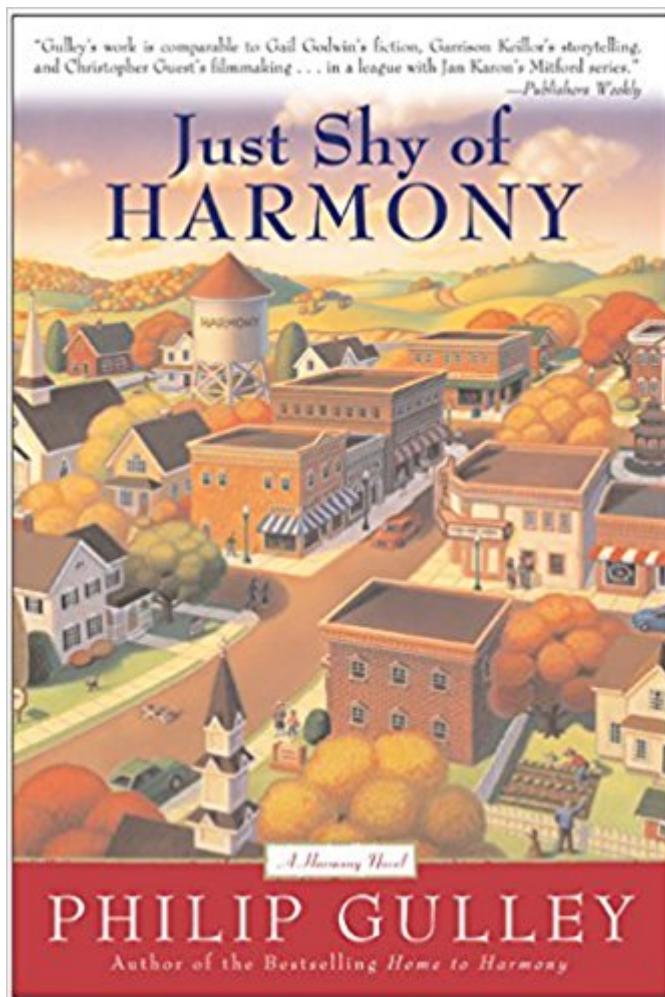


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# Just Shy Of Harmony



## **Synopsis**

Come Home to Harmony ...Thousands of readers have fallen in love with Harmony, the small town with the kindly spirit whose endearing and eccentric residents are like old friends. Join them for Sam Gardner's second year as pastor of his quirky flock.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In Just Shy of Harmony, Philip Gulley's follow-up novel to Home to Harmony, the award-winning author again offers matchless slices of small-town life as he catches us up on the doings of the quirky characters that inhabit this small community. Beloved minister Sam Gardner slides into depression as his little Quaker church, which once had goals of spreading the gospel and ending world hunger, now juggles such lofty issues as what type of vanity table to put in the ladies' restroom and the progress of its chicken noodle sales. Gulley gently pokes fun at evangelical Christianity's foibles through his characterizations, including church member Dale Hinshaw's "Scripture egg project" (chickens lay eggs with Scripture in the yolks to reach the unsaved). There are poignant moments: Wayne Fleming's wife Sally has deserted him and his three kids, and now Wayne is in love with lawyer Deena Morrison, owner of the Legal Grounds Coffee Shop. When Sally returns home, Wayne must make the most difficult decision of his life. Reading one of Gulley's stories is as comfortable as sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch, listening to an old friend spin tales. This installment in the Harmony series is sure to win Gulley some new fans and please his loyal following. --Cindy Crosby --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When Sam Gardner reads an article about "the ten warning signs of depression" in a Christian magazine, he discovers that he has seven of them. The article closes by telling readers that if they have seven or more signs of depression, they should see their pastor. The trouble is, Sam is the pastor. He's tired of writing sermons and exhausted by his congregation's resistance to any change more meaningful than installing a new vanity in the women's bathroom. In this refreshingly candid novel, a sequel of sorts to *Home to Harmony*, the members of Harmony's quirky Friends Meeting engage in various struggles with depression and doubt. Like Jan Karon, Gulley has a gift for understanding the hilarity and pathos of small churches in small towns. With his characteristic wry humor, he develops a host of side characters, from Dale Hinshaw, the self-righteous and infuriating church elder, to the salt-of-the-earth lottery winner, Jessie Peacock. Gulley is unflinching at depicting some of the church members' narrow-mindedness, but he never succumbs to stereotype. While some readers may initially have a difficult time adjusting to the way Gulley often switches from the past to the present tense, this device helps the book play out like a comfortable, down-to-earth conversation. Many readers will relate to Sam's honest struggles with faith and will appreciate the book's subtle message: that Sam's faith is rekindled only when he steps away from congregational infighting and begins to help others. This story is a winner. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Philip Gulley is a Quaker pastor living in central Indiana. This is the second installment in his "Harmony" series also set in a fictional small town in central Indiana and the protagonist is a Quaker pastor. Often, authors get the advice to "write what they know" and that is exactly what Mr. Gulley has done - and very, very well! Sam Gardner is the narrator of the story and he is the Quaker minister of Harmony Friends Meeting. He is feeling beaten down by the church he is serving and suffers a crisis of faith. When a minister no longer is sure he believes in God, it makes it difficult to preach each Sunday and serve the church the way the members feel they should be served. The way the membership handles this is the springboard for much of what happens in the rest of the novel. Many of the characters we met in "Home to Harmony" appear in this book as well. Dale Hinshaw feels called to develop his scripture egg ministry (you have to read the book to find out what this crazy idea is), Asa and Jesse Peacock struggle to make ends meet while sitting on a winning lottery ticket, Wayne and Sally Fleming struggle with major issues in their marriage, and Fern Hampton is busy trying to get a new vanity in the ladies room installed and dedicated to another family member. These are just a few of the storylines woven throughout this slim but full novel. Often laugh-out-loud funny and always poignant, this is a wonderful book and fabulous series

that I can't speak of highly enough. In the case of these books, they are permanent fixtures in my home and I go back to re-read when in the mood for comfortable, but with meaning. Others have compared this series to the Mitford Series by Jan Karon (which I also love). While I think the audiences for these two groups of books will often overlap, they are still different and just because you love Jan Karon doesn't necessarily mean you will love these. There is a bit more of a "bite" in here since, while very very humorous, there are people here you really wouldn't want to spend more time with than you had to. Great book, Great series!! Side note: A resident of central Indiana myself, I have had the opportunity to hear Mr. Gulley speak multiple times over the years. If you ever get the chance, please take advantage of it. He is a fabulous speaker and once you hear him it will enhance your enjoyment of his books. Now, when I read his work, I actually hear his voice reading aloud - very distinctive voice and style. I was actually disappointed to find that the audio recording was not by the author. He would have done a better job, I think.

Though I really liked the first book, the shift from first person to third person really changed the entire feel of the book. I liked Sam's perspective, his reminiscing, and his thoughts. When he struggles with depression, (who can blame him with leadership like he tolerates in his church!) I could understand. As a missionary's wife, I know ministry can be very stressful- especially when one is not willing to confront sin, and is not seeking to go deeper in their relationship with the Lord. I don't know of any church who allows just anyone from the congregation to stand behind the pulpit and preach. Especially those who are obviously full of pride, and have bad relationships with most everyone in the congregation. Sam should have taken some time off, but not let his congregation suffer for it. Having a temporary replacement pastor who can truly guide the flock is a much more realistic idea. This book had some funny parts, and yes people deal with hardship all the time, but there is not a lot of true spiritual advice, as following the Bible, in this book. The relationship between Deena and Wayne was not viewed as problematic even though he was still married. (His wife seemingly abandoned him.) He should never have pursued a relationship with someone else. Those things bothered me, as well as the jump in verb tenses. Editing is needed in future editions of this e-book.

I felt like reading a good Quaker book with a bit of humour. Friends are very good at making fun of themselves. The first book was lovely as we went through an introduction of so many of the stalwarts in this set of short stories really, By this second book I was beginning to find the humour was beginning to veer towards ridicule, which is never a good way to go, it began to make me uneasy.

As a matter of interest I started the third kindle book and I have only read the first six pages. As a Friend for 42 years I was hoping to revisit some kindly people. I worked out why I left ten years ago. The Minister was weak, and hoped his troubles would go away. He harboured frustration and should have dealt with it. People in his Meeting were being damaged and he was after all the minister. I have come from a completely unprogrammed Meeting background but the issues are the same for all Friends(Quakers) wherever. Many church goers from all traditions may enjoy these anecdotes. All I can say in conclusion is that I hope he has changed names to protect the innocent.....

I feel a little bad giving this one star because I really enjoyed Home to Harmony (as well as Front Porch Tales) so let me explain. Home to Harmony was written in the first person (Sam Gardner, pastor) and was generally whimsical. Just Shy of Harmony is written in the third person and some chapters deal with some pretty heavy issues, such as adultery. I'm not opposed to writing dealing with heavy issues, much of my reading explores the dark side of humanity, what bothers me is the change of genre and the change of perspective (from first person to third person) without warning. The perspectival change without fair warning in promotional material is unforgivable - when I go to a Pizza Hut I expect pizza and not tacos, when I purchased Just Shy of Harmony I expected to "hear" Sam Gardner's "voice" - but instead I heard the voice of a stranger. Perhaps if Just Shy of Harmony is your first Harmony book you'll enjoy the book because you won't realize there has been a change; but otherwise let the buyer beware.

Good, clean fun to read. Always love Philip Gulley's stories of hometown antics and quirky characters. Making my way through the series. On to the next!

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