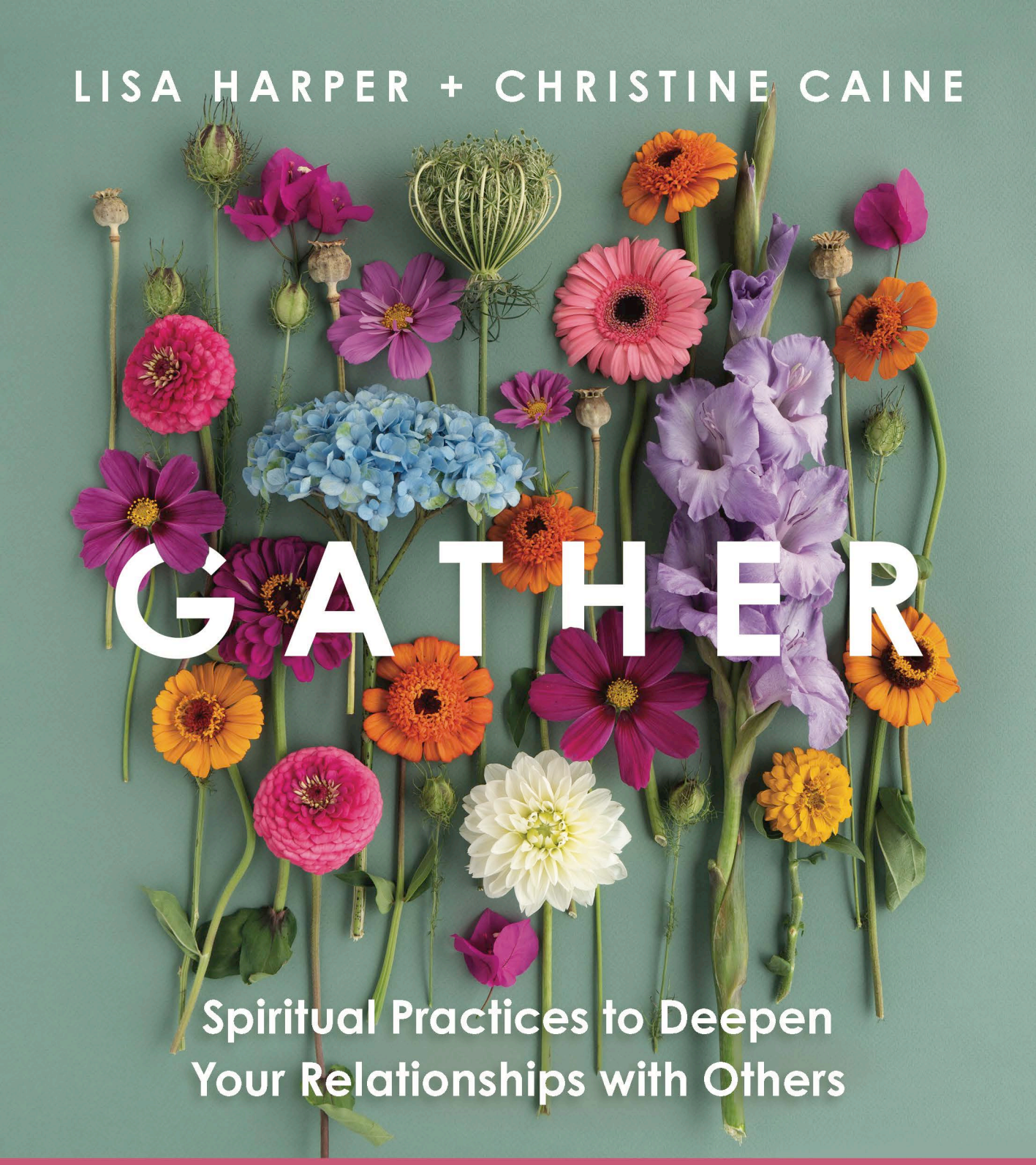
LISA HARPER + CHRISTINE CAINE



GATHER

Spiritual Practices to Deepen Your Relationships with Others

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO | FOUR SESSIONS

GATHER

Spiritual Practices to Deepen Your Relationships with Others

LISA HARPER + CHRISTINE CAINE

HarperChristian Resources

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Welcome Letter from Lisa and Christine

Hi friend,

Before we dive into this *Gather* Bible study adventure together, it behooves us to briefly explain a bit more about the Spiritual Disciplines that we're about to study. 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 1500s, when a Spanish soldier named Ignatius began studying the life of Jesus Christ, as well as the lives of early saints (like Thomas à 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.[1]

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

As time passed, more Christian leaders—like St. Teresa of Ávila, Thomas Merton, Dallas Willard, and Richard Foster—came up with additional, biblically sound "spokes"—like table fellowship and celebration—to balance out the spiritual formation wheel Ignatius created. Which is where we find ourselves with *Gather*. Unlike *Closer*, which is part one of this Bible study on Spiritual Formation and focuses on personal intimacy with Jesus Christ, the disciplines we explore in *Gather* focus on Christian community. And while these particular practices may appear more "fun," we still need to be intentional about not elevating them above the personhood of the God they're supposed to be pointing us toward. Our goal with this second part is still to reframe timeless spiritual praxes as joyful pathways which lead us into more intimate and vibrant relationships with our Creator Redeemer and the people we do life with.

So please lean in, listen to Holy Spirit as well as the other image bearers who are taking this journey with you, laugh along with us. We're super grateful you've chosen to join our motley crew!

With Joy,



How to Use This Guide

GROUP SESSIONS

This *Gather* 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 group sessions.

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 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 scholarship 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 Spirit lead you and guide you closer to Him!



THRIVING GROUPS

Group study can be incredibly rewarding as group members are invited to learn together in community and grow in their faith. In order to create an environment that facilitates this kind of growth, encourage your group members to commit to attending each session to 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 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

Corporate Worship



“CORPORATE WORSHIP IS

A REHEARSAL FOR ETERNITY.”

—A. W. Tozer





Group Study

Welcome to Session One of *Gather: Spiritual Practices to Deepen Your Relationships with Others*. 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 moment to read this passage aloud together in an opening exercise of corporate worship of God.

With what shall we come before you, O Lord? Or bow ourselves in your presence, O you Most High God? Cause us to come unto you in faith: mentioning no other name, pleading no other righteousness, and trusting in no other atonement than the name, righteousness, and atonement of your blessed Son and our adorable Mediator Jesus Christ. In him, we desire to be found; through him, we hope for favor with you, and acceptance in your sight. Blessed be your goodness for the mercies of the day, for the blessings of your providence, the comforts of your Spirit, and the privileges we enjoy. Amen.

—Augustus Toplady



Watch Session One Video

30 minutes

Leader, stream the video or play the DVD.

Scripture covered in this session:
Hebrews 10:25; Psalm 47:1, 6; 95:6; Acts 2; Leviticus 7:11–15

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

We all have reasons not to attend church, but we are called to gather together.

Hebrews 10:25 is a weighty instruction, considering the risk to Jewish Christians who were gathering in that time and place.

"Hurt happens in community. Healing also happens in community."
—CHRISTINE CAINE

We are commanded all throughout Scripture to SING!

Personal preference does not mean that God is more present in one space than another.

Our posture before God—lifted hands, dancing, etc.—shows us that our embodied experience of worshipping together matters.

Ninety-eight percent of the imperatives in the New Testament are communal.

Acts 2 shows us what it looks like to experience communal worship and faith.

Leviticus 7:11 describes a thanksgiving offering to God, which included a command to feast.

Our triune God is inherently communal.

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. Describe your definition of communal worship, either from experience or perhaps as an ideal. What makes it especially meaningful? Why?

2. Read **Hebrews 10:23–25** together. In this passage, the writer reminds these Jewish Christians to hold on to the hope of the gospel and to encourage one another in that hope. Why do you think gathering together is such an important part of encouraging one another in Christ? How does encouragement in the gospel relate to corporate worship?

"The only hermeneutic of the Gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."

—LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

3. The recipients of the message of the book of Hebrews could have been persecuted or even killed for their faith in Christ. So the weight of this command to gather together is significant. Consider what risks you currently take or would be willing to take in order to gather with other believers. Is worshipping God risky for you at all? If not, what might change in the way you worship if you knew your life was on the line?

4. In His final prayer in John 17, Jesus describes the relationship amongst believers like His relationship with the Father. **Read John 17:20-23.** Discuss ways you have can approach unity, rather than focusing on disagreements or conflict, in your corporate worship experience today.

5. While corporate worship typically involves prayer, music, singing, Scripture reading, teaching, and adoration of God, it can be expressed using many different styles and traditions. For example, some churches sing using hymn books, while others look to a video screen. Some churches use organs and pianos for music, while others have an ensemble that resembles a band. Some churches express traditional procession through their service, while others move through services more subtly with a greeting, prayer, music and message as the main procession. Describe the kind of worship service you are most familiar with. Feel free to use words like *loud*, *quiet*, *contemplative*, *liturgical*, *lively*, or *contemporary*.

6. Take a minute to picture the opposite of the kind of worship that you prefer. Discuss the differences and similarities. In what ways can you appreciate other worship styles all expressing adoration to the same God?

7. Read **Revelation 5:11–13 and 7:9–10**. In what ways are our corporate worship experiences today leaning into the worship we hope for?

Call to Action

Leader, read the activity instructions below to the group.

Today we are going to experience three movements or elements in corporate worship that have been used for centuries. This is intended to be a simple exercise in realizing the value in worshipping together through historic traditions. We will need three volunteers.

1. **CALL TO WORSHIP: The first volunteer reads Psalm 100:1–4 to the group.** Invite group members to stand and surrender their thoughts to worship as they listen to the words of this passage.

2. **PRAYER OF ADORATION: Read this centuries-old adoration aloud as a group.**
   O God, you are life, wisdom, truth, bounty, and blessedness, the eternal, the only true good; our God and our Lord, you are our hope and our heart's joy—we acknowledge with thanksgiving that you have made us in your image, and that we may direct our thoughts to you. Lord, make us know you aright, that we may love, enjoy, and possess you more and more; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
   —Anselm of Canterbury

3. **DOXOLOGY: Sing the doxology together to conclude your worship time.** Even if group members are unfamiliar with the tune, encourage everyone to do their best to sing along. This is a long-standing church practice dating to the early fourth century.

   Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
   Praise Him, all creatures here below;
   Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
   Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
   Amen.

Closing Prayer

Ask a volunteer to pray this prayer, which was written by one of the most prominent Early Church Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, over the group. He wrote this prayer specifically for the congregation to transition from gathering together corporately to going out into the world.

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests:

Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.

—John Chrysostom

SESSION ONE

Personal Study

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

DAY ONE

Scripture and Scholarship

In Scripture, we see stories of God's people following His command to gather together. Throughout time, across the world, and within diverse cultures, Christians have come together in worship. In each gathering, their worship may look different, but it is beautiful that they are all worshipping God together!

Picture a communal worship service that's familiar to you. What is a common practice in that service that feels particularly meaningful to you? What is one practice that helps you feel connected to God (e.g., singing, listening to a sermon, tithing, passing the sign of peace, taking Communion).

There is something beautiful about knowing that when we engage in worship practices in community, we are fulfilling God's command to gather. And that when we do so, we join together with Christians across time and space who are also committed to gathering. The invitation to gather reflects God's hospitality. God graciously invites us into His presence to worship Him and to be an encouragement to one another. The invitation is a gift from God!

There are certain things in life that are hard to do alone. A child's biggest question in grade school is usually "Who will be my friend?" In college, we create study groups to share notes, commiserate over upcoming tests, and encourage each other to stay focused on our studies. We socialize with our colleagues

and befriend them, all in hopes of strengthening our working relationships and reaching our common goals. We join exercise classes for their accountability and the energy and inspiration of working toward a fitness goal with others. Young mothers join moms' groups for friendship and to have support from women who are on the same journey. And, most importantly, we join together with other believers in worship. The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone!

Think of a time when you were encouraged by Christian community; it may even be the group going through this study with you. Journal below about how your faith was bolstered by this corporate worship.

"I am so much better because of the gift
of getting to be with you all and run toward Jesus together."

—LISA HARPER

Read Leviticus 7:11–15:

"'"These are the regulations for the fellowship offering anyone may present to the LORD: If they offer it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering they are to offer thick loaves made without yeast and with olive oil mixed in, thin loaves made without yeast and brushed with oil, and thick loaves of the finest flour well-kneaded and with oil mixed in. Along with their fellowship offering of thanksgiving they are to present an offering with thick loaves of bread made with yeast. They are to bring one of each kind as an offering, a contribution to the LORD; it belongs to the priest who splashes the blood of the fellowship offering against the altar. The meat of their fellowship offering of thanksgiving must be eaten on the day it is offered; they must leave none of it till morning."'"

These verses of Levitical law give instructions for a type of offering called a fellowship offering. The people of God were to bring meat and bread to the altar in order to demonstrate their gratitude to Him. In the Old Testament God established a holy meal for His people, an experience of communal worship where God was the divine host.

Because God established the fellowship offering as a way to gather people in worship, the rules of the sacrificial offering included eating all of the sacrificed meat and bread before morning the next day (verse 15). You can imagine a single person or a single family could not eat an entire bull in one day without help! This meant they would invite their neighbors, friends, and community to participate in their act of worship. God's people experienced His presence as a community, worshipped as a community, and enjoyed the meat from a community member's fellowship of thanksgiving offering together.

Because this passage in Leviticus is a worship instruction from God, we can read it as His invitation to us into corporate (or communal) worship as well. **Fill in the blanks below to respond to this invitation:**

Because God invites me into corporate worship, I will _____.

Because God invites me into corporate worship, I feel _____.

Because God invites me into corporate worship, I am encouraged to

_____.

The worship rituals throughout the Old Testament looks different from our modern-day version of Christian worship. However, gathering in worship of God, with or without animal sacrifices is still corporate worship. **Think of one worship style or experience different from your own and one thing you can learn from it.**

A worship style different from my own:

What I can learn from that style:

Read Acts 2:42–47:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, and crowds of people began to see God's power in Jerusalem. They listened to preaching, were baptized, and then experienced true fellowship and prayer together. This passage describes what their Christian community looked like as they worshipped God together and shared life with one another. Those who began to follow Jesus experienced the beauty and joy of corporate worship daily!

When I reflect on my commitment to corporate worship, I would describe myself as:



Look back at Acts 2:42–47, and circle every worship and community practice you can find. What are the practices that stand out to you? How do you experience some of these practices in your own modern-day context?

Notice in this passage that communal worship was not just about showing up to a space and worshipping near others. Instead, it emphasized shared life. **What is one way you can commit to sharing your life with other Christians in your community?**

Read Colossians 3:15–17:

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Consider the communal gratitude described in the passage you just read. Paul encouraged the Colossians to sing with gratitude in corporate worship, together.

He reminded the Colossians that they were “members of one body" (verse 15). In Scripture, language like this usually refers to the global church. In other words, all people in all places and in all times are part of one universal body, the body of Christ. In response to participating in the communal reality of the body of Christ, Paul instructed the Colossians to do many things in worship.

Fill in the chart below, noticing the ways in which Paul encouraged gratitude and worship in response to being part of the body of Christ.

Paul said . . .	This matters because . . .	For us today, this might look like . . .
wisdom through psalms	praise and truth go hand in hand	singing a psalm together

Why do you think Paul instructed the Colossians to sing with gratitude, together, to God?

When you picture the church as described in this passage, what do you envision? Do you feel encouraged by this vision? What is one step you or your community can take to move toward it?

Write a prayer asking God to reveal to you where you can participate more fully in your own Christian community and in corporate worship. Commit to doing whatever the Holy Spirit puts on your heart, and ask God to remind you to do it in gratitude to Him.

DAY TWO

Praxis

Coming together and singing songs of worship is a powerful way to experience gathering in Christian community. So today we are going to do just that!

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.

This week, we focus on the praxis of corporate worship.

Since we can't prescribe or orchestrate a worship experience for you, we invite you to attend a church service for this activity. If you currently do not have a church you are attending regularly, we encourage you to find a local gathering or service where you can worship.

"Worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts, reforms our desires, and rehabituates our loves."

—JAMES K. A. SMITH

Before you engage in this praxis of corporate worship, consider some core elements of worship that are recognized across denominations and streams of faith. While not always practiced in the same manner or in the same cadence, these are the basic movements of a church gathering (and there are more that could be added):

Scripture Reading / Ministering of the Word

Communal Prayer and Singing

The Sacraments
(baptism and/or the Lord's Supper / Communion)

Fellowship and Generosity
(welcoming one another and offering gifts to the church)

Prepare for your praxis of corporate worship using these three points below, and then go.

1. Notice that every movement of the gathering is part of the worship service. Worship is so much more than the songs sung at the beginning or end of a service. Every part of the gathering is considered corporate worship.
2. Take mental notes of when things happen and how the order of events impacts your experience.
3. Invite the Holy Spirit into your worship. Ask Him to show you how your personal preferences need to be interrupted by God.

When you return home, complete the Reflect and Record section of your personal study on the following pages.



DAY THREE

Reflect and Record

Welcome back from worship! Here is your invitation to reflect and record your thoughts, physical responses, feelings, things that happened, or simply what it was like to fully engage in corporate worship this week.

I experienced corporate worship this week while attending (circle one):

a church service **a small group gathering** **a prayer and worship event**

Do your best to outline the service in your own words. Don't be worried if you noticed more or less movements in the service you attended, just outline what you observed. (i.e. welcoming people at the door, music playing before the service, a choir or entrance of service leaders, prayer before singing etc.)

-
-
-
-
-
-

If any part of the worship experience stood out to you in a new way, explain it in the space below.

I felt closest to God during the _____ portion of the worship service. I felt this way because . . .

I felt distracted by or curious about this element of worship: _____ _____ . I felt this way because . . .

When singing together in community, I felt these emotions:

I stepped out of my comfort zone and practiced _____ , a new posture of worship for me.

I noticed my preferences challenged or affirmed in this way:

The praxis of corporate worship was . . .

My hope for future communal worship experiences is . . .

Write a prayer for your community. Ask God to show you the importance and power of corporate worship the next time you gather together.



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.

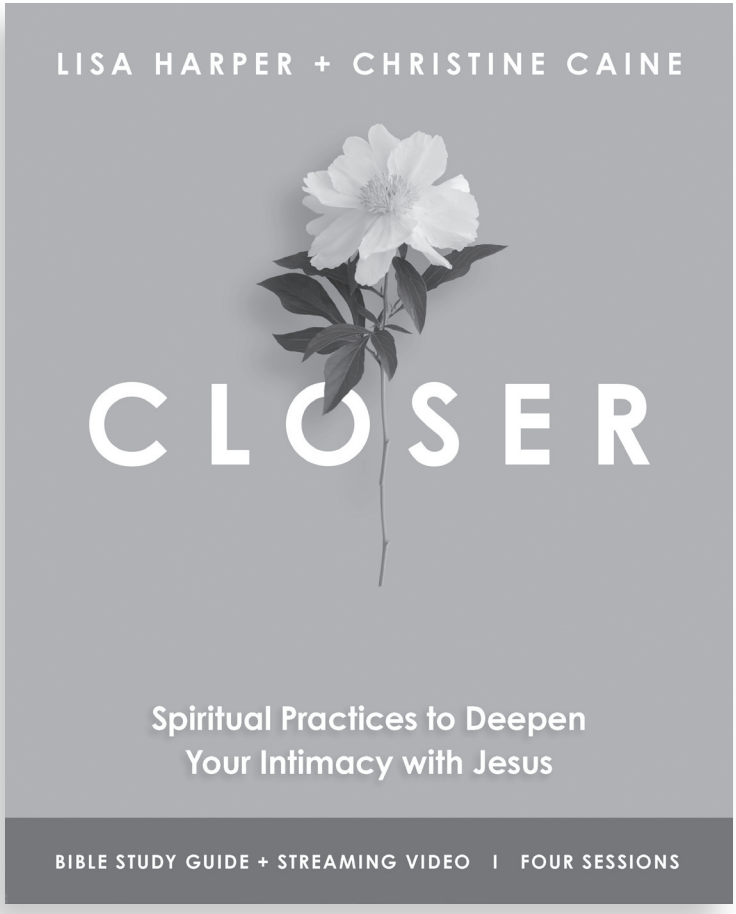


CHRISTINE CAINE

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.

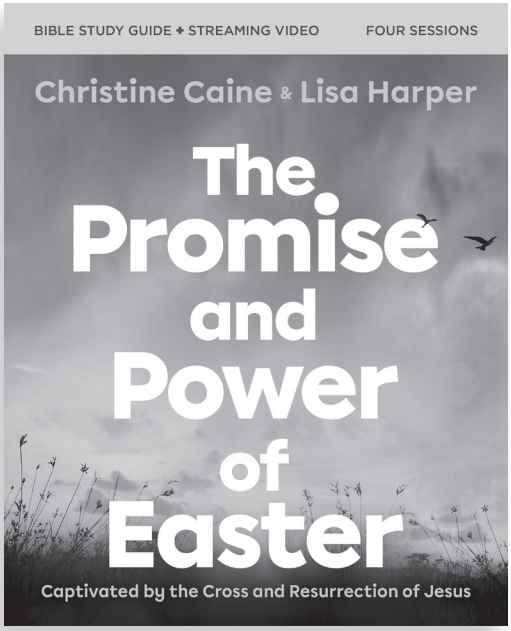
Christine and her husband, Nick, have two daughters, Catherine and Sophia. Together, they founded A21, a global anti-human-trafficking organization that prevents exploitation, recovers victims, and empowers survivors to rebuild their lives. She also founded Propel Women, an initiative that activates 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 DRAWING NEAR TO GOD
HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH GETTING IT RIGHT?

Bridging different faith traditions with honesty and humor, these two beloved Bible teachers deliver one liberating truth: "Jesus is the prize. Intimacy with Jesus is the point."

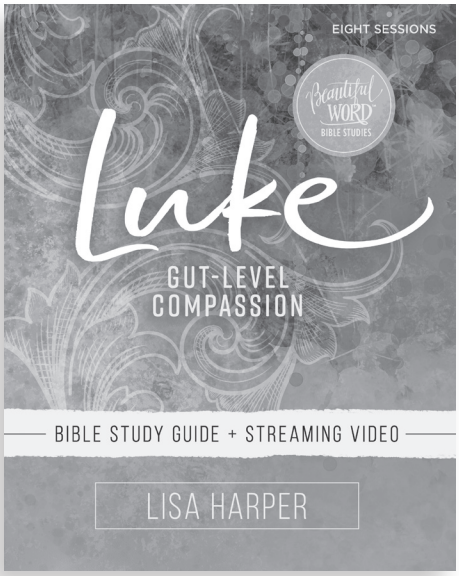


Jesus has commissioned you to come and see for yourself, and then go and tell a lost and broken world that He is alive.

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.

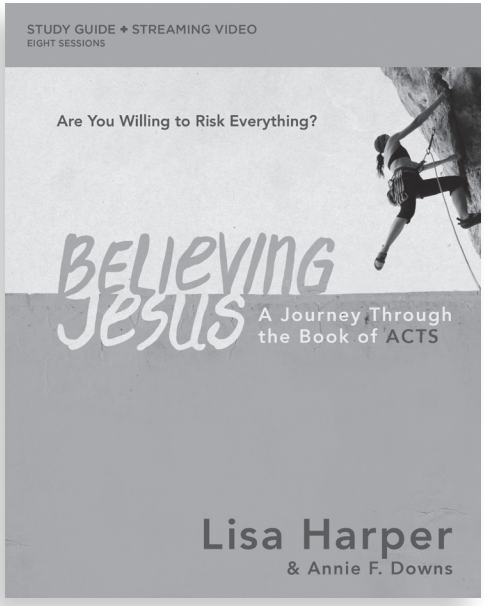


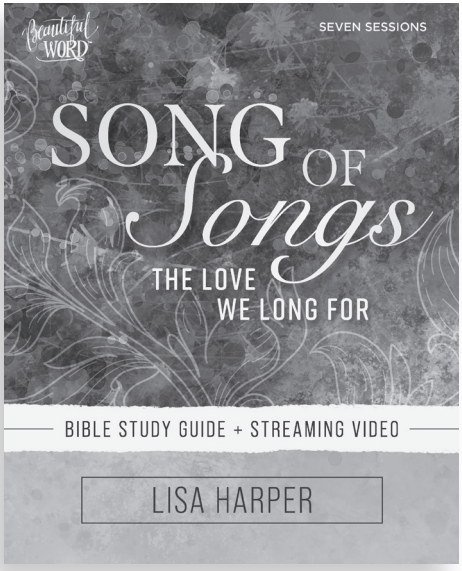
Also Available From Lisa



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.



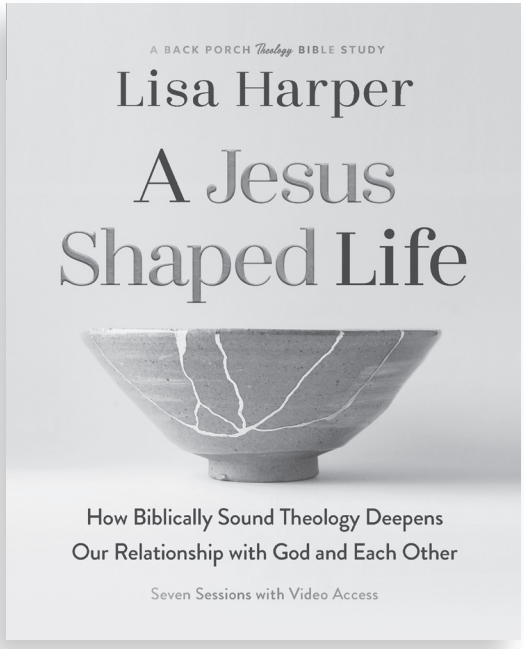


YOU ARE THE OBJECT OF GOD'S AFFECTION!

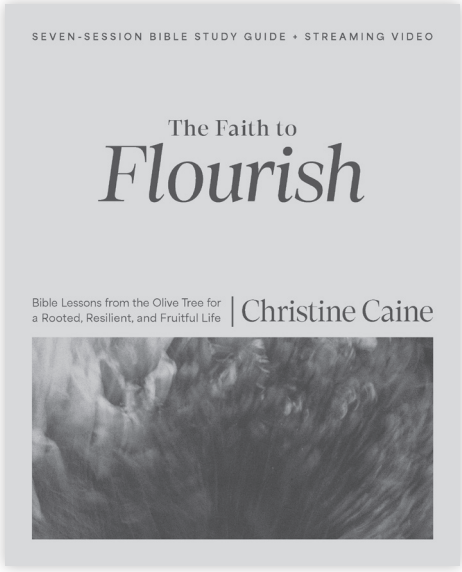
Peel back the layers of history and allegory and see Jesus as the Divine Bridegroom who delivers and delights in us!

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.

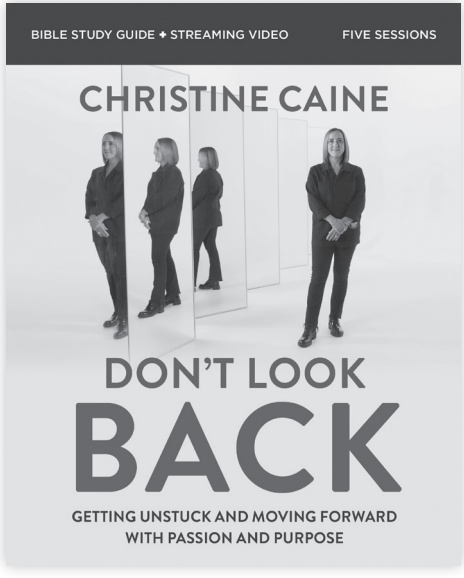


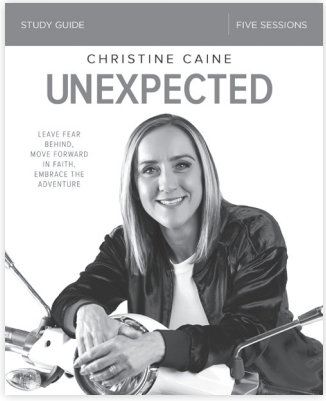
Also Available From Christine



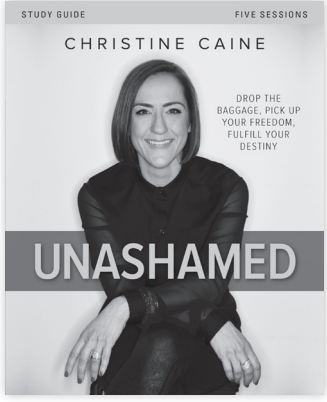
YOU WERE CREATED TO THRIVE!
Take a transformational journey to discover what it means to remains steadfast in your faith.

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.

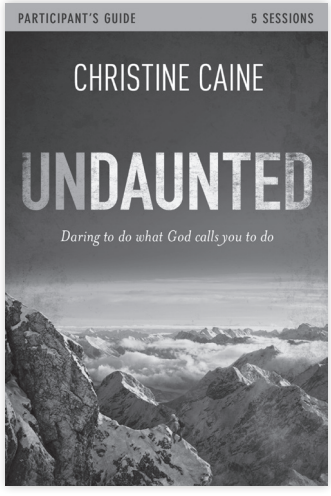




FAITH THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN IS POSSIBLE
Develop a relentless faith so that the next time life throws you a curveball, you will be able to navigate your way through, still living the adventure God planned for you!



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.

Have You Heard Lisa Harper's Podcast?



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Join Christine Caine on the Equip and Empower Podcast

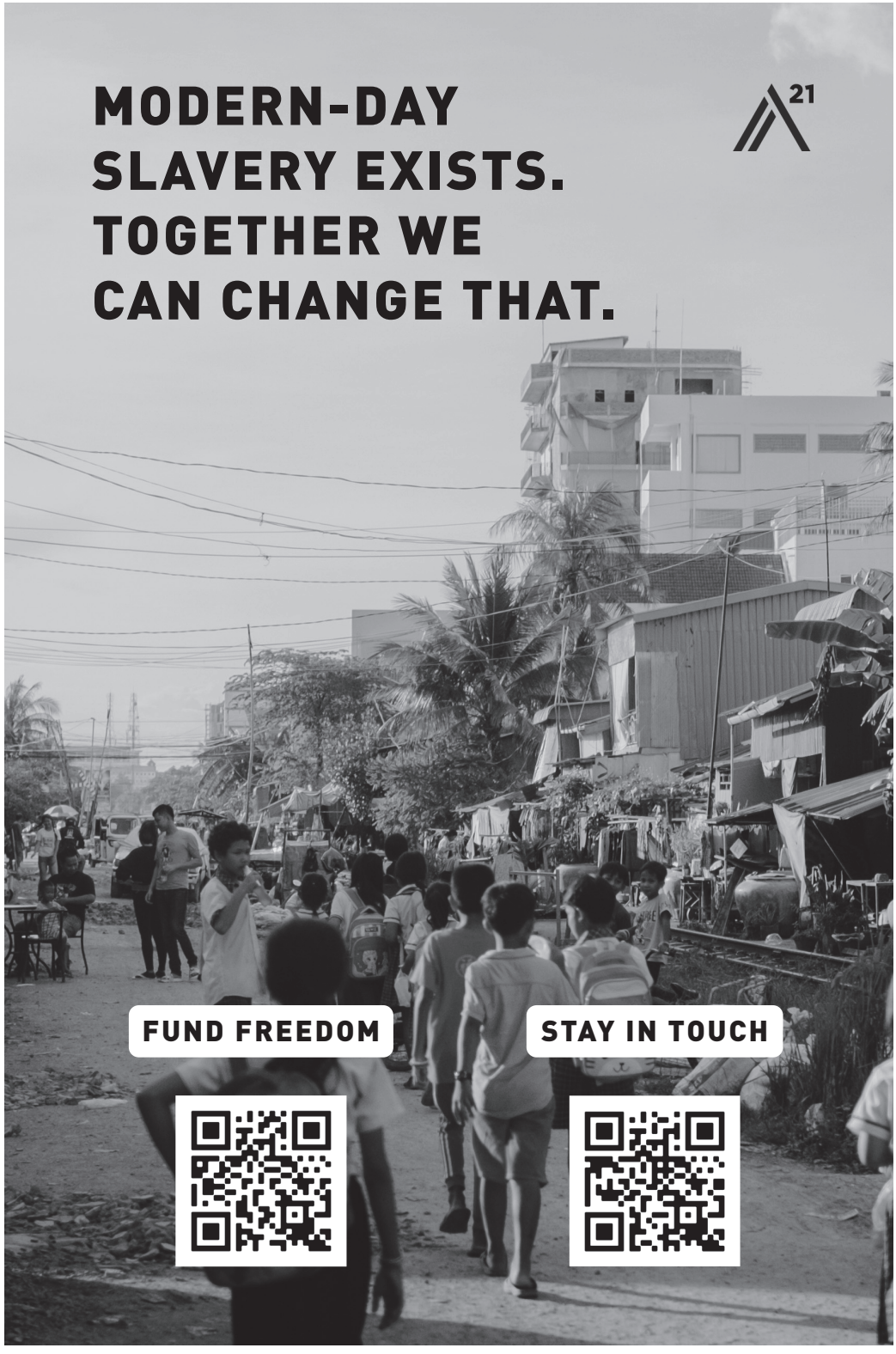
NEW EPISODES WEEKLY



Christine Caine is here to activate you to live on mission for Jesus. Through the teachings of God's Word and the strength of the Holy Spirit, you will be awakened to the distinct purpose God has for your life.

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MODERN-DAY
SLAVERY EXISTS.
TOGETHER WE
CAN CHANGE THAT.
21
FUND FREEDOM
STAY IN TOUCH