



**HANGING  
IN THERE**

**JOHN DICKSON**

**HANGING IN THERE** is your guide to choosing Jesus through the ups, downs and roundabouts of your teens and early twenties.

This is a book about God, you, the Bible, prayer, church, relationships, sex, feelings, doubts, love and, above all, hanging in there as a Christian.

Starting out as a professional singer-songwriter, **John Dickson** now works as an author, speaker, historian, pastor and media presenter. He strives to be a public advocate for the Christian faith in doubting times.

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ISBN 978-1-925424-41-6



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JOHN DICKSON



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SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN



For Mum

*Hanging in There*

Third edition

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First published 1991

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Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

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ISBN 978 1 925424 41 6

Design and typesetting by Matthias Media.

**Other publications by John Dickson:**

*A Hell of a Life*

*A Sneaking Suspicion*

*If I were God, I'd end all the pain*

*If I were God, I'd make myself clearer*

*Simply Christianity: A modern guide to the ancient faith*

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## WHY THIS BOOK?

In this book I've tried to set down what I think are the most relevant issues for people who want to live the Christian life.

Each of the chapters deals with a topic I've spoken on many times, whether privately to a school student or on stage to an audience. Touring with the band *In The Silence*, and by myself, has convinced me that there is a need for a book like this—a basic book about Christianity for young people (say, 25 and under). You might be:

- new to the Christian faith
- fairly interested in it
- a 'longer serving' Christian who needs a bit of encouragement.

Whichever way, this book might be for you.

Each chapter is self-contained and doesn't necessarily lead into the next, so you can read any chapter at any time. However, there is a logical flow, so you might find it easier to read the chapters in order.

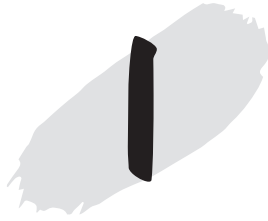
If you own a Bible, it's probably a good idea to keep it handy as you go through this book. All the Bible verses I've quoted are taken from the New International Version (unless otherwise specified) so if you have that version you'll be right. If not, don't worry—you'll still be able to follow with other versions. If you're not sure how to look up Bible references (e.g. 2 Cor 5:17), have a quick look at page 34 in chapter 4 before you get started.

At the end of most chapters there are a few Bible verses listed. If you're interested in knowing more about the topic dealt with in a particular chapter these will help you to investigate it further.

I certainly don't expect this book to make me rich and famous. I simply hope that it will be a help to those keen on hanging in there with God.

JOHN DICKSON





# CLEARING THE CONFUSION

THE 'HOW' AND 'WHAT' OF A CHRISTIAN

WHEN MY MATES AND I first picked up our instruments to form a band, it was a case of “OK, who wants to play what?” Ben wanted to play guitar so he went up to the local music shop, found a black one (they sound better) and bought it. Angus (who got 5% in music at school) took to the bass and, because I was the biggest poser of the lot, I became the lead singer. Jacques, who had never played an instrument either, joined us on the drums some time later.

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At first we wanted to play songs from ‘real bands’ but we soon discovered that there’s only so much you can do when you only know two or three chords. So we started to write our own songs in an attempt to explain our faith in a way that is easily understood.

From those laughable beginnings we ended up touring full-time around Australia and overseas playing in schools, prisons and universities. They were the most exciting and challenging years of my life.

I remember one of our high school seminars in particular. After more than an hour of songs and talks, we invited people to make comments or ask questions. Straight away, a hand shot up. “You’ve told us how and why you guys became Christians but how exactly do I become a Christian?”

The question is a good one. How do we become God’s friend? How can we know for sure that God has a place for us in his family? “How exactly do I become a Christian?” This first chapter is dedicated to answering this all important question.

The news about Jesus Christ has been a major talking point throughout history. It has transformed the lives of kings and peasants, rich and poor, nerds and thickheads, bikers and suits, young and old. The list goes on.

The news is all about the solution to a huge problem.

### **WHAT PROBLEM?**

I think most of us live in a society madly trying to convince us that everything is cool. All you need is a hot body, the latest smartphone, a girl or guy, the occasional pass in exams or job promotion and you’re set. But everything is not cool, especially if what Jesus said is true.

The basic problem is that we have all ignored the Creator of the universe and rebelled against him. We don’t want him

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telling us what to do, and so we either don't take any notice of him or just outright disobey him. As a result, we are guilty before him and cut off from having a friendship with him.

Now that's pretty bad news, I know, but there is no nice way to say it. I mean, how do you pleasantly explain to a surfer that there's a three-metre White Pointer coming his way?

Being the owner of the world, God has a right to tell us what to do. He's the boss. And in our own different ways, we all resist him and his authority. We don't obey his guidelines and we don't thank him and respect him for who he is. The consequences of this need to be looked at head on.

Jesus explained that one day everyone will be judged for what they have or haven't done.

**There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. (John 12:48)**

Some people say, "Oh, that's scare tactics". But again, if you warn a surfer about that three-metre shark, is that scare tactics?

I want to stop here and make one thing very clear: God does not get a kick out of punishing people. God is loving. No matter who you are or what you've done, he cares for you heaps. God is not a big, bearded grandfather figure sitting on a cloud waiting to hit us over the head with a stick every time we disobey him. A loving parent will still punish their child for doing something wrong. Likewise, justice is part of God's personality—he loves us enough to care about what we do and to punish us for doing wrong.

People often argue, "But what about the good things I've done?" Yes, God sees the good things, but he doesn't have a set of cosmic scales designed to weigh up the good against the bad.

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If someone commits a crime in our society, they can't say to the judge in a courtroom, "But Your Honour, just before I mugged that kid I helped an old lady across the road". The judge may think to himself, "Yes, that's nice", but he would not let the crime go unpunished. To do so would betray his position as a judge. Likewise, God sees our disobedience and will act accordingly.

As well as being guilty, the Bible also describes us as being cut off from the life God wants for us. In the very beginning, God wanted us to have a life filled with his life and friendship. When we disobeyed him, all this went wrong.

An illustration may help explain what I mean. Imagine cutting a single rose off a rose bush and sticking it in a glass of water. It looks good and smells good (if you're into that sort of thing) but really it's dying. It's cut off from its source of life. You could water it and play it music day and night, but in a few days you'd see that it really was lifeless.

Just like the rose, people are cut off from the 'life source'. God is the source of real life but because of our disobedience we can't have any of it. I've met people who argue, "But I feel great about my life". Sure, but so does the rose in a glass of water... for a while. God's book says that we are all "dead in... (our) transgressions" (Eph 2:1). That's not a good situation to be in.

Fortunately, the Christian message does not end on this depressing tone. God has a solution that blows away the problem.

### THE SOLUTION

Less than 80 generations ago, the man Jesus lived, taught, healed and generally caused a huge stir. In that part of the world (the Middle East), he was known by just about everyone.

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He was hated by some and loved by others. At about the age of 33 he was arrested and put on trial before the officials of the day. He was accused of insulting God because he claimed things about himself which only God could claim. This was a very serious crime in those days.

After being beaten and whipped, he was nailed to a cross and died. Three days later, he came back to life and appeared to heaps of people, showing that he was in fact the Son of God. The big question is, why did the all-powerful, all-knowing Designer of the universe give up his position of power, safety and respect to become a man and die at the hands of his own creation?

The answer is simple—he loves us! Not with a weak, sappy kind of love, but a love that is passionate and strong.

By dying on that cross, Jesus Christ took the penalty you and I deserve. Instead of you and me being condemned, he was condemned. Instead of you and me being cut off from God, he was cut off. He was innocent but he took the blame for you and me.

This is how the prophet Isaiah describes it:

**Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)**

At age 15, this fact had an impact on my life that could never be reversed. I was obsessed with martial arts and thought it was cool to be cruel to others. I stole for a hobby and lived by the

rule ‘if it feels good, do it’. I deserved a penalty but Jesus paid my fine. It was as if he became the 15 year-old jerk and took my place.

So then, God’s solution cancels out our problem. Our rebellion resulted in us becoming guilty, but Jesus’ death and resurrection provides complete and undeserved forgiveness. In fact, a Christian is not only forgiven, but God also considers them to be good, or ‘righteous’.

The Bible reads:

**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

**(2 Corinthians 5:21)**

A big swap occurred. Jesus took our disobedience and its consequences, and we got his goodness and all its consequences. It’s sort of like Chris Hemsworth coming to me and saying, “Hey, John, I’ll take your face and you can have mine”. It sounds too good to be true, doesn’t it? But the loving, powerful God has done it.

In botanical science, there is a process known as ‘grafting’ which allows us to take a single rose stem and restore it back onto the branch from which it came. There it receives new life from its source. God has been doing a similar thing with people for centuries.

When someone becomes a Christian, they are instantly joined back to their life source—God. Once this happens, God opens up to them a whole new life, full of the things he originally intended for them. Things like love, purpose in life, and lots more. I’ll elaborate on this in the following chapters.

A Christian is someone who has received the forgiveness and new life which God freely offers. This is God’s huge solution to our problem.



## OUR RESPONSE

I once met a Year 10 student who had understood the Christian message and agreed with it, but wanted to know how to respond to it in order to become a Christian herself.

My answer went something along the following lines.

It's a bit obvious I know, but before becoming a Christian you have to get your facts straight. Do you know that you're guilty before God and cut off from him? Do you believe that Jesus Christ died to take the blow that you and I deserve and then rose again?

Once you agree with the facts, God then wants you to trust him (in the Bible, you'll see the word 'faith' a lot; it usually means simply 'trust'). Imagine a young girl, stuck up a tree, whose mother comes to the rescue. She may agree in her head that her mum can hold her, but until she trusts her and lets go of the tree she will remain stuck.

Likewise, before you can become a Christian you not only need to know in your head that Christ died to take the world's punishment but also trust that he took your punishment so that *you* could be forgiven.

Some people only half trust God. They feel that they also need to try and do good things in order to make themselves worthy. Half their trust is in God; the other half is in their own 'goodness'. This is not what God wants. He is completely trustworthy. Christ's death is more than enough to bring us forgiveness and new life. Trust him!

Once you've trusted him, simply ask God to forgive you. It's like saying sorry to someone you've wronged, only a much bigger deal. Remember, he is ready, able and very keen to hear you. If you're not too sure about what to pray, there is an example at the end of the chapter.

## HANGING IN THERE

In every day situations an apology usually means two things. Firstly, that we're sorry, and secondly, that we intend to stop whatever it is we're sorry for. It's the same in becoming a Christian. How can we ask God to forgive us unless we intend to turn from rebelling against him and begin putting him first?

When I became a Christian, I stopped stealing, hurting people and living for myself. I didn't become an angel overnight (just ask my mum, wife, friends, etc.) but my attitude certainly changed. I made it my aim to treat God as Boss. This didn't earn God's forgiveness but I really was sorry and I was thankful for everything he'd done.

Get the facts straight, then trust, ask and turn. This is how we step out of our problem and into God's wonderful solution. If you've never done that, perhaps you may want to tell God that you want his solution. The following prayer is not magical, but it may just help you express to God your desire to be a Christian.

**God, I know that I've done things that are wrong.**

**I've ignored you and rebelled against you.**

**I am truly sorry. Please forgive me.**

**Thank you, Jesus, for taking my punishment on the cross.**

**Thank you that you love me and will forgive me.**

**I know you are alive and I want to obey you from now on.**

**Amen.**

### CHECK THESE OUT

▶ ROMANS 6:23

▶ 1 JOHN 1:9

▶ ROMANS 10:13

▶ EPHESIANS 2:8