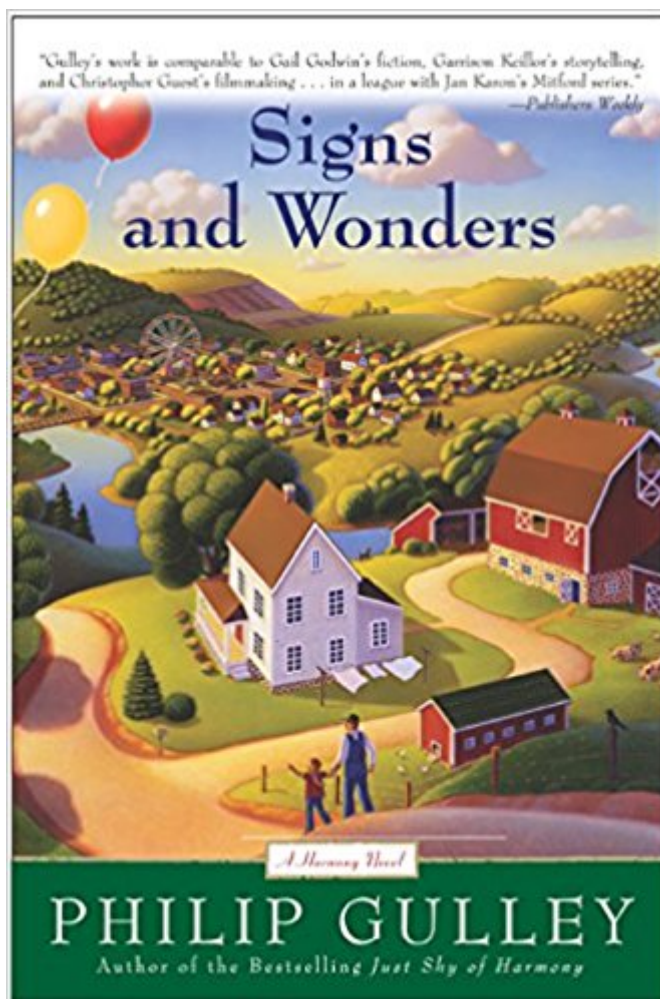


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# Signs And Wonders: A Harmony Novel



## Synopsis

A Year of Laughter and Grace in harmony Master storyteller Philip Gulley returns to the winsome ways of Harmony, Indiana, in the third installment of the beloved Harmony series.

## Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: HarperSanFrancisco; Reprint edition (March 16, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060727071

ISBN-13: 978-0060727079

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 62 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #74,409 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Quaker #2373 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Contemporary #2683 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Literature & Fiction

## Customer Reviews

In his third full-length Harmony novel, Gulley delivers another series of charming vignettes about Quaker pastor Sam Gardner and his eccentric parishioners. In fact, Gulley's underlying thesis seems to be that to live in a small Midwestern town is to be eccentric, as evidenced by such bizarre schemes as Harvey Muldock's attempt to store his beloved convertible in his garage attic, only to have it crash down on top of his wife's car. At its best, Gulley's work is comparable to Gail Godwin's fiction, Garrison Keillor's storytelling and Christopher Guest's filmmaking. When, for example, an obnoxiously pietistic member of the church releases "salvation balloons" in an attempt to save all those Democrats in Chicago, he gets an angry call from a zookeeper in Pittsburgh who reports that the first recipient of one of his balloons was a rare trumpeter swan, who choked on the balloon and died. These moments of sharp wit are interwoven with gentler, more homespun humor in a league with Jan Karon's Mitford series, exemplified in a plot revolving around the only single, attractive, well-educated woman in town and her vain attempts to find love. Sometimes Gulley indulges in hyperbole that reflects just a bit of condescension toward his smalltown characters; for example, he describes Italian night at the local cafe as "Chef Boyardee spaghetti from a can and Bea Majors on the organ." His caricatures of conservative Christians occasionally seem a bit mean-spirited as well. Still, readers who seek pleasant, witty and occasionally poignant fiction will delight in this

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• Welcome back to a place where the stories are rich and the folks are familiar. • (Lynne Hinton, author of *Friendship Cake*) • Gulley's work is comparable to Gail Godwin's fiction, Garrison Keillor's storytelling, and Christopher Guest's filmmaking. • (Publishers Weekly) • A celebration of small-town life, this novel is filled with master storyteller Philip Gulley's trademark humor and insight. • (Woman's Day)

The first two books in this series are wonderful. Although Dale and other pious members grate on you as they take advantage of and press Sam into following tradition rather than the leading of the Lord, you are hoping they will be refined as the series continues. Not so. It is a pastor's job to humbly lead and to, with grace, reprove those who are wrong. Sam does not fulfill this role as pastor. He is a weak leader who will not confront people, and depends entirely too much on Miriam Hodge to be his guts and stand up for right. Though he is annoyed with the behaviors of those in leadership, he does nothing to challenge them or help them grow. As hard as it is to hear that you are wrong, God can work even in the hardest and most stubborn of hearts, if bathed in prayer. The fact that Sam is afraid of losing his position if he rocks the boat bothers me. One should do right and let God sort out the results. Dale is given entirely too much grace, and has no concept of how to minister to others. No one likes him, he is not a truly spiritual person, and yet he is allowed to remain in a leadership position. Just too much for me. While I thoroughly enjoy the way Gulley interweaves touching and spiritual lessons amidst the silly and outrageous, they are too few and far between in this book to be redeeming. I will not be continuing this series.

This book--well, first let me clarify the "contains some sexual content." There are discussions of characters' sexual loneliness, of attempts to match make, of one gay character who appears briefly without his partner and talks at length with a single woman about otherness; there are perhaps a couple of scenes between the pastor, Sam, and his wife which obviously suggest a warm sexual sharing, none of which is portrayed. That's sexual content for this gentle, but also fierce, series. In this book, the most interesting thing to me was the frustrations of the ministry, the stresses it can put on a marriage, the preciousness of minutes of family life in such a household, the imperfections of the partners in any marriage--even a pastor's. I had a relative who was a pastor (not this denomination); I worked long years in another helping profession before returning to writing and

reviewing. The strength, energy, inventiveness, frustrations, endlessness, and the obligations and trust place upon a pastor (or any identified helper) are ongoing and complex. While usually maintaining his humor that so adds human delight to these books, Gulley gives a very good presentation of these aspects of Sam's and Barbara's lives. His secondary characters maintain their usual mix of pull-your-hair-out frustration and coming-through-some-of-the-time (and completely blowing things once in a while), and a new one is introduced; I think interesting storylines will come her way. Gulley also presents particular imperfections in Sam's behavior in this novel; he makes a couple of foolish decisions, and they lead to some preposterous conclusions. One was highly believable; one was a step too far and just not realistic. (But funny!) There is a holiday fest scene that will relieve ever reader of regrets or mortification about our own holiday fiascos; this takes ours to the tenth power. Recommend and enjoyed! Some readers may not like seeing how hard the ministry can be, and there are strong religious right characters who may annoy or offend readers who are Friends or readers who are just not religious right. But a loving, sincere, somewhat true-to-life presentation of familiar community and characters, and a pleasant book, despite the genuine difficulties that for me were very interesting. Sam as a character has evolved considerably in this fourth book of the series, as has Barbara.

Same quirky characters in the series with experiences and outcomes that might surprise you. I enjoy this series because it is so real. Seems like i know folks similar to these people and it makes for a comfortable easy read. Laughs thrown in for good measure and this is the reason i read, for enjoyment.

Philip Gulley is an author extraordinaire. I mean it. His books about pastoring a small Quaker church in a little northern town are so simple and straight forward, that at first you think...oh this is too simple...but hold on! Keep reading. His insight into life is so point on and honest. Soon you will be laughing out loud at the scenarios of the church and town's people. So many deep truths are embedded in the stories, not preachy at all, but your heart will be touched, warmed and tickled by them. It is addictive to read his books and this Signs and Wonders is just the tip of the iceberg. People....I think these books are a rare treat and I'm so glad I discovered them. They are every last one of them a solid treasure hidden behind a simple looking book. Don't miss them. Pretty soon they will be hard to find and each one is worthy of passing on to beloved friends and family. Love them...love them.

he is witty and funny, very light-hearted reading as long as you don't mind "spiritual fiction" that is very humanistic in its agenda. While enjoying the writing itself, I had to stop reading because it became frustrating at just how slanted the books are against other denominations other than quaker....especially Baptist...they seem to be the hardest hit denomination, and made to sound "nuts". So if you're a Christian looking for Christian fiction to enjoy, this is NOT the book for you.

### Reading the whole series

I'm re-reading all of the Harmony series, which I found many years ago at a library in Ohio. Google saved me - and I found them online. The mix of humor, social lessons, current events and religion (never overdone) is a perfect soothing bedtime read combo for me. I do take issue with Gulley's consistent description of the Catholics - he uses Dale Hinshaw's voice - but it's usually a swipe or a dig. Especially the "Second Class Citizens" line - about an ecumenical service and Communion. It's my only beef about books that always are heart warming, never sappy and sometimes laugh out loud funny.

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