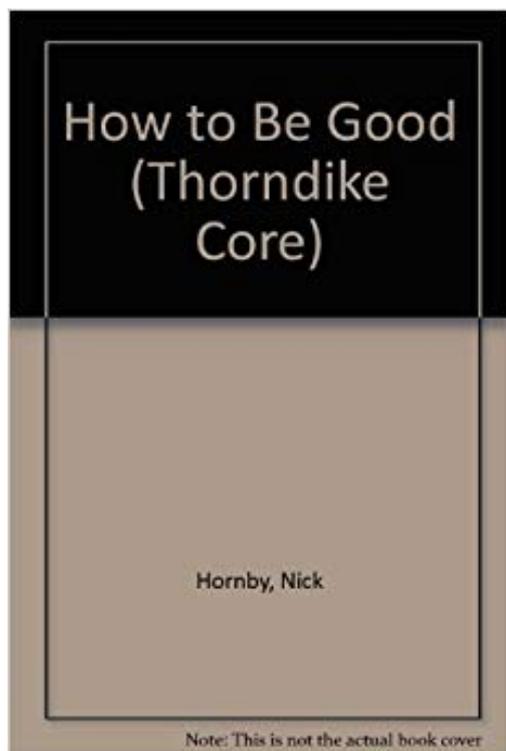


How to Be Good *by* Nick Hornby



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Katie, a liberal, urban mother and doctor from North London, finds her life turned upside-down when her husband, David, undergoes an outrageous spiritual transformation.



Reviews of the *How to Be Good* *by* Nick Hornby

Briciraz

Wavering between 2 and 3 stars. SO disappointed in this one. I had high expectations - loved the subject matter, which at first seemed to be the meaning of marriage, and then changed into what seemed to be what does it mean to be a good person, but ended up really, as neither, with horrible, unlikeable characters who largely did things no one would do and said things no one would say. Hornby is such a good writer, and I've heard so many people give me rave reviews of him, and I really believe I will find a book of his that I love. This is the second one I've read, and neither has hit the mark. But I really feel I'll find one, so I'll keep reading.

Wohald

I almost didn't buy this book because of the reviews. However, I know Nick Hornby is a good writer, so I decided to go with my instincts. I thought the book was funny and spot on with Katie's feelings and observations about marriage, life and how she really felt about other people (like admitting she

didn't like some of her patients). The characterization of the other major characters (like David GoodNews, the kids, etc.) was also done well. The ending was, indeed, a little weak but overall I really enjoyed the book.

For reference, I tend to like literary novels more so than purely plot driven, under-developed character novels. To me, *How to be Good* seems to fall in the middle of that spectrum.

Fecage

No resolution offered for the readers or characters. So if you need an "ending" this is not for you. I give the novel 3.5 stars. What I did not know was there is an extra short story at the end (of the kindle version) that I would've 4.5 stars.

Tall

How to be Good (HTBG) was my first Nick Hornby novel, a strange choice considering its mixed reviews compared to *About a Boy* and *High Fidelity*. Here's a sample of critics' promotional hyperbole on the cover-"darkly funny," "breezily hilarious," "a hoot." Other critics called it: surprising, worrisome, and thorny. It is not surprising then that this novel got mixed reviews.

So what is it? A hilarious hoot? Nah- more likely it is a rigorous spiritual analysis of contemporary western society. Dr. Kathy Carr, wife, mother, professional person, takes a lover. She has become disaffected from her stay-at-home husband, a cross between Homer Simpson and Rush Limbaugh, with none of their charm or humor. On the surface, their family seems solid enough, but there is something missing. HTBG depicts their attempts to find out just what is missing and to learn to deal with it.

I used the term "spiritual" to describe Hornby's work because, in every sense, the crises his characters face are produced by society's relative excess and individuals' relative narcissism. The combination of the two produces the loss of meaning and the inevitable depression that Viktor Frankl predicted in *Man's Search for Meaning*. Hornby tries to show some of the comic elements of the struggle, elements that anyone over forty can appreciate, albeit, at times, painfully. Enter the faith healer, GoodNews, a homeless person who received revelation and supernatural powers after dropping Ecstasy at a party. Thirty-two years old and from obscure origins, GoodNews, whose self-chosen name derives from the meaning of the word Gospel, is kind of a Christ-on-Ecstasy-figure. GoodNews sees how sadness pollutes us, making us sick. He has a supernatural ability to remove this sadness, converting the believer into a new, better person. His hope is to multiply that effect in order to create better families and communities. Not everyone buys his message of generosity and selflessness. As a consequence, with his magic comes division--within families and the larger community. This division can be internalized with in the individual (in the form of guilt), as the still imperfect individual struggles with the challenge of being good in an imperfect world. Moreover, the individual can puff up goodness and selflessness in order to punish those with whom he is annoyed, making it a form of vanity.

In this version of the gospel story, Christ/GoodNews is not God Incarnate. He is very, very human, sometimes laughably so. His assembly of believers falls short of the promises for which they hoped, just as has Christendom, which it lightly parallels. Today's church, the community of mainstream believers--in this case, the Church of England--is presented as a fossilized institution, not a particularly attractive alternative to the charismatic charm and power of GoodNews and his disciples, however flawed the latter is. The C of E's adherents, even its leaders, have very little hope of anything and attend out of a sense of duty, a hope of being validated without being challenged.

GoodNews' characters' Road to Damascus epiphany experience, falls a little short. They are not born again, nor do they become completely new people, despite the attractiveness that a clean slate offers. They still seek answers from themselves and from other humans. The answers they get are

frequently lack the voltage to get them through the lonely, sad, and empty lives they face. It's as if they are asking for data when what they need is power.

Washington

How To Be Good is the first Nick Hornby book I've read which I haven't seen the movie version of first. In the cases of High Fidelity and About a Boy, seeing the movie first didn't limit my enjoyment of the book, and in this case, even without a film adaptation, I still found the book to be quite entertaining.

The book is the story of Katie Carr, a doctor who is disillusioned with both marriage and parenthood. Her husband has a rather snide streak, but when he undergoes a personality change, she learns to long for her old husband. He has gone from selfish and self-absorbed to extremely selfless, the result of an encounter with a strange New Age healer called GoodNews.

The husband's conversion makes him even harder to live with and forces Katie and her children to reexamine their own values.

Although a generally comic novel, there are definite bits of seriousness also. Katie is a distinctly flawed character, and while you often sympathize with her ordeal, other times she is completely unsympathetic (as even she realizes). Her husband is an interesting character as he remains equally distant from his wife no matter what his approach to life is. And GoodNews is more complex than a simple charlatan, if he even is somehow a fake.

The story does drag in places as Katie seems to spin her wheels a lot, takes little action and can't even decide what to do next. Overall, however, this is a fun and insightful novel and I look forward to the next Hornby book I read.

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