of getting caught?
2. In which of these three situations would you be more likely to be dishonest: to avoid conflict/keep the peace; to make yourself look more attractive and fit in with a particular group; or to keep from hurting someone else's feelings?
3. Do you think there are any "righteous" reasons that legitimize dishonesty?
4. Reread the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Which of the two brothers do you most identify with in this season of your life? Please explain your answer.

5. How would you describe the correlation between a *sense of entitlement* and *dishonesty*?
6. When has telling the truth—better yet, *living* the truth—resulted in an elevated pulse and sweaty palms for you?
7. Read Psalm 101. If you had to write a chorus for this Old Testament “song,” what would the lyrics be?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about how I can be more authentic, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 13

PUTTING DOWN THE PEN

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, I can't believe You picked me! And I can't wait to ride off in a limo trailing soup cans with You! Please help me to rest in Your love yet also look forward to the wedding party Your friend John described. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What chapters of your life story are *vastly different* from the way you thought they would look when you were younger?
2. Looking back over your story now, what particular chapter stands out as one that seemed tragic when it happened but actually produced great treasure?
3. Read Romans 8:18–28. What context does the whole passage bring to the single verse of Romans 8:28?
4. Read 2 Peter 3:8–9. In what relationship or circumstance of your life does God seem slow in keeping His promises?
5. Read Romans 5:1–5. How would you summarize the connection between suffering and hope? Between hope and contentment?

6. If your life story were being filmed as a movie, what do you think the title would be? What actress would you like to see play you?

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about putting down my pen and becoming more content with You as the author of my life, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 14

CARRYING HOME A GIANT

Living in Light of His Story

Dear Jesus, thank You for promising that Your grace is all we need and that Your power works best in weakness. Please help me trust in Your compassionate strength and remember my own frailties, so I won't be tempted to try and lug heavy stuff by myself anymore. I'd rather stay right here at Your feet, totally dependent on You. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. What is the thing and/or relationship you're most afraid of losing?
2. What would you describe as your greatest loss in the past few years?
3. How has the grief over that loss affected your relationship with God?
4. In her wonderful devotional *Jesus Calling*, Sarah Young wrote, "Rehearsing your troubles results in experiencing them many times, whereas you are meant to go through them only when they actually occur." What does "rehearsing your troubles" look like through the lens of your personality?

5. Read Matthew 11:28–30. What would it look like for you to truly collapse into the caring arms of God?
6. Who specifically would you need to depend on less in order to depend on God completely?
7. Read 1 Peter 5:7. Given the fact that *casting* is a verb, what action could you do today to become more reliant on God?
8. Read Joshua 1:5–9. Describe two specific places you need to be reminded that God is going with you this week.

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I've been thinking about becoming absolutely devoted to and dependent on You, Jesus, and . . .

chapter 15

THE GALVANIZING EFFECT OF GRATITUDE

Living in Light of His Story

Oh Jesus, help me to never forget the lack of peace I had during especially sinful seasons. How lonely I've been when I haven't sought refuge in You. How jarring and discordant life is without Your voice. I'm so grateful You continually rescue me from the disease of my own rebellion. You have restored me into a living hope. I look forward to the day I can lie at Your nail-scarred feet and say thank You. Amen.

Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion Questions

1. Describe the top three things (not individuals) you're thankful for today.
2. Who are three people you're especially grateful for this season?
3. Read Psalms 34 and 107. Both of these psalms are classified as "thanksgiving psalms," and most thanksgiving psalms include gratitude for a specific calamity from which God rescued the psalmist (e.g., a close call in battle, literal captivity). What "calamity" has God rescued you from recently?

4. In light of the assertion about the leper being “especially grateful because he hadn’t forgotten how completely disfigured his life was before the Messiah graciously entered it,” how would you describe the disfigurement in your life before you met Jesus?
5. Read Philippians 4:6–7. What are some practical ways you’ve found to approach God with gratitude on really bad days?
6. Go through the ABCs and state at least one thing beginning with each letter that you’re thankful God has given you or from which He has delivered you. (Feel free to cheat on “X” and substitute a word with “x” in it!)

Journal Entry

Please consider completing this sentence in your personal journal:

So, today I’ve been thinking about becoming more intentional about thanking You, Jesus, and . . .