LISA HARPER + CHRISTINE CAINE



CLOSER

Spiritual Practices to Deepen Your Intimacy with Jesus

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO | FOUR SESSIONS

CLOSER

Spiritual Practices to Deepen Your Intimacy with Jesus

LISA HARPER + CHRISTINE CAINE

HarperChristian Resources

Closer Bible Study
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Welcome Letter from Lisa and Christine

Hi friend,

Before we dive into this *Closer* Bible study adventure together, it behooves us to briefly explain a bit more about the Spiritual Disciplines. While we were developing this project, we had conversations with a few folks who sincerely thought these concepts were a close cousin of Eastern mysticism or the marketing brainchild of some sinister yoga conglomerate trying to recruit gullible Christians!

The roots of the Spiritual Disciplines model—sometimes generally referred to as Spiritual Formation—date all the way back to the early 1500s, when a Spanish soldier named Ignatius began studying the life of Jesus Christ, as well as the lives of early saints (like Thomas á Kempis), while he was recovering from serious battle wounds. During his prolonged recuperation, Ignatius found himself longing to be healed spiritually as well as physically, and he began experimenting with different forms of prayer and meditation in an earnest desire to become more fully devoted to God. Ultimately, Ignatius became a priest, founded the Jesuit movement, and wrote a manual called *The Spiritual Exercises* as a structured pathway to help younger priests, as well as Christian laypeople, become more disciplined and devoted in their walk of faith. These exercises, designed by Ignatius and his followers, were often practiced by ancient Christians in monthlong retreat settings so they could

become habitual and, therefore, a consistent means of grace for practitioners' spiritual growth and maturity.[1]

Unfortunately, the biblically sound practices Ignatius encouraged believers to implement into their regular routines—prayer, fasting, Scripture meditation, silence, etc.—have been elevated above the personhood of God. Instead of pointing us toward Him, they morph into a kind of spiritual to-do list or an elitist scale that segregates Christians who regularly practice these disciplines from those who don't. And that defeats the whole purpose because these exercises were always intended to be transformative not transactional . . . personal not performative. Therefore, our goal with this Bible study is to reframe these timeless spiritual praxes as joyful pathways which lead us into a more intimate and vibrant relationship with our Creator Redeemer.

Now that this particular cat is out of the bag, please know that we're super grateful you've chosen to join us for *Closer* and can't wait to experience God's presence with you!

With Joy,



[1] Richard J. Foster and Gayle D. Beebe, *Longing for God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion* (IVP, 2009), 149–50.

How to Use This Guide

GROUP SESSIONS

This *Closer* study is designed to be experienced as a group, in settings like Bible studies, small groups, or Sunday school classes. Each group session starts off with a video featuring Lisa Harper and Christine Caine. Outlines are provided for participants if group members want to take notes during the video. Then, each session moves into a time of small group discussion. Leaders can decide, based on the needs of the group or the direction of the conversation, how many questions to discuss during the group discussion time. Not all questions need to be discussed or answered. Finally, you will close each group meeting with a call to action meant to move the study contents into practice.

MATERIALS

Instructions for video viewing can be found on the inside cover of this study guide. The video is available via streaming or a DVD that is available for purchase. Each participant should have a copy of this study guide to follow along with during group sessions and to complete the personal study days in between groupsessions.

LEADER GUIDANCE AND TIMING

This study guide includes notes for the leader of the group that instruct them on which sections to read aloud and how long each section should last. Timing is flexible, and the timing notes are included as a general guide. If the group does not have sufficient time for the entirety of the group session, it can be helpful to ask group members to view the week's video ahead of time.

PERSONAL STUDY

If each group member has their own study guide, then they can work through the personal study days in between the group sessions. These personal study days are designed to provide additional scripture and everyday language before you are invited into praxis, the heart-deep experience of each discipline. After you actively engage in praxis, intentional prompts invite group members to reflect and record the deeper intimacy with Jesus that comes from and through these spiritual practices.

Your personal experience with each spiritual practice will be magnified as you share with the group your experience; however, sharing is never required. That is why we have intentionally provided space to record your thoughts as you go through this process, no matter how new or experienced you might be to this type of study. We encourage you to see sharing as valuable for everyone in your group (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Romans 14:19; Hebrews 10:24) and to trust the work of the Holy Spirit through you for the benefit of your sisters and brothers in Christ (Acts 1:8).

The intention of this study is to help your group move beyond mere knowledge of the value of transformation into actual practical, impactful, ongoing spiritual transformation. Therefore, it is not just our hope, but our strong encouragement that you follow the simple and open instructions to engage in each practice on your own at least once between your group meetings. Jesus was clear about the benefit of the Holy Spirit coming to us after He ascended into heaven; it is the Holy Spirit who facilitates our transformation into Christlikeness, the purveyor of our sanctification.

Let this be your prayer for this study: *I'm willing to try. Let Your will be done in me, Lord.*

And in Jesus' name, to the Father's glory, may the Sprit lead you and guide you closer to Him!

THRIVING GROUPS

Group study can be incredibly rewarding as members are invited to learn together in community and grow in their faith. In order to create a group space that facilitates this growth, be mindful of the kind of environment you want to create. Group members should be encouraged to commit to attending each session in order to create consistency and build trust.

Additionally, be intentional about creating safety in conversation by listening well, validating the responses of others, and encouraging each member to contribute to the discussion. Participate in the group with benevolent assumptions, meaning assume good intent in someone else's statements or actions unless given reason to believe otherwise. Work to help each person feel heard and seen and try to resist the temptation to "fix" someone's thoughts or ideas (even if they seem a little confusing or theologically off). Consider articulating a group agreement or covenant at the start of the study so that all members are on the same page and are committed to creating a space that will lead to friendship, growth, and community.

Note: If you are leading the group, there are additional resources in the back of this study guide to help you lead.



Session One

Prayer

“GOD DOES NOTHING

BUT BY PRAYER,

AND EVERYTHING WITH IT.”

—Attributed to John Wesley



Group Study

Welcome to Session One of *Closer: Spiritual Practices to Deepen Your Intimacy with Jesus*. It is our hope and sincere prayer that you will come to experience practical and true spiritual transformation without feeling overwhelmed, burdened, or inadequate in the pursuit. Mostly, we are thrilled you have chosen to join us and feel so privileged to spend this time with you.

Before you dive into the Session One video, take a few minutes to:

- introduce yourselves to one another;
- share one way you are excited to learn more about Spiritual Disciplines;
- and share which one of us you are more familiar with (not because we're competitive or anything . . . just because it's fun to know where someone is coming from). And we already know how different we are. ☺



Watch Session One Video

33 minutes

Leader, stream the video or play the DVD.

Scripture covered in this session:
Colossians 4:2–3; Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Luke 10:21–22; Hebrews 7:24–25

As you watch the video for this session, use the outline below to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

Much like Christine, we often come into prayer with preconceived notions or anxieties, thinking there are right and wrong ways to pray.

We are taught in Scripture to: PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. (1 THESSALONIANS 5:17).

Try to make your first thought a prayer:
Good morning, Holy Spirit.

Persist in prayer and joyfully celebrate having direct access to God.

Jesus prays joyfully in Luke 10 and then teaches the disciples how to pray in Luke 11.

Jesus invites us to call God "Abba" (Father) in prayer, signaling familial intimacy with God.

Much like the picture of Lisa's mother praying for her, Jesus prays for us.

Breath prayer in the Celtic tradition is also called the prayer of the sanctified imagination.

Group Discussion

30–45 minutes

Discuss some or all of the questions below together. As the leader, feel free to select the questions that will be the most meaningful to your group.

1. What was prayer like in your faith tradition growing up? Is it the same for you today? How has your faith tradition's perspective on prayer affected your personal prayer life (for good or for bad)?

Christine said, "I think one of the most misunderstood practices is the one of prayer. Of all the things that should be the simplest, most authentic, the easiest, and an overflow of who we are, it ought to be prayer. And yet, I truly think it's one of the things we complicate the most."

2. In **Luke 11:1**, the disciples say to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." Why do you think even Jesus' disciples struggled to know how to pray? In what ways has prayer been complicated for you?

Lisa said, "There is no other religion that I'm aware of that you can go to the creator God of that religion and talk to them like a heavenly Father and intimate friend, a comforter, a healer."

3. In both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, Jesus instructs His followers to address God as "Father." When you pray, do you picture God as close as a parent? Is the image of God as Father a comfort to you or is it more of a hurdle to overcome? How do you interact with this image?

4. **First Thessalonians 5:17** invites us to "pray without ceasing" (ESV). This is not a call to neglect all daily tasks except prayer, but rather, to notice God's presence in our daily lives. In what specific ways, as you look back over the past week, have you noticed, or perhaps are noticing now upon reflection, that God was with you?

5. **Hebrews 7:25** tells us Jesus "always lives to intercede for them." The "them" in this verse is all who come to Him. Imagine Jesus praying on your behalf. What emotions does that image evoke for you?

The Greek word for breath is *pneuma* (πνεῦμα).

In the New Testament, this word is also used to name the Holy Spirit: τὸ ἅγιον **πνεῦμα**.

6. Practice breath prayer together as a group. Set a timer for one minute. In your own time, breathe in the breath of God and think to yourself, *Holy Spirit*. As you exhale, say to yourself, *I give You all my anxieties and worries.* After the time is up, reflect on the experience together. What did it feel like?

Call to Action

Leader, the group will participate in prayer of the sanctified imagination to close your time together. You will need at least one small item per person. These items can be anything you find around your home or office.

The practice of the prayer of the sanctified imagination reminds us that prayer can be simple and anchored to our daily lives.

Have each group member choose an item that is in the bag or on the table in front of them. Spend one to two minutes holding the object in your hand and contemplating its simplicity and reminder of daily life.

As you consider the item, think about always being in the posture of prayer. What prayer does the item bring to mind?

Invite each person to briefly share how the object they chose inspired them to pray.





Closing Prayer

Ask a volunteer to pray this prayer over the group.

Father, thank You for inviting us to pray without ceasing. Thank You that every good gift comes from You, even and especially the ordinary, everyday moments in life. Please remind us this week of Your presence and prompt us to pray in the quiet, in the hectic, and in everything in between. As we come to You in prayer this week, relieve us of our anxieties and our hesitations to come to You fully. And help us to see You as our loving Father, ready to hear from us and be with us as we pray.

In Jesus' name, amen.



SESSION ONE

Personal Study

This section provides an opportunity to grow further in your understanding and experience of prayer.

DAY ONE

Scripture and Scholarship

One of the most beautiful truths is that the God of the universe cares deeply for our needs. He not only hears our prayers, but also promises to move on our behalf. The God of the Bible is active, responsive, and involved in the lives of His people, so we can have confidence in petitioning Him in prayer.

The word *petition* refers to any type of prayer that brings a need or request to God. Petitions are only one form of prayer, and they do not need to be formal requests. More than any other type of prayer, petition is where we put God before ourselves and ask for His will to be done rather than our own.

Prayer is talking to God throughout our day, acknowledging Him and who He is, and telling Him our needs, wants, and desires. Jesus said He came that we would have life to the full (John 10:10) and that is a life filled with God's best for us. It is in prayer that we ask Him for it.

"God loves it when His children pray big, bold prayers."
—CHRISTINE CAINE

Read James 5:13–16:

"Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

The book of James is known as a book of action. James tells us that faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26), and prayer is one of the actions we can take. In chapter five, James tells us to pray not only for our own needs, desires, and wants, but for others and their needs, desires, and wants.

James lists several circumstances that invite us to pray. **Circle those circumstances above in the passage. Then, in the space below, add a few circumstances that you think invite us to pray.**

1. Is anyone _____? Let them pray.
2. Is anyone _____? Let them pray.
3. Is anyone _____? Let them pray.

When you have a need, is your first instinct to bring them to God in prayer? If so, why? If not, why not?

When you come to God in prayer, bringing your own needs, wants, and desires to Him, does God feel distant or close? How do you picture Him responding to you in your vulnerability? In the box below, reflect on what it feels like to come to God in prayer by drawing a picture or journaling.

James calls on us to pray for one another. **Write a list of three people in your life you can pray for today:**

1

2

3

Read Matthew 9:35–38:

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

Bringing our needs to God can expand our vision beyond ourselves and our immediate community. In this passage, Jesus invites His disciples to pray that God would send out "workers into his harvest field." In other words, Jesus teaches that prayer and the active work of God's people in the world are inextricably linked.

Chris talked about feeling led to "pray for the -stans," referring to several countries whose names end with stan, i.e., countries like Afghanistan or Pakistan. But sometimes, prayer beyond ourselves and our immediate community can feel overwhelming. If you don't already have a circumstance or people group on your heart to pray for, ask the Spirit to guide you in praying for something outside your everyday world, like He did for Christine.

As you leave this day of study, take the following thoughts with you.

May you always know that prayer is a very intimate, very personal, very practical communication with God. It's not mystical. You don't need to use the right language or have the right tone. It's not self-indulgent. May you, like Jesus, get lost for a moment in adoration of the Father, of the Spirit, the Creator. May you come to know there is purpose in prayer.

DAY TWO

Praxis

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." —1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

The essence of prayer is to be with God. And today, that is exactly what we are going to do!

But first, we're going to define what and why we are calling this day "praxis."

Why Are We Calling This Day Praxis?

We call this *praxis* because the word *practice* is insufficient for what we are aiming for in this study. We are all familiar with practice. It is the common verb we use for repeated action. We are taught from our youth to practice (to repeatedly try or execute) anything we wish to become proficient at or desire to make a habit in our lives. Maybe you have heard the phrase, "Practice makes perfect." We understand repetition of any act or experience lends to a sense of proficiency; it gives us authority in whatever we practice.

Praxis, on the other hand, takes the act of practice deeper into a place of reflection that becomes understanding. Praxis doesn't just refer to a new habit or behavior; it orients us toward God in a deep and spiritual way. *Praxis changes us*.

We are transformed through praxis, and that is what we are seeking in the practice of these Spiritual Disciplines. Each week, we will spend a day focused entirely on the praxis of the discipline we are learning about.

Today we focus on the praxis of prayer.

As you read the following prompts, consider where you would like to grow through prayer. It might be to simply practice it more. Or there could be something you want to know from God. If you feel uncomfortable praying because prayer has been presented to you in a way that is performative or insincere, be willing to follow the prompts and the prompting (or invitation) of the Holy Spirit into a simple conversation with God today. Tomorrow, you will have an opportunity to reflect and record your experience, so you can look back later and see how the praxis of prayer has transformed you.

Picture in your mind physically coming before the God of the universe, speaking directly to Him, and sitting in His presence.

What emotions arise when you paint that picture of yourself in God's presence?

There is no one way to pray.

No one way to experience the presence of God.

Throughout our lives, we are invited by God to establish and maintain a connection—an ongoing conversation—with Him wherever we are.

Our prayers do not have to feel fancy. Or formal. We can simply talk to God, whenever we want, as informally as we want. As we walk through our days, no matter how crazy or busy they are, we can know that God is with us.

Remember when I (Christine) shared about waking each morning and simply praying, "Good morning, Holy Spirit!"? This is my daily praxis of inviting the Holy Spirit into my day, into my heart.

In the chart below, write five ordinary things you will do today or tomorrow—a simple list of daily activities. Some examples are provided.

Today I will . . .	I will pray . . .
Wake up.	Good morning, God!
Eat breakfast.	Thank you, Lord, for this meal.
Drop my kids off at school and go to work	Thank you, Lord, for my chlidren and work.

Prayer in the ordinary moments helps us to notice the ways God shows up in our daily lives. It attunes our hearts to God's presence and to the ways in which the Holy Spirit is moving.

DAY THREE

Reflect and Record

Welcome back! Today you will get to reflect and record your thoughts, physical responses, feelings, happenings, or simply what it was like to go through a day of conversing with God in the ordinary movements of your life.

Because transformation requires attentiveness and acknowledgment of where we begin, give yourself the gift of recording as much detail as you can about your experience. Some prompts are provided to help you.

"True, whole prayer is nothing but love."

—ST. AUGUSTINE

I prayed during:

I noticed _____in my physical body when I started talking with God during my day.

I found praying throughout my daily activities to be:

Some obstacles I needed to overcome in the practice of prayer were:

Because I was talking with God, I noticed the following about my day overall:

My hope for continuing constant prayer is:



About the Authors



LISA HARPER

Rarely are the terms "hilarious storyteller" and "theologian" used in the same sentence—much less to describe the same person—but Lisa Harper is definitely not stereotypical! She has an earned doctorate from Houston Theological Seminary, has published extensively, and teaches the Bible around the world, but she's also a frequent belly laugher. She describes her greatest accomplishment as being Missy's mom through the miracle of adoption, followed closely by learning to wake surf in her sixties.

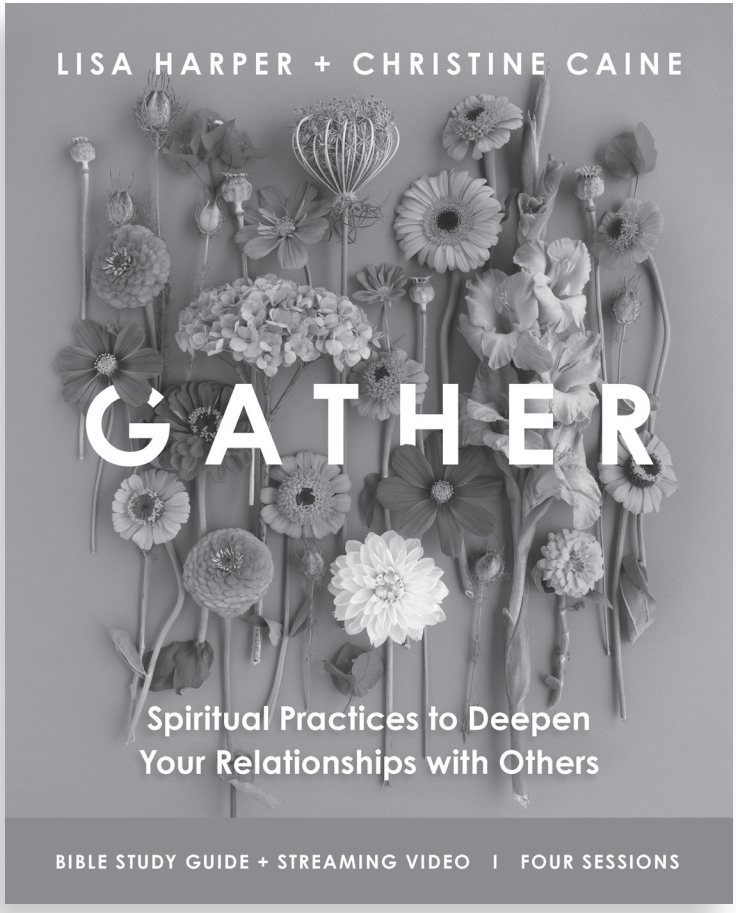


CHRISTINE CAINE

Christine Caine is a speaker, activist, and *New York Times* bestselling author who awakens people globally to discover their God-given purpose and live transformed lives for Jesus.

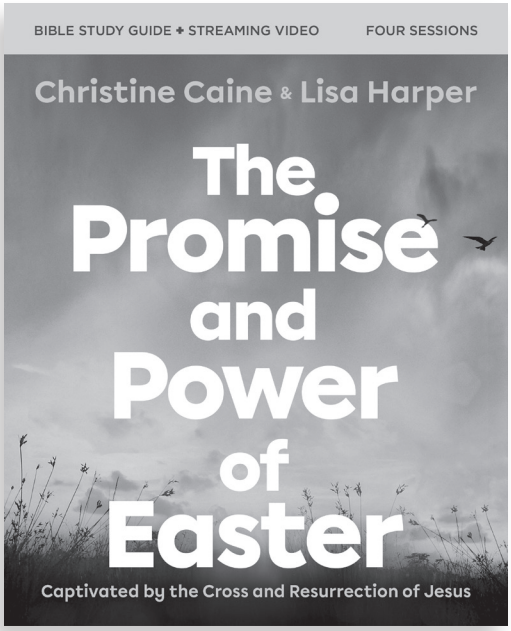
Christine and her husband, Nick, have two daughters, Catherine and Sophia. Together, they founded A21, a global anti-human-trafficking organization that prevents exploitation, recovers victims, and empowers survivors to rebuild their lives. She also founded Propel Women, an initiative that activates women to follow Jesus wholeheartedly and live confidently in their God-given purpose. You can tune into Christine's *Equip & Empower* podcast and *Life and Leadership* podcast for practical insights and encouragement, drawing hope from Jesus wherever you are. To learn more about Christine and her resources, visit www.christinecaine.com.

Also From
Lisa and Christine Together



WHAT IF LOVING OTHERS LIKE JESUS ISN'T COMPLICATED?

Bridging different faith traditions with honesty and humor, these two beloved Bible teachers help us reclaim the joy Jesus promised would be in us as we love one another like He first loved us.

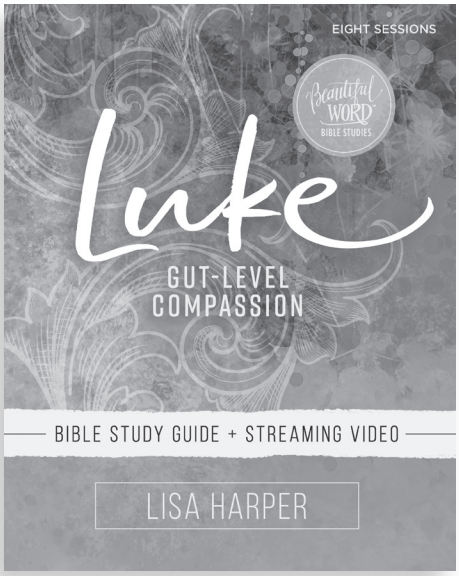


Jesus has commissioned you to come and see for yourself, and then go and tell a lost and broken world that He is alive.

Discover how Advent is not only a season of waiting and preparation, but a season of action to share the hope of Jesus with everyone.

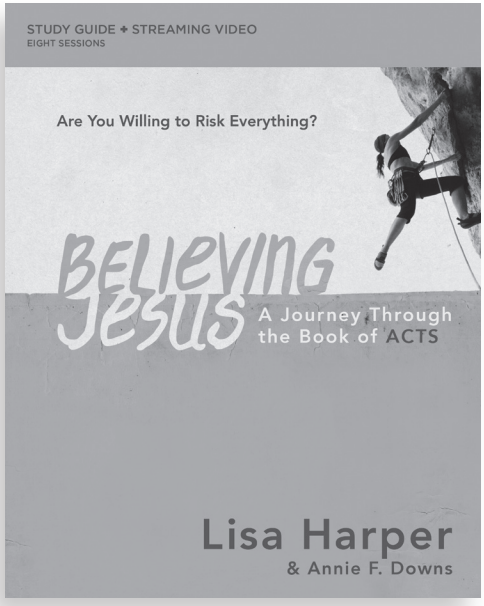


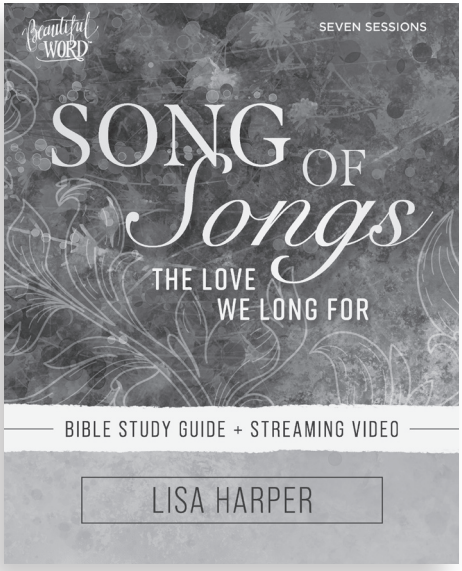
Also Available From Lisa



PERFECTION NOT REQUIRED
In this eight-session study, Lisa teaches the gospel that doesn't celebrate the elite, but embraces the outliers, outcasts, and overlooked!

RISKING EVERYTHING IS SO WORTH IT
In this eight-session study, Lisa reveals how the Holy Spirit catapults believers forward with power, grace, and authority to dramatically impact the world.



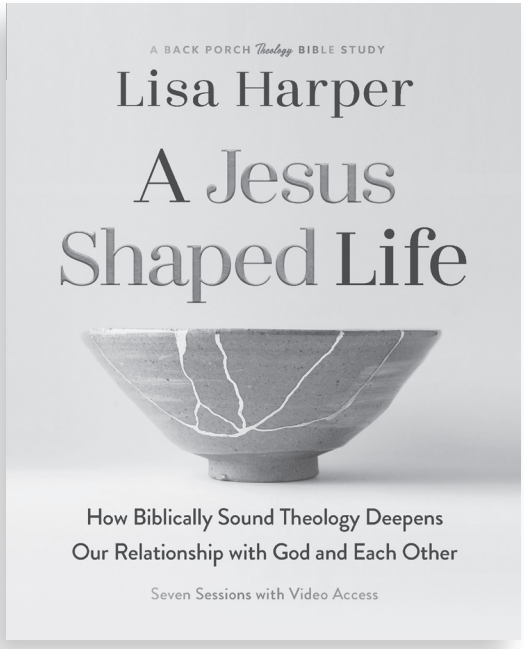


YOU ARE THE OBJECT OF GOD'S AFFECTION!

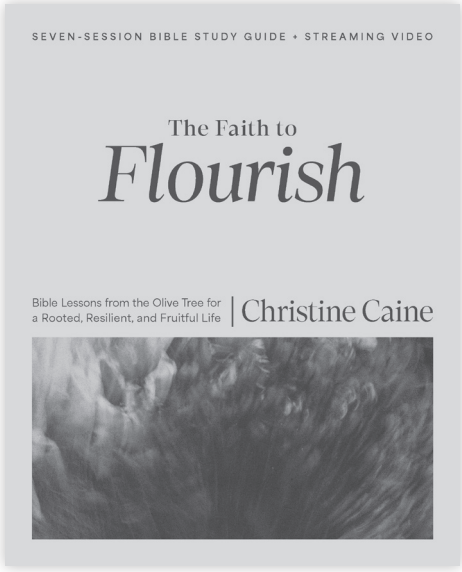
Peel back the layers of history and allegory and see Jesus as the Divine Bridegroom who delivers and delights in us!

BEYOND FACTS INTO TRUE CONNECTION WITH OUR REDEEMER

This is your invitation to explore the depths of God's character, love for you, and how your relationship with Him transforms your heart.

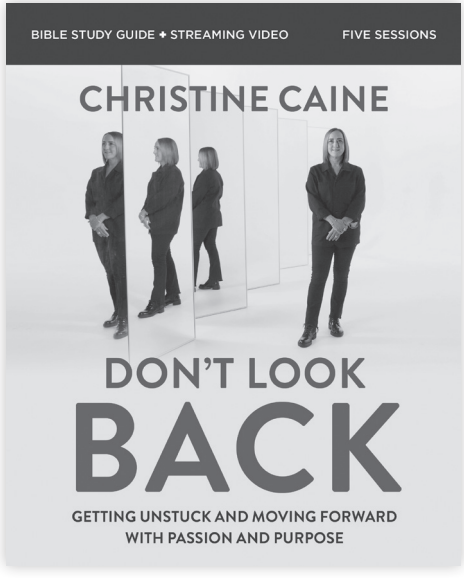


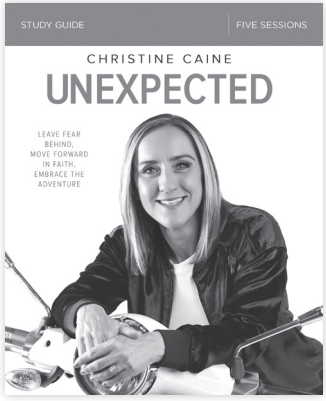
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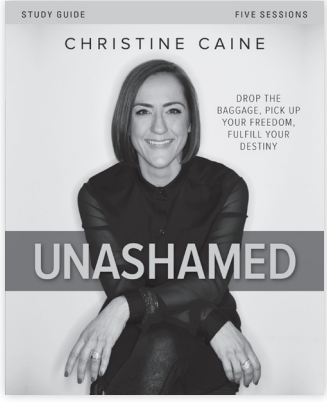
YOU WERE CREATED TO THRIVE!
Take a transformational journey to discover what it means to remains steadfast in your faith.

MOVE CONFIDENTLY INTO THE PURPOSE GOD HAS FOR YOU
With a rallying cry to "remember Lot's wife," Christine motivates us to stop looking back, to let go, and to move forward into what God promises for our lives.

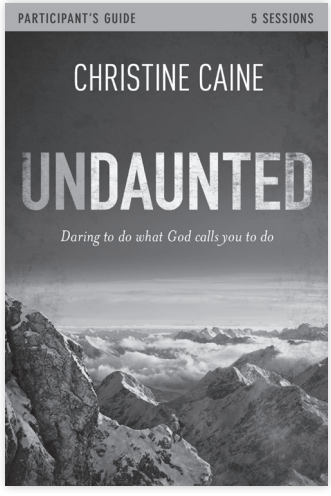




FAITH THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN IS POSSIBLE
Develop a relentless faith so that the next time life throws you a curveball, you will be able to navigate your way through, still living the adventure God planned for you!



TODAY IS THE DAY
TO FULFILL YOUR DESTINY
Christine teaches you a way out of shame by helping you rediscover the power of God to overcome our mistakes, our inadequacies, our pasts, and our limitations.



DARE TO DO
WHAT GOD CALLS YOU TO
Learn from Christine life-transforming insights about how to overcome the challenges and often painful circumstances we all experience, and to use those experiences to be a catalyst for change—in ourselves and those around us.

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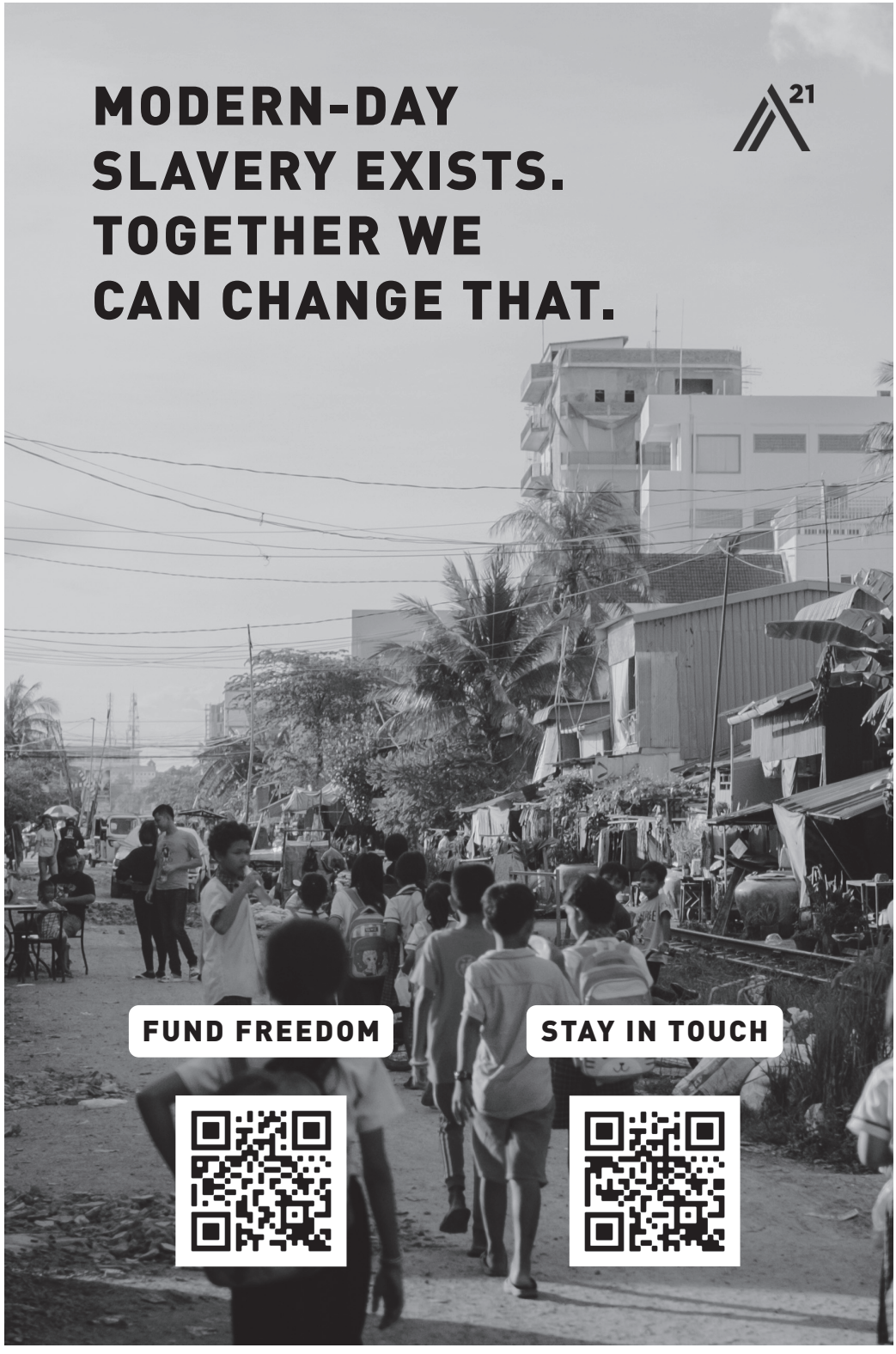
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