

LOVE PERIOD.

WITH REV. DR.
JACQUI LEWIS

**Find Joy Purposefully
with Lisa Sharon Harper**

Jacqui Lewis: Hey everybody. Jacqui Lewis here. Welcome to this second season of Love. Period. This season, we're focusing our conversations on my new book, *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World*. Each of my friends will be helping you to think about the themes in each chapter, nine practical practices that can help us love ourselves, love our posse, and then love the world in healing. It all starts with you, and we're going to give you practical tips to make these practices a part of your life.

Jacqui Lewis: Today's episode is inspired by the eighth chapter of my book, *Fierce Love*, find joy purposefully, it is the water of life. I asked my friend, Lisa Sharon Harper to join us today. She is the president and founder of Freedom Road, a consulting program that's designed to change the story on American life. She and I are both fellows at Auburn Seminary and have a similar journey about faith and transition. Joy sustains the work we do. Lisa Sharon Harper, many of us love to say all your names. How are you today?

Lisa Sharon Har...: I'm good. I'm wrapped in a new scarf that I have that is huge and it makes me feel like a burrito, but all wrapped up in the heavenly goodness and just contained. I need to be contained right now, because my world is literally like yours, going in a million different directions. That breadth, and then also my tea...

Jacqui Lewis: And your blankie.

Lisa Sharon Har...: I'm good. I'm good and I-

Jacqui Lewis: You got your [Kiki 00:01:52]?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: Did you call your blanket a Kiki when you were little? Did you have a nickname for your blanket?

Lisa Sharon Har...: No, I didn't actually. I think we called it my blankie. That was my blankie, not a Kiki. I never heard that one, but you know what? That sounds like you.

Jacqui Lewis: It sounds like me.

Lisa Sharon Har...: It does. It's cute.

Jacqui Lewis: My goddaughter Morgan, who now is 30 something, used to call her blanket a Kiki and my little granddaughter Ophelia calls hers simply B. Her blanket is her B, and her B gives her many joyful moments.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Oh, wow. That is beautiful.

Jacqui Lewis: If she's watching television at [NanaPoppop 00:02:30], we're one word, NanaPoppop's house, NanaPoppop's house-

Lisa Sharon Har...: Fabulous.

Jacqui Lewis: Then she might not have her B quickly available, so you'll say, "Do you want Nana's B?"

She's like, "Yes, can I have Nana's B?" So cute. Isn't that cool?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Oh, I love family.

Jacqui Lewis: I do too. I do too. It's been nice to see your niece in your world over there on the Zooms. Does she live in Philly?

Lisa Sharon Har...: She lives all the way on the West Coast, she lives in Los Angeles. So I only get to see her a few times a year. And when I do, it's like, "Ah." I feel like I'm a second mom to her, but a distant... Well really, no, I'm just her favorite auntie. I'm not a second mom because I [crosstalk 00:03:10].

Jacqui Lewis: Claiming that favorite auntie, right? Go ahead.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Oh yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: Claim it.

Lisa Sharon Har...: By far. Yes, I am the favorite auntie. Yes. Her grandma, my mother, is just really in her life. Once a month, she flies in and hangs out with her, takes her out, does stuff and... Because my mom and I live together here in Philly.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah. How's that working? Do you like it?

Lisa Sharon Har...: That's a good question. Actually, let me say, the process of writing Fortune, that's my next book. The process of writing Fortune has really brought us even closer together, and the process of living together has tested that. We have really, we've literally had it coming from both sides. Fortune is right in the center of the way that we have bonded for decades now. Our primary way of bonding, getting past all of our differences, and just recently, I've figured out the depth of our differences. I'm a three with a four wing on the Enneagram and we figured out that she's a six with a seven wing on the Enneagram. And basically what that means is that she can be a fearful person, she can actually do the dark scenario thing where she's living in her dark scenarios and I'm not. I'm one of those people who charges, I just charge forward.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And it's the rush of charging that gets me past any fear. And I do have fear. It's not like I don't have fear, all of us do, but I just charge forward and I get the thing done. For me, it's about getting it done. And so our conflict, our highest conflict recently has been, "You're not doing things in a way that would be secure for us, and I don't feel safe and blah blah." And at the same time, I'm just like, "Mom, maybe should stop watching all those slasher movies at night. Maybe you shouldn't be going to sleep with Stephen King." You know what I mean?

Jacqui Lewis: That's so funny. Perhaps, one should not scare oneself, that could be good.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yes. There's enough to be afraid of just in our own freaking neighborhood, we don't need to actually add to it at night before you go to sleep, you know what I mean?

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah, I do.

Lisa Sharon Har...: So yeah, but both of us can learn. I have also taken in my lesson. Okay, I'm being safer blah, blah, blah. But I think a lot of that also has to do, quite honestly has to do with the ethic of love.

Jacqui Lewis: Absolutely.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And it has to do with what you talk about all the time, fierce love. I really do believe that as I love my neighbors, and including the neighbors on the street who sell the drugs. As I love them, get to know them, their names, pay them for things that they do for me in our household, that I will create a bond that is stronger than security. You know what I mean?

Jacqui Lewis: That's so good, Lisa.

Lisa Sharon Har...: It's stronger because it is real. I believe that.

Jacqui Lewis: That's right. Me too, [crosstalk 00:06:13].

Lisa Sharon Har...: That's what my experience and for the year that we've literally been here a year now.

Jacqui Lewis: Wow.

Lisa Sharon Har...: One year, and one week, this week. And that's been my experience.

Jacqui Lewis: I love that.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And I'm sticking to it.

Jacqui Lewis: I love that. I think that's right. There is something about begetting what we put in the world.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: We beget love if we love, we beget safety if we feel safe. I really think you're right about that. I hope that doesn't sound too woo-woo, you all listening, but we create our own ecosystem, I think, is what I hear you saying that I agree with-

Lisa Sharon Har...: We do

Jacqui Lewis: ... really strongly.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Well, I think what it is, is... Here it is in its essence. I believe that as you move in the world, according to your ethic, whatever that ethic is, others rise to that ethic. So if you have a ethic of fear and you then operate out of fear, and your ethic of fear drives you to try to dominate others, you then will be surrounded by people who dominate. And you will have people trying to dominate you, because you have put out into the world an ethic of domination. But if you put into the world an ethic of love, meaning that in every interaction, the goal is to create a connection. In every interaction, the goal is to weave us back together, this ripped apart world, that's the

goal, then others will be blessed by that and they will lean in and they will too.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Now there are the crazies, I know this is true. There are the people who are just anti-social people and the people who the slasher movies are made about, but I don't think that, that's going to be the majority. And they are out there, right? But that's not the majority of people and not by far. And even them, quite honestly, even people who suffer from that mental illness, if they are human and they are, then they have the capacity, they have the capacity, even if it's a blink, even if it's within a nanosecond, their heart can be reached. It can be.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah. It can be changed. Yeah. So Lisa, it's been a year since you and your mom have moved in together, and you're discovering each other's Enneagram compatibility and not, and daughter-mother stuff. But one thing I notice about you almost all the time is that not only do you grab things and go, or as you say, "Charge in," I don't know if I've ever seen you, not joyful, I'm not sure. You have a joyful soul.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Wow.

Jacqui Lewis: And so, disavow me of that, if I'm wrong. Tell me when you're cranky, then what is it that restores that joy in you?

Lisa Sharon Har...: That's a great question, Jacqui. It's funny actually and I was thinking about this with a couple of friends recently. Back when I was in high school, I got introduced to that whole melancholy, sanguine, I don't even know, there was another one... I don't think it was-

Jacqui Lewis: Choleric.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Choleric.

Jacqui Lewis: Choleric.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Choleric, something like that.

Jacqui Lewis: [crosstalk 00:09:42], something like that. Yeah.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah. You know what I'm talking about, right? Exactly.

Jacqui Lewis: Sadly I do. Yes.

Lisa Sharon Har...: We actually used that thing back then, nobody uses that anymore. But I remember calling myself melancholy like, "I am melancholy," and I was. But I think back now, I'm like, "I'm not exactly sure when the shift happened." Probably, honestly the shift probably happened around 2005, and there's a reason for that, I can go into that, but I'm not there anymore. And I would say that my normal baseline is joy, it's not happiness, I'm always happy, but it is joy. There's a sense of, "I'm well, I'm well," and I get anxious about all kind of crap like everybody else sometimes, But at the baseline, I'm okay, I'm good, because I believe it really is a... I believe God's got my back, I do, I've seen it. I've seen it-

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah. Good for you.

Lisa Sharon Har...: ... just one too many times to not believe that. And my mom is not that, my mom is not... that's not her baseline. Her baseline is melancholy or sanguine, maybe it's sanguine actually, or sanguine. So I think that the difference for me has really been a process of owning myself literally. That has been the process of going from melancholy to joy and a lot of it has to do with that transition from being embedded in evangelical community. That was not just evangelical community, but it was really tight knit, it was high control and I was in it for a decade, actually, yeah, it's decade.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And when I got out of that, I had an amazing year in grad school. And it was in that year in grad school that I found my voice again. And I found out, "Well, people actually want to know what I have to say," whereas people in that high control area of my life or time in my life, they made it their goal to break me down, and show me all the things that are not right with me in order to build me back up in their image. I swear to you, that's what it was.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh my gosh. Yeah.

Lisa Sharon Har...: No, that really was. So of course, I was melancholy right? I look back on that now, and I'm like, "Hey, of course."

Jacqui Lewis: Of course.

Lisa Sharon Har...: A friend of mine said to me while I was in it, and she was in it too, but she said, "Lisa, this is toxic for you. This is not good for you." And I wanting, ever the joiner, ever the person who wants to be accepted, ever the one who was really operating out of my own brokenness at the time and without the healing, right? Feeling always unwanted. In fact, I credit that community though with some of the deepest healing that I ever experienced, because while some people were trying to break me down, there were others there who were really the healers in the community. And they surrounded me, and a whole year was invested in some deep inner healing prayer in that space.

Lisa Sharon Har...: So I became very, very aware of the places where my past, my heritage, intergenerational curses and brokenness were passed down. And not just intergenerational, but also just stuff, stuff that happened and lies that I believed about myself.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh my goodness.

Lisa Sharon Har...: So I began... I went through a year of identifying the lies and claiming the truths about myself. And so that was... Actually, I had to say, maybe that was the biggest shift right there, and that's what led me eventually to leave. And then discover my voice and my own power and live in it, actually walk in it and find out, "Wow, oh my God, this is what we're meant to do. How about that?"

Jacqui Lewis: This is what I'm meant to be. Yeah. Oh, Lisa, I love that story. I didn't know it and I'm so glad you told it, and I really deeply resonate with you making the connection between truth, your true self, being in your truth, being honest, knowing what it is, letting go of the lies, and how that leads to joy, right? The space that you make in the world for yourself to be yourself is I think, a joyful and resilient space. I write in my book, *Fierce Love*, something

about joy in our superpowers. Do you remember? Remember when we went to that first Auburn? Were you there for that first retreat when we were all... all the Auburn fellows were telling bad stories on ourselves? This is [crosstalk 00:14:33].

Lisa Sharon Har...: I was not, actually.

Jacqui Lewis: You were not there yet?

Lisa Sharon Har...: I was there the second time.

Jacqui Lewis: The second time around.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Second, but tell me, I want to know.

Jacqui Lewis: Well, it was so interesting. The exercise was something like, "Talk about a time when you really felt great about a success," I did that really well, which I got to say, sometimes we as Christians or people of faith are discouraged from owning that power.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Right. That's true.

Jacqui Lewis: And then we also talked about like... This is what I really screwed something up. I really got this wrong. And out of those two narratives, our friend Otis Moss III named us. So you got named also by Otis.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: But it stayed in my body, Lisa as like, "Oh, it's at the conjoining of my incredible gifts and my failures that my superpowers come." They come in the space, both of delicious goodness that I have, but also in the places where I'm broken. When I look keenly at it, I think there is super power also, and that gives me joy.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: Does that make sense to you?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: All right.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yes. I think the way that I take that in is to say for myself, right? The way that it works is when I think about my superpowers, my superpower... And it's funny, because I think Otis really nailed it, and I wanted to be Storm. I'm like, "Why can't I be Storm?"

Jacqui Lewis: Because, I'm Storm. Damn it.

Lisa Sharon Har...: You're already Storm. Darn it. I got there one retreat too late to be-

Jacqui Lewis: One retreat too late. Yeah.

Lisa Sharon Har...: ... to be Storm. But also I'm just not Storm, I wish I was, I'm not. In some ways

some people might say that I am, because I'm just like, I'm a catalyst.

Jacqui Lewis: You can change the weather.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah. I can change the weather.

Jacqui Lewis: Yes, you can.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Hello somebody. But, actually the person he named me, everybody like, "We all got our names," was Cecilia Reyes. And I was like, "Who's that?" You know what I mean? But Cecilia Reyes is somebody who is a healer, that's who she is. And I think that, that really is my life vocation, I am a healer. My mom is a nurse-

Jacqui Lewis: Healing [crosstalk 00:16:45].

Lisa Sharon Har...: ... it's passed down, and a registered nurse, but actually a nurse practitioner. And because I went through such deep healing, when I look out at society, I am asking the question, how do we heal that? How do we repair that? It's part of the reason why my book is actually, the subtitle, How Race Broke My Family and the World and How To Repair It All. I actually wanted to say how to heal it all, but they were like, "Well, repair sounds better."

Lisa Sharon Har...: So anyway, I think that the space where that healing needed to be done in me, the healing that I needed, so it's actually the place of my brokenness, but just my brokenness, my healing, where that meets the world's greatest needs. Wow, that's where I show up.

Jacqui Lewis: That's awesome. Reminds me of that Buechner definition about calling, right? What Frederick Buechner says, "Where the world's greatest needs and your greatest gifts meet is called, it's vocation."

Lisa Sharon Har...: Wow.

Jacqui Lewis: And I'm sure someone's going to say, "That's not exactly right, Jacqui," but I'm paraphrasing there.

Lisa Sharon Har...: No, that's exactly. That is right.

Jacqui Lewis: That's right. Yeah. And Lisa, you said, "I'm not happy all the time, but I'm joyful." Sometimes when I'm talking about joy, I go, "Look, you all, don't get stuck on the difference between happiness and joy." Because I got mansplained to me one time and I just resisted it. But in this conversation, I'd love to know what you think of as happiness versus what you think of as joy. Tell me what you think.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah. That's a good question. I think for me, joy is the reservoir that I draw from at the well, right? So the well of life and sustenance and creativity and spirit connection and communal, for when my mom and I go at it, and we have gone at it in recent days, joy is what brings me back, right? Joy is also hope. Joy is hope as well, right? Because you may not be joyful in that moment or happy in that moment, but joy knows that there's a reservoir deep beneath the surface you can draw from, and it's always, always accessible, always. Because that reservoir for me and in my faith tradition says that God is never, ever, ever not present, God is always present, God is always committed to me. Even when everything around me says, "Nope," God says, "Oh yes." And so I hold onto that oh yes, I do. And that is what gives me joy.

Jacqui Lewis: That's joy. So this place where faith in the holy other or the holy within us also, right? The holy one that is God gives us a sense of-

Lisa Sharon Har...: You say holy within us. And I say... My theology is, I'm taking that in and I'm considering that, but I actually do believe that God is other than us. And I get that right from the first page in the Bible, from the word likeness, right? And that means something, it really means a lot actually. The reason why I fight for that is because that word likeness, we are made in the image and likeness of God, actually if you split the hair, it's really not saying we're like God. What it's really saying is we are like God, but we are not God. In other words... And I think that this is the principle sin actually of people of European descent through history is that they have been striving to be God, to be God over all others, to be Supreme. That's what white supremacy is all about. Whiteness was created in order to create a Supreme race in our nation that would be the ones to rule. That was the whole purpose of it.

Jacqui Lewis: Right.

Lisa Sharon Har...: So, well, what do you do when you do that? That means you're crashing the image of God in others. You're ignoring the image of God in others when you do that, so I that's why that first page is so significant in the Bible. And so that word likeness is a caution to us, not to try to be God, because only God can be perfect. God's concern with us is not to try to be perfect, only God can be perfect. Only God knows everything. We don't need to try to know everything.

Jacqui Lewis: Yep. In fact, that might have been what that original sin was about, was trying to get too up in there.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Hello? Yes. And control too much.

Jacqui Lewis: Control too much.

Jacqui Lewis: I love your theology of resisting that begod, because it causes white supremacy. And I would say as a womanist theologian also I claim that I love that first page and I love, love, love, love, love 1 John 4. In this place where you can tell the joining community is writing about, they're like, "Hello, Jewish people, you'll get this." God is love and everyone who tabernacles in love, tabernacles in God, and God tabernacles in them. So I think about being a wandering people, across the desert-

Lisa Sharon Har...: Oh, I see. Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: And there's no like, "Where's God?" "Well, God's right here in the tabernacle. We got God, the Temple's gone, let's go." So this idea of, then we become a tabernacle of the holy. So you're right, Lisa, the sin of being God has really messed up human life. But I think an anecdote, and maybe a place of my joy comes when I think to myself in my best moments, Sunday, I preached at Riverside Church, and it was just one of these moments where my little closet, charismatic self, I was like, "Oh my God, the Holy Spirit is right here. Bam, bam, bam." I felt it, right?

Lisa Sharon Har...: I love that.

Jacqui Lewis: I felt it, right? And that place where I knew in the core of my bones, that I was channeling what God's spirit was saying through me. And I was ecstatic joy, Lisa, ecstatic joy. And it felt like proof texting that sometimes I am, you are, we are a tabernacle for the holy, like a box holding God or a love shack, baby, I love saying that. So when that happens to me, when I feel that kinetic, emotional, full, me and God, and me and the world, because it doesn't feel like just me and God, but me in the world are synced up around spirit. That's joy, joy, joy down in my soul.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah. So I want to add something to something I said earlier, because you really, you inspired me or reminded me of something. You ever see Chariots of Fire?

Jacqui Lewis: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Right? Back in the... I don't even know, was it the eighties when Chariots of Fire came out?

Jacqui Lewis: That's a long time ago, but we won't... I was only two, but I saw it, no kidding.

Lisa Sharon Har...: It's such a great movie, right? And you were only two?

Jacqui Lewis: Excellent movie.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Right. Wow. I was like, "Oh my Lord." But it was really, it was a very influential movie for me because I was a theater person before I was ever a theologian or activist or anything like that. And when I watched that and he said, "When I run, I feel God's pleasure." Really what he's talking about is vocation. He's talking about calling, like when you're in the flow, when you are walking in the direction that God created you to walk that God was dreaming of when God made you, when you're doing that, when you're running, when you're flying, when you're doing the-

Jacqui Lewis: Preaching, singing.

Lisa Sharon Har...: ... art, when you're preaching, when you're doing it, right? Wow, that's when you feel God's pleasure. For me, that's when I'm in joy. And I think I'm more in that space now than ever before, because I actually do feel like I'm right in the flow. I'm right in that place that, where God created me for this. And in order to get here, I had to say no to a lot. I had to say no to working for other people, doing stuff I loved, but doing stuff toward their vision. And God was calling me to start Freedom Road, and it took me two years to actually say yes to leaving the former thing. And then when I did, I had no idea what I was... I really didn't know what I was need going be going into at all, I just knew I was saying no to that.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And then literally the day that I gave my final day's notice, my final day, I told them what my final day would be, which was four months from that point. That day, I got the, "Aha. This is what I want to do."

Jacqui Lewis: Oh good.

Lisa Sharon Har...: So what I found and as part of the faith thing and is that when you walk forward, God really does shine light on the very next step. So it's been a faith journey and at the same time, I really am living my best life. I'm doing it. I'm doing it. I'm doing what I want to do-

Jacqui Lewis: [crosstalk 00:26:48].

Lisa Sharon Har...: ... what I'm created to do. Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: Amen, it's beautiful. One of the things that happened when I was dating the man who mansplained to me, the joy was different than happiness. And I was like, "Okay, whatever. I [crosstalk 00:26:59]."

Lisa Sharon Har...: Oh, God.

Jacqui Lewis: But there was a way in which, Lisa, you and I are people of faith, and many of the people who listen to the podcast are going to be people of faith. But I'm always... I think you know me well enough to know that I'm always trying to stretch out the good things that keep me sane into the world of people who don't necessarily have that, didn't have our upbringing, didn't have a chance to taste God that way, let's say. So I was thinking about joy as a feeling of freedom, of bounce back, of contentment. I love when in Spanish, contentada just sounds better than contentment, but wonder. And a reservoir of goodness that makes you walk back and forth and hug yourself. That reservoir of goodness or the reservoir of Godness.

Lisa Sharon Har...: That's good.

Jacqui Lewis: Or the reservoir of love that you're describing when you know you're in the bosom of that, laying in it, right? In it somehow, that goodness, yeah? I think that feels like joy.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And I would say that, here's the thing is that when we encounter the things that try to steal joy, right? The mountains of life, the disappointments, the hurts from other people, the loss. Life and another whole part of life is loss. Life is loss and you are constantly losing people, things, opportunities. We lose our health over time, everything. So when you encounter that, I think that the thing that, that brings me back to the joy, even in the midst of that, right? Especially when you're hurt by someone else, it's the empathy, it's the practices, the spiritual practices that I've learned over time that actually anchor me. I think they really do serve as an anchor, so it's the practice of prayer and being connected in my core self with spirit, with God. It's the practice of empathy for my enemy, for the one who has just messed with me. You know what I mean?

Jacqui Lewis: Yes. I do.

Lisa Sharon Har...: I've just gotten all messed up.

Jacqui Lewis: I do know what you mean.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah. It's the practice of letting go.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah. Surrender.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Letting go of the things that are running from you, right? Or the people who are running from you... And I think also acceptance, because sometimes God, I do, I believe this, sometimes God body blocks you from the stuff that you think you should have. But I think God knows that if you did get that, you would actually miss your actual blessing. You would miss the purpose for being you. It was like, it would be a detour.

Jacqui Lewis: Detour.

Lisa Sharon Har...: It's not actually meant for you and that's okay. So it's letting it go, allowing it to go.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah. I hear that. My friend, I do. And I was trying to think about... I was just trying to think, as you were talking there about, I believe that in some ways you and I are in an ongoing conversation about coming out of evangelical, right?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Oh God. Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: Like, "Lisa and Jacqui are talking about that?" And I remember that as I left behind some of the beliefs that made me feel impinged or bound or crazy, I also let go just a little bit of God's... And you're not saying this to know that I'm not saying you're saying this, but that seems as a little person that it would be like, "God's going to order every one of those things for me. I'm going to... the boyfriend, the grade, the A." You know what I'm saying?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: You're not saying that. Do you know what I'm saying? I'm going to get the A on the test and all that stuff.

Lisa Sharon Har...: I know what you mean.

Jacqui Lewis: Right. And I had to-

Lisa Sharon Har...: There is that.

Jacqui Lewis: There is that, but that same thing could make me joyless because I'd be like, "Well, God, I did all the right stuff and you did not deliver, okay, the thing that the genie God should deliver since I did all the right stuff," a weird circle, right?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: And then I'd be salty with God. So I had to change my... My joy increased Lisa, when I changed my contract with God. And I had a congregant... I had to do this exercise with this congregant who lost, I don't know, all kinds of eight, 10 loved ones in about a year. And she was furious, and she was doubtful, and she was depressed. And I was like, "I think you're mad at God." "No, I'm not." "Yes, you are. Yes, you are. You don't think you should be, but you are, because you did all those good girl things and you think God failed you." So Jacqui, had to go to myself at a point, "Your contract with God is wrong. You think if you do all the good things, God's going to give you all the good things, and then you're going to have a joyful life. Instead, if you just walk with God more closely, you might not get any of the stuff you think you're supposed to have, but you will feel this holy presence bathing you or this presence loving you," right?

Jacqui Lewis: And that's been like, "Oh, well that went crazy, the building burned down. It did burn down." A younger Jacqui, Lisa, would've wondered what God was trying to say with that fire.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Oh, wow.

Jacqui Lewis: That's a lot to do to God, to make God responsible like that, right?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Wow.

Jacqui Lewis: But instead I have found so many moments of giggles and joy and satisfaction in this interstitial place without a congregation, without a space for my congregation. I find the joy in the presence. Does that make sense to you? Does that resonate?

Lisa Sharon Har...: It makes absolute sense. Yes, it does. Where I resonate with that for me, the place of the greatest, and it's not really a loss because I never really had it, but it was the dream of marriage, right? So, I'm still, "Hey people, I'm still out here. I'm single, and I'm open," but it took me a long time to get here, to that place where I'm open, right? And I think that for me, what I realized is that I... And this is a recent revelation literally in the last year, that I filled my life with authoritarian evangelicalism, because it was the closest thing that was to my dad, which was he was an authoritarian, right? And so that's what brought me toward it and kept me there also is that it had hard boundaries, everything was black and white. It made it much easier to determine what's right and wrong and all of that. But it was in that context that I also learned, my body is evil, my sexuality is evil and I'm heterosexual, but that was evil.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah. Being a heterosexual is evil too. Yeah.

Lisa Sharon Har...: I'm cisgendered but just basically having a sexuality was evil in that context, and so I de-gendered myself basically in order to be safe in that environment. Not for me to be safe from others, but for me to be safe for others. Hello. Because I was in a mostly white space, and in order for me to gain girlfriends who had husbands, I had to not have a gender because I couldn't be a threat to them.

Jacqui Lewis: Right.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And if I wanted to have friends who were guys, they weren't going to date me. And if they thought I was trying to date them, they wouldn't really be friends, so I had to de-gender myself and walk around as if I had no sexuality at all in order to have friends in that space.

Jacqui Lewis: Wow.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And that, yes.

Jacqui Lewis: Wow, that's a lot.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And that really did, it really, really did do... It did a number on me. And so I think what I've realized is that, that's been that, has been my loss, because when I was 17, I was dreaming of having a child at 21. I wanted to have a kid at 21, because it's when my mom had me, at 21. And so I had always imagined I would get married, and have kids and that would be it, but that isn't the way that it worked out. And I can't say if I was a Calvinist, I would say, "Well, this is predestination," that this has been God's plan all along. And so now it's just up for you to live in God's plan. God never met for you to be married. Well, you know what? That's bull donkey.

Jacqui Lewis: Yes, it is. That's right.

Lisa Sharon Har...: It's bull donkey. There's lots of reasons why I'm not married. Some of which are because they're self-imposed because of my own brokenness, others are because they're imposed by others because of their brokenness, and society-

Jacqui Lewis: But neither did God sit around thinking, "Lisa shouldn't get married."

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah. No, and also marriage ain't everything.

Jacqui Lewis: That's right.

Lisa Sharon Har...: You know what I mean? It's mixed up, it's almost like chicken soup, it's all mixed up, and we can get mixed up in that chicken soup and think chicken soup is the only soup, right? But at the same time, I do know that the whole point of telling you this was, I do know that, that feeling, that's the place where I go to God, that's still the place where I feel longing. So the longings of our heart are what drive us in life. The longing of our heart... I long for three major things. I long to be united with someone in spirit and in flesh, I long for that. And as a companion, a lifelong companion and a husband, I long for that. I long, and I know this is going to sound really, really corny, but it's true, I long for peace. I long for justice. I long for Shalom. I long for the peaceable reign of God, I long for that.

Jacqui Lewis: Yes, that doesn't sound corny to pray, preach, do it.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Thank you. And I long for the reunification of my own family where brokenness and broken relationships and broken trust have shattered my family. My mom and dad... My mom basically, my mom divorced when I was 10, and then divorced again when I was about 37, maybe 40 something. When was that? That was 2014, so whatever.

Jacqui Lewis: Right.

Lisa Sharon Har...: So not that long ago, right? But we had a blended family that then basically got blown to smithereens because of sin, because of folks' sin, But I long for my family to be reunited and healthy, not in the way that it was, and healthy.

Jacqui Lewis: I love that, Lisa.

Lisa Sharon Har...: So I have no choice. I have no choice with those longings, but to believe and trust in a God that's larger than myself, because none of the three of them are within my control.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah. I hear that. And I say really the yearning of the desires of your heart, I'm so grateful for your vulnerability in just saying those out loud. I think there's something that circles us back to the top of the conversation about just how it's the truth that both sets us free. It's the truth in being naked and honest, and vulnerable that let us put out in the universe, "This is what I want, God. This is what I want, world. This is what I need." And I think that it is that truth telling, owning the yearning plus the gratitude even for the good and the bad and the ugly, that is a stew that makes joy.

Jacqui Lewis: It's like, joy isn't, oh, everything's shiny.

Lisa Sharon Har...: That's right.

Jacqui Lewis: But the joy is, I know that the gospel... my Redeemer liveth, or I know there's a God who loves me no matter what. I know that there is something inside and outside of us, that's a compelling force of love that is present in the world, and then we can look for it and we can see it. We can look for it and we can see it.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Yeah. I'm reminded of that kind of joy when I think about our ancestors.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah, absolutely.

Lisa Sharon Har...: When I think about black church, and I think about the black mothers in the church who sang, and we don't sing, they sang, right? And they sing, they draw from the deepest part of their being, and they sing with the power of a Mack Truck. And you know that before that Sunday, that they had some tragedy in their family's life. [Baybay 00:40:12] got picked up by the police or somebody lost a job or a check didn't come in and so they had to figure out how to feed the kids that week.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah, how to make it happen.

Lisa Sharon Har...: But that church mama, she sings. And she sings in a place that makes me reach down and believe that God is going to come through. And you're right, that's that reservoir. That's the reservoir that I was talking about earlier. That's the location of our joy.

Jacqui Lewis: That's where it is. And I hope that our conversation inspires folks to just think, "How can I access that?" I'm always trying to be multi-vocal, I think I can access that in my prayer, I can access it in my singing. Maybe someone else can access that on a yoga mat, I don't know. Maybe someone's going to eat mindfully and be like, "This grape is the best grape I've ever had in my life."

Lisa Sharon Har...: I love that, yes.

Jacqui Lewis: "And when I feel that burst on my tongue, I'm going to be like, 'Woo,' I get a little taste of it." Lisa, let me just bring us a little bit to close here after having such, such, such a great conversation with you. I'm so glad to be getting to know you this way.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Ditto.

Jacqui Lewis: What do you know for sure about love?

Lisa Sharon Har...: What I know for sure about love is that love is more powerful than power.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, that's good. Love is more powerful than power. Come on, everybody. Write that down.

Lisa Sharon Har...: It's true.

Jacqui Lewis: And when I say... It is true. And when I say fierce love, what does that evoke in you?

Lisa Sharon Har...: Fierce love evokes in me a picture of a warrior with the sword of love, that we can overcome our enemies, making them into companions with the force of love. And I don't just mean that on an individual level, but I also mean that societally. I mean that in the realm of the public square, that as we confront those who would rather see us dead, but we... I'll tell you what, I see it in the picture of myself, standing there in the Emancipation Park, in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. And standing across from a man who carried an AR-15, and he was a militia man.

Lisa Sharon Har...: And I stood across him from him, for a good hour, just singing and praying. And I

finally looked at him at one point, and I said to him, “Excuse me, come over here. Excuse me, can you come here for a second?” And he looked at me and he was like, “Not coming over.” So instead I just said it loud, I said, “I want you to know something. I love you. I love you. We love you.” And you know what he said?

Jacqui Lewis: What did he say?

Lisa Sharon Har...: He said, “I know. I love you too.”

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, wow.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Can you believe that? And do you know what? Well, in five minutes he wasn't there anymore. They took him off that line, but that's love is more powerful than power, and love is our... it's both our battle shield and our authority.

Jacqui Lewis: Yep. Beautiful, Lisa. Well, Lisa Sharon Harper, my friend of three names, I'm so grateful for this conversation with you, and sending you every good wish for the fiercest love of all to keep you and guard you. Thank you.

Lisa Sharon Har...: Thank you.

Jacqui Lewis: Rumi says, “When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy,” so whether it is sitting down to a cup of coffee with a friend, or a cheese and great plate for yourself, or listening to your favorite jam and dancing, pick something that gives you joy and run toward it. It will feed your soul.