SAMPLE

Hebrews

THE NEARNESS OF KING JESUS

LISA HARPER

LifeWay
Biblical Solutions for Life

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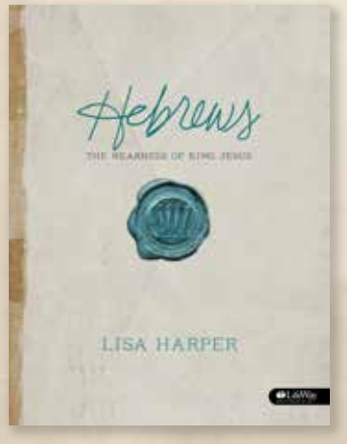

JESUS IS OUR ACCESSIBLE KING.

He is not a faraway God, but an up-close Redeemer who kneels beside us.

Join Lisa Harper in this 7-session study as she digs into Hebrews, as only she can, with plenty of humor and depth. *Hebrews* reminds women that Jesus reigns supreme, but He also draws near to us with compassion, empathy, and love to no end.

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LOOK AROUND…

Explore this sample taken from the first week of *Hebrews*.
Visit lifeway.com/hebrews for more info or to order.

"A BIBLE THAT IS FALLING APART USUALLY BELONGS TO SOMEONE WHO ISN'T."

—CHARLES SPURGEON

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rarely are the terms "hilarious storyteller" and "theological scholar" used in the same sentence, much less used to describe the same person, but Lisa Harper is anything but stereotypical. She is a master storyteller, whose writing and speaking overflows with colorful pop culture references that connect the dots between the Bible and modern life.

Her vocational resume includes six years as the director of Focus on the Family's national women's ministry, followed by six years as the women's ministry director at a large church. Her academic resume includes a master's in theological studies with honors from Covenant Seminary. Now a sought-after Bible teacher and speaker, Lisa is currently featured on the national Women of Faith tour and speaks at many other large multi-denominational events—such as Kathy Trocoli's Among Friends, LifeWay's women's events, and Women of Joy conferences—as well as at hundreds of churches all over the world. She's been on numerous syndicated radio and television programs and was featured on the cover of *Today's Christian Woman*.

She's written 11 books, including *Overextended … and Loving It!*, *Stumbling into Grace,* and *A Perfect Mess*. In spite of her credentials, the most noticeable thing about Lisa Harper is her authenticity. "I'm so grateful for the opportunities God's given me," Lisa says, "but don't forget: He often uses donkeys and rocks!"

INTRODUCTION & GROUP SUGGESTIONS

Mindy, one of my friends at The Next Door (a six-month residential addiction recovery program where I volunteer) plopped down on a couch beside me with an exaggerated sigh and said, "This stuff is *hard,* Lisa."

I gave Mindy's shoulders a squeeze and asked, "What's hard, Sweetie?"

She leaned back as far as the couch would allow and replied, "EVERY. THING. Everything here is hard." Then she launched into her daily routine at TND:

Wake up at 5:00 a.m. to get ready for work.
Walk to the bus stop—regardless of the weather—to catch the 6:15 cross-town bus.
Ride bus to Krystal, then fry burgers/deal with irate customers/clean toilets for 8 hours.
Catch the bus back to The Next Door.
Eat a quick dinner.
Help clean up the kitchen.
Attend a mandatory community meeting and/or devotional.
Attend a mandatory AA meeting.
Take a shower and go to bed, while showing grace to a noisy roommate.
Start all over again the following morning.

With a partial smile on her face and tears in her eyes, she lamented, "I'm not used to working this hard, Lisa. I mean, good night, I just got here from prison a few weeks ago, and all I had to do there was lay around and watch cable. I promise, I'm trying as hard as I can and I don't wanna get kicked out of the program, but it's dang hard to go from not working at all for six years to busting my tail overnight!"

I couldn't help but think of Mindy's bumpy transition when I flipped through this Hebrews workbook. I couldn't help think about the precious it's-been-a-while-since-I've-been-in-church or the I've-never-been-in-a-small-group-and-didn't-know-crop-pants-were-required girls who will also flip through these pages and then probably break out in a cold sweat. Because it's all new to them and, at first glance, being in a Bible study sounds like hard work! Especially if they aren't familiar with Scripture and they're afraid one of us with a dog-eared Bible and a Vera Bradley tote full of highlighters will turn up our nose or, worse still, feel led to expose her inexperience.

So let's agree to make Hebrews an easy place to engage with God. A place where every woman feels like it's OK to ask questions about Him, share the highs and lows of her story, and ultimately lean further into the nearness of King Jesus. Therefore, it's not necessary to choose a single leader for this study (I can almost hear the audible gasps from the type A's reading this!), and may be more beneficial to choose a couple of friendly chicks to co-lead, which will help the environment be less personality-driven and more participation-driven.

A FEW TIPS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY INVOLVEMENT:

- Establish a no-monopoly chat zone. Encourage everyone to answer at least one question rather than having one big-talker answer all of them.
- Allow for "silence cushions" between questions to give introverts time to formulate their thoughts and participate.
- Throw spitballs at anyone who responds to a question with a basic yes-or-no answer. OK, maybe spitballs are a tad punitive, but encourage real responses!
- Be quick to listen and slow to give advice or attempt to fix the other chicks' problems in your circle. Just say no to Dr. Phil wannabes!
- Make your best effort to begin and end on time.
- Don't focus on moving through all the material each time you get together; instead, focus on how your small-group tribe is moving toward Jesus.

To make Hebrews user-friendly, we've created a workbook/journal geared toward participation instead of intimidation. We've also segmented the work-book into chunks instead of days, so you can complete the questions when you have time—when your baby's sleeping, when your husband's glued to a football game, or when you're finally home from work and have changed into

a pair of comfy sweatpants. The last thing we want is to make the homework so difficult and time-consuming that your group dwindles down to nonexistent.

Each week starts with a two-page video and group guide. For the first session, you'll just watch the video and get to know each other. Then, during the following week, complete your first week's study. When you gather for the second week, discuss the week 1 study and watch the second week's video.

Your format can depend on your group's size. If your group has few members, discuss the previous week's study first and then watch the video, allowing for some time to discuss the video's questions afterward. If you have a large group, watch the video first and then combine the discussion of video questions and the previous week's work.

Now, may I encourage you to breathe deeply, smile genuinely (even if it's just to yourself), and turn the page? Then doodle wildly in the margins. Be as honest as possible in every response. And fire away with your thoughts, since few questions have right or wrong answers. Feel free to throw this workbook on the floor with gusto if something I've written steps on one of your emotional bruises ... or hug it close to your chest when Jesus whispers how valuable you are to Him while you're perusing a passage.

My deep hope and fervent prayer is that the King of all kings will woo us closer to Himself than ever this season. That God's Spirit—our Comforter and Counselor—will cause us to long for a more intimate relationship with our Redeemer and compel us to share more compassion with the poor, lost, and marginalized world around us. I want to love bigger, fear less, and run headlong into the arms of Jesus every single day as a result of hiking through Hebrews with you. I really can't wait to see how God shows up in this adventure!

Warmest regards,

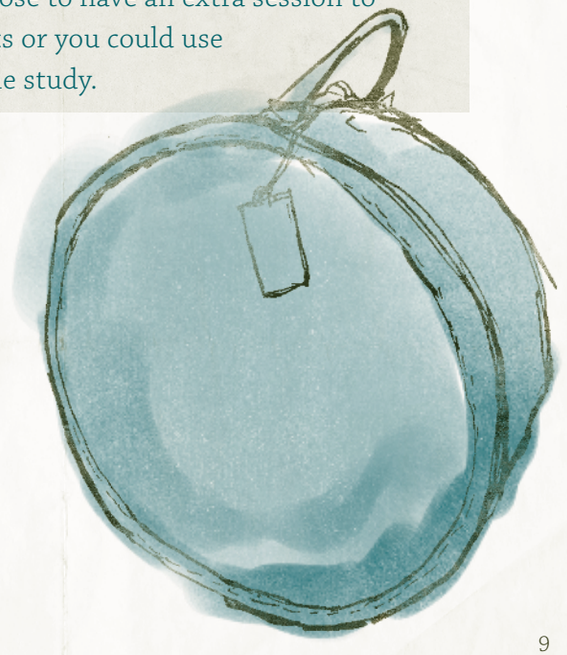
Lisa

As an extra feature of Hebrews, we have included six articles excerpted from ***Biblical Illustrator*** magazine. Feel free to ignore the articles or to do the extra study. For the complete version of the articles and nine additional articles on Hebrews, you may purchase the downloadable set from ***Biblical Illustrator.*** Look for "Hebrews: The Nearness of King Jesus Biblical Illustrator Bundle" on *lifeway.com/hebrews*. ***Biblical Illustrator*** is a great enrichment magazine for Bible teachers and students. It delves into archeology and biblical history with photos and insights that help bring Scripture to life.

OPTIONAL BONUS

You will find two bonus videos in the Hebrews leader kit: a panel discussion of the difficult issues in the Book of Hebrews and a guest teaching segment with Mandisa on Hebrews 12:1-2. You might choose to have an extra session to view and discuss these segments or you could use them for a celebration to end the study.

If you're on social media, please share what you're learning at #nearJesus



The Book of Hebrews covers two key Christological concepts: the _____ and the _____ of Jesus.

Hebrews was written sometime between A.D. _____ and _____, approximately three to four decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Hebrews was written to a small group of _____ Christians, who were living in either _____ or _____ .

Monotheistic: pledging one's allegiance to _____ God

Polytheistic: pledging one's allegiance to a plethora of little"g" gods

Nero confused the _____ .

> Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.
> **HEBREWS 1:1-4 (ESV)**

What are four of the "many ways" (polytropos) *God used to speak to His people long ago?*

1. _____

2. _____ and _____

3. _____

4. _____ and _____

The "latter days" or "last days" refers to the time period on the continuum of progressive revelation between the _____ and _____ coming of Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. *How has Hebrews ministered to you in the past?*
2. *What has been your steepest climb in the past? How has Jesus helped you to keep on?*
3. *What climb do you face now? What would you like to get from this group and study?*

Video sessions available for purchase
at www.lifeway.com/hebrews

WEEK 1

ANGELS ROCK BUT JESUS RULES

WALK A MILE IN HEBREW SHOES

I rarely feel like I'm about to burst with excitement when I'm on a plane. At Starbucks, yes. Pottery Barn, yes. Anywhere that serves tableside guacamole and free chip refills, most definitely. But in a motorized aluminum tube? Probably not. Since I travel about two hundred days a year, my mindset on planes is more eye-rolling resignation than wide-eyed enthusiasm. The seats are configured to a supermodel's bottom. And I often end up in a middle seat, squashed between two NFL linemen-sized guys with questionable hygiene. To add insult to injury, they inevitably hog the armrests. Needless to say, the travel part of my job can be a tad unpleasant, as well as claustrophobic.

On this particular transatlantic flight, however, I didn't mind being crammed or even having Cran-Apple juice accidentally sloshed in my lap. I was going to Hillsong Church in London— the top entry on my church bucket list. I've been singing along with their worship CDs since the '90s and have listened to scads of Hillsong sermons online, so to visit one of their main campuses was a dream come true for me. Plus, I was traveling with my dear friend, Christine Caine, who's one of my favorite chicks in the universe and just happens to be part of Hillsong's international teaching team. It was like being en route to the chocolate factory with Willy Wonka himself!

We spent four whirlwind days in London, watching God do amazing things. Hundreds of people put their hope in Jesus, the worship music was so anointed that I wept the whole time we were singing, plus I got mocha lattes between all four services, making the whole experience even more heavenly.

The only less-than-wonderful moment in London happened at a dinner the Hillsong pastors had arranged with some new members at their gorgeous home in a very chic neighborhood. Christine mentioned there would be several interesting people at the dinner—a runway model, an incredibly successful venture capitalist, and some other European bigwigs—so I knew to dress up, but I'd run out of appropriate things to wear. It snowed the whole time we were there, and I hadn't packed accordingly. So, with about an hour to get ready, I decided to race to a few stores and buy a new outfit.

I had completely forgotten how much smaller UK sizing is from our generously proportioned American clothes. After forty-five minutes of berating myself for too much chips-and-guacamole consumption (because I couldn't find pants that would fit over my thighs or a jacket that didn't give me sausage arms), I had only fifteen minutes to buy something, jog back to the hotel, change, reapply makeup, and fluff my hair. At that very moment, I passed the Anthropologie store window and noticed a pretty peach mohair sweater on the mannequin. *That'll go perfectly with my dark jeans and the long strand of pearls I packed,* I thought. So I barreled into the store, bought the sweater without trying it on, and hustled back to the hotel.

As soon as I glanced at the full-length mirror in my room, I knew I was in trouble. I resembled a horror-movie-sized fuzzy lollipop—not unlike the Michelin Man in the first *Ghostbusters* movie. What in the world compelled me to think a bright orange-yellow, hairy sweater would look good stretched across my not-exactly-petite top half? Of course, by then I had about 90 seconds to meet our group in the lobby, so I had no choice but to spritz perfume on my furry, sorbet-colored self, square my shoulders, and walk downstairs with my head held high.

The situation escalated into an even greater opportunity in humility when our driver dropped us at our dinner engagement. Our host, who met us at the door, was exactly eye-level with my bottom rib, since I had worn really high heels that night in an attempt to elongate and slenderize my appearance. In reality, I just made myself unnaturally tall. My pastel largeness may have alarmed the wee host, because his greeting was brief. Then he swung the front door wide open to his mansion.

That is when I noticed EVERY. SINGLE. PERSON. In the room was dressed from head to toe in black. And not fuddy-duddy, funereal black either—they were clad in butter-soft black leather ensembles, flowing black silk dresses, and effortlessly elegant black tailored jackets. Furthermore, EVERY. SINGLE. PERSON. Looked like they ate approximately four carrot sticks and one vitamin-that-makes-your-hair-shiny per day.

To their credit, those lean Londoners did not gasp out loud when I—a woolly, brightly hued American—lumbered into their sophisticated midst. A few eyes might've initially widened in surprise; however, after just a second's hesitation, they all moved forward and enveloped me like incredibly gracious swans making a protective circle around a fashion-challenged duckling.

I won't trouble you with further details about my total-opposite-of-a-Cinderella evening, except to say that after making lots of small talk and nibbling on foie gras (what in the world is wrong with pigs in a blanket as an appetizer?), I had humiliation further etched into my soul while walking across a glass ceiling during a tour of the lovely home. The architect thought a solid glass ceiling smack dab in the middle of six other floors would be an interesting feature, our host explained. While everyone else marveled over the architect's brilliance, I secretly plotted to toilet paper his home, because he obviously didn't factor in non-waifish Yanks in high heels who would be forced to take mincing steps across his crystal-clear masterpiece, terrified of crashing through said ceiling and accidentally squishing a former Vogue model. After which, the Yank would be indicted on accidental homicide charges and never, ever get to return to her homeland where people wear brightly colorful outfits and the average woman's size is twelve (two points better than a perfect ten, if you ask me).

The next time you're at a dinner party with church friends, casually throw out the phrase "ontological equality," which basically means that the three members of the Trinity—God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are equal in value but different in their function.[1] It'll make you sound smart, and, more important, it'll help you remember the doctrinal concrete the writer of Hebrews used for his church members' theological foundation.

THE LORD'S SONG IN A STRANGE LAND

In Psalm 137:4 the singer asked, "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" I sure didn't feel like singing at that London party, but I suspect we've all felt out of place at one time or another. So now it's your turn. I'd love to hear your story as well. If I could be there with you, we could laugh together or at least commiserate.

When was the last time you were aware of not fitting in at a social, work, or church setting?

What do you think it was/is about you that didn't gel with those surroundings?

What kind of emotion did your sticking-out-like-a-sore-thumb experience stir up in your heart?

My awkward London debut reminded me of what it feels like to be a square peg in a round hole. Or a donkey at the Kentucky Derby. My feelings, however, probably only represent a tiny taste of the unease our Jewish Christian friends felt in the second half of the first century, because they completely clashed with their culture too. Remember, Hebrews believed in one true God, while their Roman neighbors believed in a smorgasbord of false gods (they even adopted the gods of people they defeated in battle, just to cover all their bases).

HEBREW PRACTICE	ROMAN PRACTICE
Try to live holy, righteous lives.	If it feels good, do it.
Choose marriage and family.	Have multiple partners and abandon female infants on the side of the road.

Although I doubt they had to tiptoe across glass ceilings, these Jewish Christians did have to walk through each day not knowing if they were going to make it home for dinner. Not knowing if one of the emperor's Christian-hating cohorts would snatch them off the street and set them on fire for sport—which is a million times worse than being the only peach bobbing in a sea of cool black.

When has your faith in Jesus caused you to feel awkward or not fit in?

When you don't fit in because of your faith, how do you feel?

What's the worst persecution you've faced from being a Christian?

Have you ever felt physically threatened or unsafe because of your belief in Jesus? If so, describe that situation.

Talk with your group about how we, who have mostly been safe, can identify with and support those who are physically persecuted for their faith in other parts of the world.

LEAN INTO THE STORY

Before we dig into the rich soil of this text, I want to remind you that the Hebrews were living in uber-scary times. Their businesses were being ransacked, their kids were being bullied, and some of their Christian friends had been martyred for their faith. I doubt many of us have experienced the level of persecution they did in their everyday lives, but I bet most of us can identify with being at least a little afraid.

STOP AND THINK ABOUT IT FOR A MINUTE.

Have you ever been climbing up or down a steep staircase and felt like you were going to fall? ❑ *yes* ❑ *no*

Have you ever been a passenger in another person's speeding car and felt like you were going to crash? ❑ *yes* ❑ *no*

Have you ever ridden a roller coaster at an amusement park and felt like you were going to become one with the earth below? ❑ *yes* ❑ *no*

If you said yes to any of those situations, how did you react? You grabbed the banister or the handle above the car window or the metal crossbar—which, along with gravity, was the only thing keeping you in that stupid roller coaster, right? When we're frightened, it's human nature to reach for something solid, something that will anchor us to safety, something that will keep us from tumbling into Scary Town.

Jesus is the only thing we can hang on to that will actually support us in tough times. So the pastor (that is, the writer) of Hebrews keeps reminding his anxious parishioners about Jesus' better-than-anything-else nature.

In this second part of his sermon, the pastor of the Hebrews makes the case for the Son's supremacy to angels. Hebrews 1:5-14 is a treasure chest of theological booty, but we'll examine just two of the brightest jewels. The first is the author's use of multiple quotations from the Old Testament to contrast Jesus and angels.

We've set aside the entire next page to show some of the quotations and allusions the pastor uses in verses 5-14. But before you examine them, consider the following details about how the New Testament writers used Scripture.

How the New Testament Writers Use the Old Testament

You will note as you study Hebrews that almost everything the pastor said was either a direct quote of the Old Testament or an allusion to it. However, you may struggle with the wording for several reasons.

First, the people of Bible times had no experience with our modern idea of exact quotations. Remember, they lived in an world of oral learners. They spoke the Word. They learned it by hearing it. Books were far too rare for people to have their own copies. They lived and breathed the Scripture to such a degree that we sometimes cannot determine exactly which Old Testament passage was being referenced. The writer/speaker might weave multiple passages together.

Second, note that the Greek Septuagint was the Bible most in use in the first century. It was a translation of the Hebrew manuscripts. Any translation results in some degree of paraphrasing because human languages never match perfectly. We live in an unbelievably blessed time because thousands of scholars have spent their entire working lives comparing manuscripts and seeking the most accurate original documents of Scripture. Therefore we have multiple excellent translations to compare and study.

Finally, we must recognize that the writers of the New Testament wrote under unique inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For example, in Hebrews 10:20 the pastor said Jesus opened a new and living way to God's presence. The pastor said Jesus' crucified body was the torn veil in the temple. God inspired the writer of Hebrews to make such a claim, but today, we cannot produce new ideas that equal God-breathed Scripture. We seek to understand the completed message God has given us, not to add novel teachings to it.

Hebrews 1:5 cites Psalm 2:7: "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" And 2 Samuel 7:14: "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men."

Hebrews 1:6 cites Deuteronomy 32:43: "Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land."

Hebrews 1:7 cites Psalm 104:4: "He makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire."

Hebrews 1:8 cites Psalm 45:6-7: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

Hebrews 1:9 cites Isaiah 61:1,3: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

Hebrews 1:10 cites Psalm 102:25-27: "Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end."

Hebrews 1:13 cites Psalm 110:1: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

In Hebrew, the Book of Psalms is titled Tehillim, which means "songs of praise."[2] And since each psalm was originally crafted as a song, that makes Psalms the first collective hymnal of the Israelites—kind of like God's iPod!

When David began Psalm 110 with "The LORD says," he established the lyrics that follow as an oracle—a direct statement from God. It's also clear that David intended this song to be messianic in nature because of the way he describes God as speaking to his future king: "The LORD says to *my Lord*" (emphasis mine).[3]

Keep in mind that these believers were practicing Jews before they put their hope in Jesus. It's safe to say they were very familiar with the Old Testament—it was their Bible. Most of them had been listening to *Tanakh* (the Jewish Bible) readings and singing psalms since before they relinquished their pacifiers. So their pastor connects the dots and proves God's new revelation by citing the old revelation, illuminating the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The pastor's many allusions to Scripture also underscore the truth that we can always mine jewels from our past, even if the only beauty they provide is the reminder of what God has rescued us from.

Which of those messianic "song lyrics" (Psalm 2:7; 45:6-7; 102:25-27; 104:4; and 110:1) would you be most prone to sing?

Why do those particular words resonate with you?

The Jewish Bible is also known as the Tanakh. Tanakh is not a word but an acronym, T-N-K, based on the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible—Torah (the Law), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Ketuvim (the Writings).[4]

In royal courts, a king extended his scepter toward subjects when he wanted them to approach his throne—when he wanted them to come closer (Psalm 45:6-7). How have you experienced King Jesus beckoning you nearer to His throne recently?

The second jewel we're going to examine is the way the pastor proclaims the superiority of Jesus over angels:

Jesus is God's Son; therefore His name is superior to angels: "[H]aving become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'? Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'?" (Hebrews 1:4-5)

Jesus is God's Son; therefore His position is superior to angels: "And, again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" (Hebrews 1:6)

Angels worship Jesus; therefore His nature is superior to theirs: "Of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.'" (Hebrews 1:7)

Jesus' reign is forever; therefore His role is superior to angels: "But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.'" (Hebrews 1:8)

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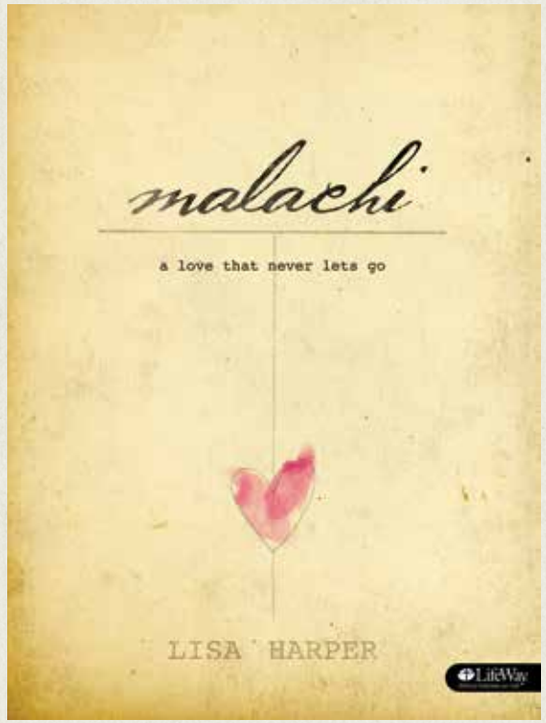
also by Lisa



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