

Christine Caine & Lisa Harper

The Marvel and Miracle of Advent

Recapturing the Wonder of Jesus Living With Us

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Resources

The Marvel and Miracle of Advent Bible Study Guide
© 2024 by Christine Caine and Lisa Harper

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Welcome

From Christine and Lisa

For more than a thousand years, a special time has been set apart in the church calendar that invites us to pause, to prepare, and to anticipate the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. This season of Advent gives us the time and opportunity to prayerfully reflect on the wonder of Christ's glorious entrance into this world.

I (Chris) was raised in Australia and grew up in the Greek Orthodox Church. For us, December was the kickoff of summer. I heard stories and watched movies of people enjoying white, snowy Christmases; meanwhile, we were enjoying the white sands of the beach. My mom celebrated Advent by preparing different foods, and I'd anxiously count down the days to Christmas with an Advent calendar loaded with chocolate.

Because I (Lisa) spent my childhood in central Florida, I was used to warm winters. However, after relocating to Tennessee, I quickly fell in love with a snowy holiday season accompanied by crackling fires and hot cocoa the way Nat King Cole used to croon about. But while Australia and Florida's weather is relatively similar, Chris and I had very different pre-Christmas experiences, because my sweet, Jesus-loving mom didn't associate Advent with being Protestant. Therefore, it took me a long time to understand that Advent is for everybody, y'all!

Yet what we've both discovered is that, more than just a countdown to Jesus' birthday, this is a season to reflect on Jesus' miraculous birth and the anticipation of His return.

And it's a call to attentiveness, an opportunity to prepare the way for the Lord, that begins in our own hearts. It's a time when the air is thick with the expectation of the dawn of a new day—and we all need that!

As we embark on this journey of Advent together, may you find your hope renewed through the promise of Emmanuel, "God with us." And may you rediscover the love of Christ being born anew in your heart.

Chris Lisa

How to Use This Guide

OVERVIEW

The Marvel and Miracle of Advent Bible study is divided into four sessions. Every session includes Video Notes, Group Discussion, Call to Action, Closing Prayer, and between sessions Personal Study. As a group, you will watch the video and then use the video notes and discussion questions to engage in active conversation. The goal is to develop genuine relationships and to become fully equipped to share the good news of God's love and why His condescension from heaven to be with us matters so very much—not just to cover all the material.

GROUP SIZE

This four-session video Bible study is designed to be experienced in a group setting, such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, retreat, small-group, or online gathering. If your gathering is large, you may want to consider splitting everyone into smaller groups of five to eight people after viewing the teaching for more intimate discussion. This will ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the discussions.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Everyone in your group will need a copy of this study guide, which includes personal streaming video access, notes for the video teachings, discussion questions, and personal Bible studies in between group meetings. A leader's best practices and guide is found at the back of each study guide.

FACILITATION

Depending on how your group is formatted, you may need to appoint a person to serve as a facilitator. This person will be responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions. Facilitators should be prepared to read the discussion questions aloud and to monitor discussions, encouraging everyone in the group to engage and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate.

PERSONAL STUDIES

Between group meetings, maximize the impact of this study on Advent by working through the personal Bible study section. Treat each personal Bible study like committed time with the Lord and your Bible in whatever way works best for your schedule. Allowing time across multiple days provides the greatest opportunity for marinating in God's Word as well as letting the teaching take root. These personal studies are not intended to be burdensome or time-consuming but to help you apply the learned lessons to your everyday, personal life for growth and connection.

SCRIPTURE CUTOUT ARTWORK

We have selected four specific verses from the Bible that carry the Advent narrative as we can experience it today. Each verse page is designed to be cut out and will fit in a standard 8x10 matte frame. Our hope is that you will be reminded of the marvel and miracle of Advent, the wonder of Jesus living with us, all throughout the year.

*We have a Savior who is with us.
He is not a faraway God.*

LISA HARPER

SESSION 1
Group Study

**The
Longing
in the
Silence**

Video

Leader, stream the video or play the DVD.

As you watch, take notes on anything that stands out to you.

SCRIPTURE: Malachi 1:1–2, 2:17, 3:1

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Malachi

Four hundred years of silence

Rhetorical disputation

The stockings

Under the bed

VOCABULARY	DEFINITION
ADVENT	word with Latin roots, meaning “coming”
PASSOVER	most important Hebrew feast, commemorating their deliverance from Egyptian bondage
PENTECOST	also called the Feast of Weeks, derived from the Greek word meaning “fifty”; occurs fifty days after Passover, and celebrates the end of the grain harvest
FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES	combined the ingathering of the labor of the field (Exodus 23:16), the fruit of the earth (Leviticus 23:39), the ingathering of the threshing floor and winepress (Deuteronomy 16:13), and the dwelling in booths (or tabernacles), which were to be joyful reminders to Israel
RHETORICAL DISPUTATION	dialogue between two parties without specific resolution; dialogue between the Lord and the people of Israel
INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD	the period between the end of the Old Testament (Malachi) and the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist; also known as four hundred years of silence; Jews believe prophecy ceased during this period

Group Discussion

1. Think about your personal experience with Advent. Perhaps you are hearing the definition for the first time today, or, like Chris, your family had clear and specific Advent traditions.

- Did you celebrate it as a child?
- Do you celebrate it today?
- What is your understanding of the season?

2. Ask a volunteer to read Malachi 1:1–2 and 2:17 aloud, and then discuss the following.

- In light of the journey God's people have been on, why do you think the Israelites doubt and question God's love?
- What situations or events cause you to doubt and question God's love?
- Where do you most need to experience God's love during this Advent season?

3. After the book of Malachi and the renewed promise of a Savior, God remained silent for four hundred years.

- What do you think that silence was like for the Israelites?
- Where do you feel you're experiencing silence from God in your life?
- What is the most challenging aspect of this for you?
- How have you seen God working in the silence?
- How does recognizing and contemplating periods of God's silence deepen your appreciation of waiting for the coming of Christ we celebrate during Advent?

- Where do you feel like you've been waiting, for what seems like forever, for God to answer a desire?
- In what ways might you trust God with that desire this Advent season?

4. Lisa tells the story of decorating for Christmas and hanging precious stockings for Missy's arrival only to be told that she would probably never be able to bring Missy home.



"I took down every single light, every single ornament, and I packed them all up in cardboard boxes. I shoved them under my stairs and thought, I'll never celebrate Christmas again. This was just too hard."

- What are some reasons we might hold back from hope or from asking God for something we long for?
- 5. The intertestamental period is calculated to be fourteen generations, according to Daniel 9:24–27. Consider what you know about the lives of your ancestors.**
- Do you know what your grandparents hoped for just two generations from you? What they prayed and trusted God for?
 - How difficult do you think it is to carry on a shared hope for the exact same thing for fourteen generations? What might happen to the understanding of what is being hoped for?
 - How do you think the Israelites handled the hope for the promise God made that a Savior was coming who would make all things right through fourteen generations of people? What were their tactics for maintaining collective hope?

- In light of today's teaching, how are you currently thinking of ways to share your hope in Jesus with other generations?

Holding on to hope in our Savior is as equally important as sharing our hope with others.

6. Though God's people are frustrated, disappointed, and angry that life hasn't turned out like they expected, God promises a Savior. He tells them Christ is coming, right around the corner. Select a volunteer to read Malachi 3:1 and discuss the following.

- What words or phrases are most meaningful to you from this passage?
- Why does it matter to God's people, and us today, that He is coming?
- What prevents you from believing that Jesus can come into your greatest disappointment, fear, doubt, or wonder?

7. Lisa tells the story of hiding under her bed after she wrecked her bike and her mother crawling underneath the bed to be with her.



"That's the promise of Advent, y'all. No matter where we are, even when we've wedged ourselves in some dark place because we're so disappointed, God pursues us. He's so kind, and He's with us. Wherever you are this Advent season, you are not invisible to Him."

- Describe a time when you were in a dark place and someone lovingly pursued you.
- What did that feel like? What made it meaningful?
- What do you hope for most from celebrating Advent?

Call to Action

Leader, you will need some pieces of paper, about a quarter- or half-page for this exercise.

Pass out a piece of paper to each group member. Invite each participant to write down something they are longing for or hoping for this Advent season. Place each slip of paper into a bowl or basket and mix them up. Then have each person draw one and pray over that longing or hope for the next week.

Closing Prayer

Select a volunteer to read the closing prayer over the group.

Lord Jesus, nothing is hidden from You. Strengthen our resolve to remain hopeful even when we can't see or hear the responses we desire. Help us to share our hope with others who may not know what to hope in. Fill us with holy anticipation of You and Your goodness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SESSION 1

Personal Study

This section is created as a guide to personally study and further explore the experience of Advent and longing in silence.

Don't forget to pray over the longing of one of your fellow group members throughout this week.



LESSON ONE

Advent invites us to pull away from the hectic consumerism that often overtakes the four weeks before Christmas and enter a time of preparation and anticipation for the arrival of Jesus.

- ✦ What's one meaningful way you've prepared your heart for Christmas in the past?

Throughout the world, believers celebrate this season in beautifully diverse ways. In the heart of Germany, as the Advent season unfolds its tapestry of anticipation, families gather around a wreath with four candles. Each week, families encircle the wreath and light a candle which casts its warm glow upon those gathered, a beacon of hope and joy.

Across the expanse of Mexico, you'll find a nine-day religious ceremony known as Las Posadas, or "The Inns," held throughout towns and villages. It's held from December 16–24 to celebrate the journey of Mary and Joseph. In the evening, a child dressed as an angel leads a group of other children to selected homes where they are not allowed entry but still given refreshments.

In China, believers illuminate their homes using colorful paper lanterns during the Advent season. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, they make Christingles, oranges decorated with a red table, candles, and sweets. They also hold Christingles services, which involve readings, singing, prayers, and fundraisers for those in need.


Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate Advent on the Revised Julian Calendar starting November 15 through December 24. They prepare their hearts and minds for Christ's arrival through the Nativity Fast. Participants may abstain from particular foods, including fish, meat, dairy products, and olive oil, for the weeks leading up to Christmas.¹

All of these practices help participants engage in a hope-filled anticipation of Christ's arrival.

✦ Which of these practices from around the world intrigues you the most? Why?

✦ Which of these practices (or others) would help you engage in this biblical season of waiting?

¹ Forrest Brown, "What Is Advent? And What Traditions Do People Follow Worldwide?" November 14, 2023.



God doesn't say, "You can only bring perky, happy clappy to Me." But He says, "When you're disappointed, when you don't get what you want... bring that to Me."

✦ In this season of Advent, where do you most need to get honest with God?

✦ What do you need to surrender to God?

✦ What doubts do you need to give to God?

✦ What are the disappointments you need God's healing and restoration for?

✦ What do you most want to receive from God during this season of Advent?

In the space below, write a prayer that surrenders your hesitations, fears, disappointments, doubts, and pain. Then ask God to fill you with hope-filled anticipation for how He might meet and renew you during Advent.



LESSON TWO

We can easily open the Gospels and discover stunning accounts of Jesus' birth and the layers of miracles surrounding His arrival. Though Jesus' entrance into this world comes quickly to us, we must remember that God's people had been longing for the promised deliverer for thousands of years, and the wait was often uncomfortable and hard.

After seventy brutal years in Babylonian captivity, God's people returned home to Jerusalem with sky-high hopes. They planned to rebuild their lives, worship in the temple, and experience the goodness of God that all the prophets had promised. They were convinced that with their new freedom, the Messiah would soon return, establish His holy reign, and deliver justice, peace, and abundance for all.


Alas, their hopes were soon dashed. The temple they planned to worship and celebrate in had been demolished. Much of their great city had been reduced to rubble. And worse, the long-awaited Messiah was nowhere to be found.

Life didn't turn out like they'd hoped or planned. For the next hundred years, God's people flourished in their population but floundered in their faith. Injustice and corruption abounded. And their hearts turned to stone.

Around a century after their escape from Babylon, the prophet Malachi, whose name means "messenger," arrives in their midst. He's been sent by God to expose and confront the hardness of the people's hearts. What unfolds is a series of six rhetorical disputes. God makes a claim, and the Israelites either protest or debate the claim.

Read Malachi 1:2.

- ✦ What claim does God make, and what question do the people ask?



"You are precious to Him. That's the promise of Malachi. That's a promise from Genesis to Revelation. We have a Savior who's with us; He's not a faraway God."

God goes on to remind the people of the promises He made to Jacob instead of Esau (or who would become Edom), who eventually came to ruin. God has kept the promise of His love for them throughout the generations.

- ✦ When are you most tempted to doubt or question God's love?

- ✦ How do you tend to treat God's guidance and instruction when you don't trust His love? Does your typical response bear fruit or leave you still in need? What might need to change?
- ✦ Where do you most need to know the depths of God's love and favor in your life right now?

Read Jeremiah 31:3 and Zephaniah 3:17.

- ✦ What do each of these passages reveal about the nature of God's love for you?

The book of Malachi goes on to reveal that the time in exile didn't soften the hearts of God's people or lead to lasting repentance. So, God meets the people in their frustration and refusal to obey, exposes the hardness of their hearts, and calls them to return to Him.

READ	BEHAVIOR GOD CALLS OUT IN THE ISRAELITES	BEHAVIOR GOD CALLS OUT IN ME
Malachi 1:6-2:9		
Malachi 2:10-16		
Malachi 2:17-3:5		
Malachi 3:6-12		
Malachi 3:13-18		

✦ What does it reveal about God that He calls people back to Himself no matter how far they've wandered?

✦ Where do you sense God calling you to return to Him?

Now remember that this riveting conversation between God and His people, known as the book of Malachi, is the final book of the Old Testament. These questions, doubts, and struggles are the last thing God wants to address before the centuries of silence that will follow.

And tucked into this dialogue is a stunning promise regarding the One who is yet to come.

Read Malachi 3:1–4.

✦ What stands out to you about the promised Messiah?

Malachi predicts the arrival of John the Baptist (3:1), who prepares the way for the Lord (Mark 1:1–4), and that Jesus, as the Refiner, will fulfill God's promises. This is incredible news! But it's also a promise that must be held on to for four hundred years before it's fulfilled—as we'll discover in the next lesson of personal study.



LESSON THREE

In the final book of the Old Testament, Malachi, we receive the powerful anchor of hope of the coming Christ. Yet centuries of uncomfortable silence followed. We have the privilege now of knowing that period between the Old and New Testaments lasted four hundred years, but the generations who lived and died during those centuries had no idea when it would end. The prophets of God had vanished. The voice of God had gone silent. And the people were left in a great unknowing of when God might speak to them again, let alone fulfill His promise of the long-awaited Messiah.

It is in this very silence we are invited to wait and pray and anticipate and long for God. That's one of the great gifts of Advent: It gives space for reflective preparation of what God has done and is yet to do.

Which of the following have you felt or faced when you're waiting on God and all you hear is silence? Circle all that apply.

Disappointed

Frustrated

Expectant

Angry

Disoriented

Questioning

Hopeful

Afraid

Confused

Doubtful

Disillusioned

Sad

All of these are normal human responses, and all have been experienced by God’s people for thousands of years. Yet rather than become stuck in our disappointment or disorientation, we can use the time to reorient ourselves toward Jesus and increase our dependence on God.

One of the rich places in the Bible where we find both our heartaches and sacred hopes expressed side by side is throughout the Psalms.

Read the following passages. What does each one reveal about God’s character and His trustworthiness even in the silence and even when we can’t see the outcome?

SCRIPTURE	WHAT IS REVEALED ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF GOD?
Psalm 9:7–10	
Psalm 40:4–5	
Psalm 91:1–6	
Psalm 112:6–9	
Psalm 143:8–10	

- ✦ **As you review the chart, which characteristic of God are you struggling to trust most now?**

Write a prayer of response asking God to renew your trust in who He is and His faithfulness.





"You know what God is saying to His disappointed people... 'Christmas is coming. Christmas is coming, Emmanuel. He's right around the corner.'"

In this season of Advent, we all have areas where we're waiting for God to break the silence and for Christ to come anew. What are three areas where you're waiting for God to break the silence and for Christ to come and heal, restore, or make all things new?

1

2

3

✦ What are you leaning on to fulfill these desires other than God?

✦ What steps can you take to remove those from your life during the upcoming weeks of Advent?

About the Authors



MEET CHRISTINE CAINE ✨

Christine Caine is a speaker, activist, and bestselling author. She and her husband, Nick, founded The A21 Campaign, an anti-human trafficking organization. They also founded Propel Women, an initiative that is dedicated to coming alongside women all over the globe to activate their God-given purpose. You can tune into Christine's weekly podcast, *Equip & Empower*, or her TBN television program to be encouraged with the hope of Jesus wherever you are. To learn more about Christine, visit www.christinecaine.com.

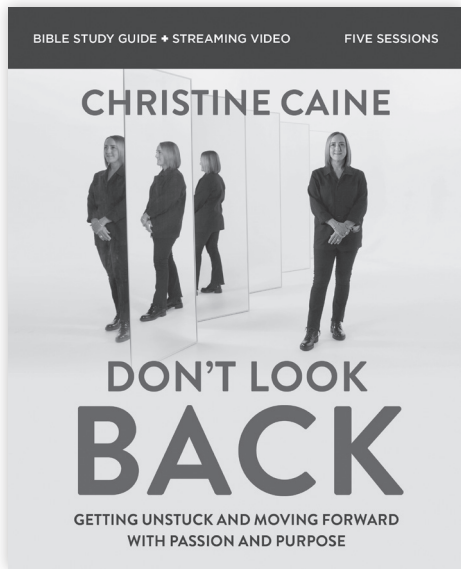


MEET LISA HARPER ✨

Lauded as a "hilarious storyteller" and "theological storyteller," Lisa Harper is anything but stereotypical! She is known for emphasizing that accruing knowledge about God pales next to a real and intimate relationship with Jesus. Lisa has 30+ years of church and para-church ministry leadership, as well as a decade speaking on-tour with Women of Faith. She holds a Master of Theological Studies

from Covenant Seminary and is in the thesis stage of an earned doctorate at Denver Seminary. She is a regular on TBN's globally syndicated *Better Together* show and has published multiple books and Bible studies. Lisa has also been leading the same weekly Bible study in her neighborhood for fifteen years. The most noticeable thing about Lisa Harper is her authenticity and love for Christ. But her greatest accomplishment to date is getting to become Missy's mom through the miracle of adoption in 2014!

Also Available From Christine

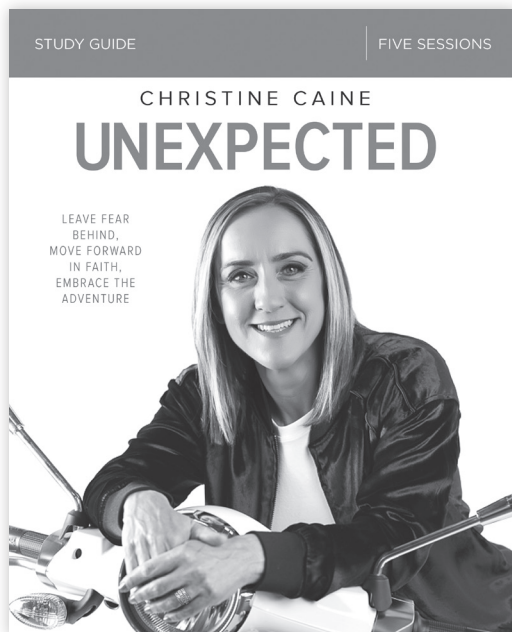


MOVE CONFIDENTLY INTO THE PURPOSE GOD HAS FOR YOU

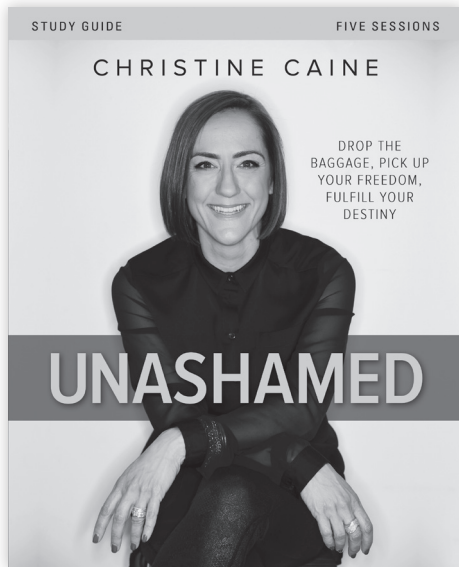
With a rallying cry to “remember Lot’s wife,” Christine motivates us to stop looking back, to let go, and to move forward into what God promises for our lives.

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!



Also Available From Christine

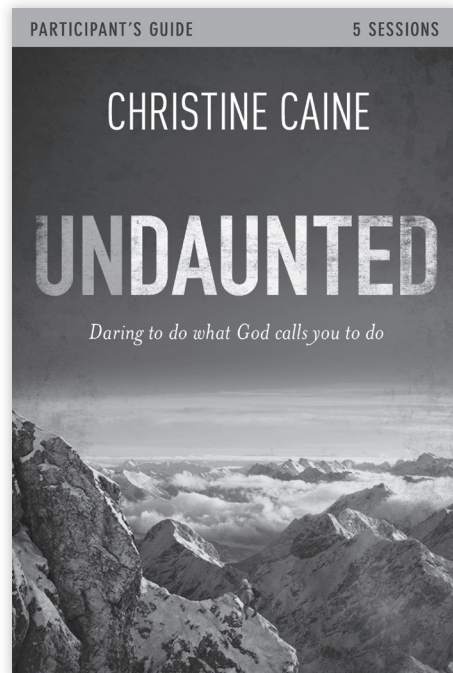


TODAY IS THE DAY TO FULFILL YOUR DESTINY

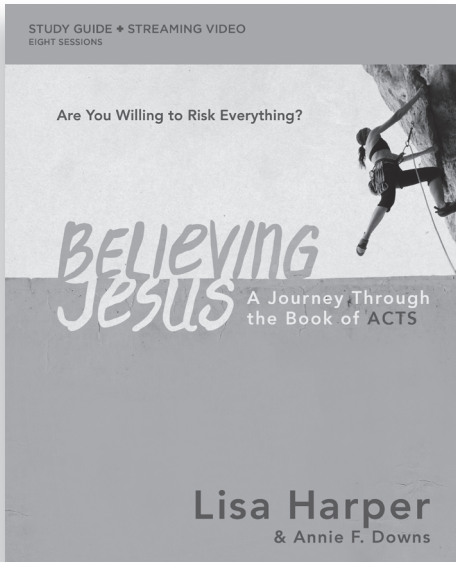
Christine teaches you a way out of shame by helping you rediscover the power of God to overcome our mistakes, our inadequacies, our pasts, our limitations.

DARE TO DO WHAT GOD CALL 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.



Also Available From Lisa

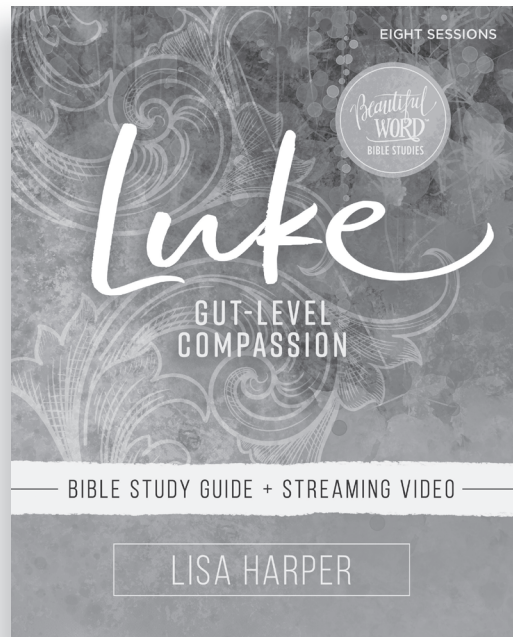


RISKING EVERYTHING IS SO WORTH IT

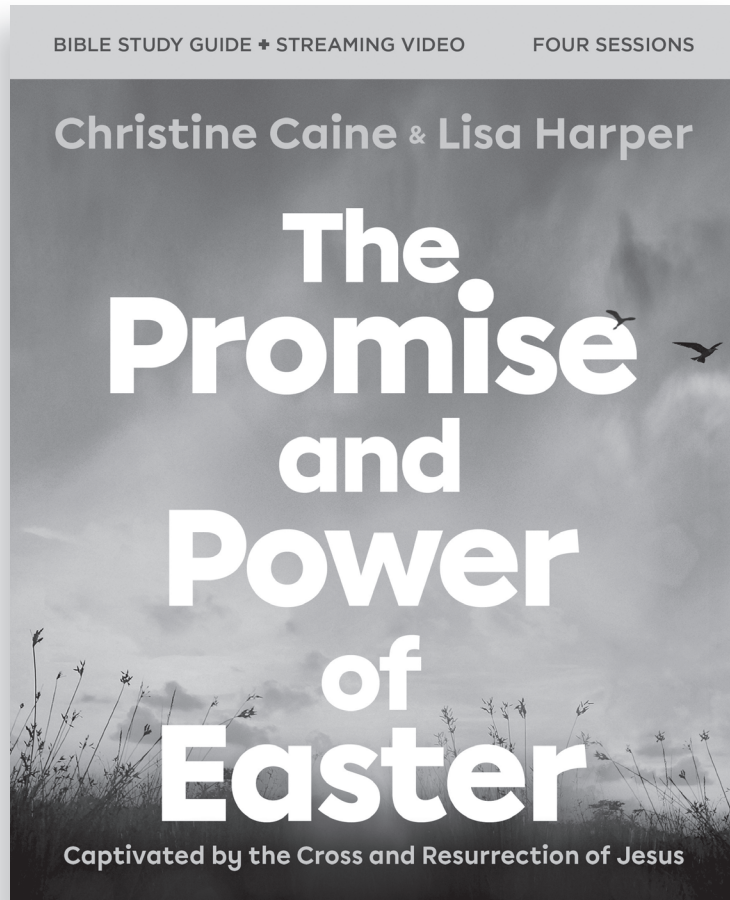
In this eight-session study, Lisa reveals how the Holy Spirit catapults believers forward with power, grace, and authority to dramatically impact the world.

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!



Also From Lisa and Christine Together



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