The
Poor Doubting Christian
Drawn to Christ

By
Rev. Thomas Hooker

Edited by
Eric N. Pline

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A Modern Update of the Christian Classic:

The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ

By Rev. Thomas Hooker, First Minister of Hartford, Connecticut

With an Introduction By

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Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Isaiah 55:1
Preface

Thomas Hooker was born in 1586 in Leicestershire, England. He attended Queens’ College Cambridge and later Emmanuel College Cambridge, graduating in 1611.

In 1620 he became the minister of St. George’s in Esher, Surrey. There he was introduced to Joan Drake, the wife of Francis Drake, and asked to bring aid to her, particularly with regard to her spiritual and emotional distress which others had proved helpless to relieve. God used Hooker’s counsel to bring her from her spiritual distress to a wonderful conversion to Christ before her death in 1625. Cotton Mather stated in regard to Hooker’s ability to deal with souls under conviction of sin, “Indeed he now had no superior, and scarce any equal, for the skill of
treating a troubled soul.” *The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ* came out of his spiritual counsels drawn from the Word of God. Printed in 1629, it was the first title of Hooker's to appear in print.

Thomas Hooker came to the New World in 1633 and founded the Connecticut colony in 1636. He is considered by many to be the “Father of American Democracy.” He wrote the *Fundamental Orders* of Connecticut, thought to be the first constitution of the New England colonies.

An incident that took place at the end of Hooker’s life reveals his deep understanding of the grace of God and his dependence upon Christ. As Thomas Hooker lay dying in 1647, someone said to him, “Sir, you are going to receive the reward of all your labors.” Hooker’s simple reply was, “Brother, I am going to receive mercy.”

The goal of this book is to bring Hooker’s words into the twenty-first century so that many can receive the benefit of his godly counsel and teaching. The goal is not to make it read like a twenty-first century book. The goal is to make the book *understandable* to today’s reader. It still maintains a certain Puritan flavor. Most people are not willing or able to learn early modern English in order to read a book, even one that will bring great help to their souls. This book is an update of an 1845 re-publication. Because I have experienced firsthand the value of this book to my own soul, my hope is that the Lord will use Hooker’s treatise even today to draw many to that comfort and assurance found only in Christ.
Several things were done to update and rework this book, including:
1. Replacing all antiquated words and phrases;
2. Rewriting every sentence for readability, while preserving as many of Hooker’s original words and thoughts as possible;
3. Dividing lengthy sentences into two or three sentences (sometimes his sentences would go on for the length of a paragraph or two);
4. Dividing the five lengthy, original chapters into twelve shorter, more digestible chapters suitable for individual reading or group discussion;
5. Adding text if necessary to better fill out and link the new chapters together, or explain some point more fully;
6. Adding questions at the end of each chapter for further thought and discussion; and
7. Updating nearly all the scripture references from the King James Version (KJV) to another faithful—though modern—translation of the Bible, the English Standard Version (ESV).

Included is the (slightly abridged and updated) introduction given to a mid-nineteenth century re-publication of Hooker’s work by a direct descendant of Thomas Hooker and Jonathan Edwards, Dr. Edward W. Hooker of the Theological Institute of Connecticut.

May the Lord show you the wonders of His grace and mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ and how He desires that you live dependent upon Him to the fullest.

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Introduction

Every believer, especially if he is a pastor, meets with other Christians who suffer spiritual trials of various forms and degrees of intensity. His concern as a conscientious and affectionate watchman for souls is awakened for these people, even though he may feel uncertain on the precise counsel to be given for their instruction and relief. A book, therefore, which can be put into their hands, adapted to their necessities, which they can read repeatedly, by which they can examine their hearts, over which they can pray, through the aid of which they can understand the causes of their sorrows, and find their way out of perplexity and darkness into light and comfort, cannot fail to be of great worth to them. A book of such a character, it is believed, will be found in the present little volume.
It will serve the two-fold purpose of guarding Christians against the devices of their adversary and preventing discomfort and mistakes relative to their spiritual condition.

Not only the private Christian but also the minister will find this little work worthy of frequent inspection. Just as the physician avails himself of the books of experienced and skillful practitioners, so the Christian minister feels it a privilege to avail himself of the results of the studies, experience and observations of his fathers and brethren, who have been wise and successful in their treatment of the cases of afflicted and tender-spirited Christians.

It is true that there is a danger of “healing the hurt” of the mere professor of religion in a slight way. Peace and comfort may be administered where they do not belong or before the way is prepared. There are probably those who make a profession of religion who have occasion to stand in doubt of themselves. There are some in whom a worldly spirit predominates, whose example is inconsistent with their Christian profession, who live in an unsettled, uneasy and skeptical frame of mind relative to the great and fundamental doctrines of the gospel. They have adopted unscriptural views of divine truth, or contend with those doctrines of the Scriptures which humble human pride and show man dependent entirely on the sovereign grace of God. They endeavor to make hope and their profession the means of quieting their conscience, in spite of the disturbances and rebukes that their dissatisfied conscience gives them. The mere professor of religion
in whom any of these appear has serious reason to be afraid for himself. The following pages do not appear to have been written for such people. Andrew Fuller’s The Backslider, Matthew Mead’s The Almost Christian, Joseph Alleine’s Alarm to the Unconverted, and Richard Baxter’s A Call to the Unconverted, should be recommended for their serious examination. The faithful minister will make it one object of his instructions to disturb the peace of men such as this, for they may be ruined by self-deception, unless their peace is broken up and substituted by “a better hope.”

This book, therefore, should be read with a right understanding of its design and of the precise type of people to whom its counsels are adapted. It is designed for mourners in Zion, for those children of God whose souls are cast down and disquieted within them, for those who walk softly before the Lord, who live in conflict with sin in themselves and who have been wounded with the fiery darts of the wicked one. These would prize, immeasurably, the peace and comfort to be obtained by going to Calvary and in sitting at the feet of Jesus.

It is probable that the present volume will fall into the hands of some who have prematurely entered the visible church. Views of religion have been taught in recent years that have multiplied such cases to an alarming extent. Under the influence of erroneous instruction, many, it is feared, have made a profession of religion because they have resolved in a general way to live religiously and have begun to do some of the outward things of religion; while, to use the language of
David Brainard, they “do not see any manner of difference between those exercises which are spiritual and holy, and those which have self-love for their beginning, center and end.” This type of person may be met by such examples of Christian experience as are contained in this book, that they might respond with the language of the skeptical Athenians to Paul, “You bring certain strange things to our ears.” It is affectionately suggested for their consideration, that to have come into the visible church in ignorance of those spiritual affections that are produced in the renewed heart by the Holy Spirit, is to have taken a step attended with serious hazard. He who professes religion in ignorance or skepticism of the offices and work of Christ in our redemption does it to the endangering of his soul. Likewise, he who comes before the church of God to declare himself a Christian and to take a Christian’s vows, who misunderstands, disesteems or calls into question the offices and work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration does equally peril his eternal interests.

Should the examination of the following pages persuade in any who profess religion, a spirit of inquiry, a review of their religious course, self-examination, and the correction of mistaken views relative to the work of grace and its Author, and if any perplexed and trembling Christian shall be relieved, established, comforted, in being drawn to Christ, it will not be in vain that the venerable author, in its republication, has broken the silence of more than a hundred years to speak again to the children of God, the heirs of salvation.
It is respectfully suggested to ministers of the gospel that they consider the methods of instruction and counsel exemplified in this book, these methods being too rare in this present day. Should not ministers, to whom Christ has said, “Feed my sheep, feed my lambs,” cultivate that relationship with the members of their churches and take interest in their spiritual condition which will better prepare them to understand their religious trials, perplexities and conflicts? And more wisely and successfully to administer for their comfort and establishment in the hope which is in Christ Jesus? Some of the most interesting and profitable labors of the pastor will be found in such duties. It is good, then, to be laborers together with Christ, in “comforting those that mourn in Zion.”

E. W. Hooker
Theological Institute of Connecticut
East Windsor, February 1845
Chapter 1

Hindrances in Coming to Christ

There are many obstacles that hinder poor Christians from drawing close to Christ, but I will begin by addressing those barriers that really keep men from savingly coming to take hold of Christ at all, which I desire to reduce to the following:

First, there is a blind, careless, or presumptuous security. Men are content with their present condition, presuming that all is well with them, when there is no biblical reason for their belief.

Convinced of this, they think to save themselves by their own strength, and set upon a reformation of life. They imagine that they can make amends with God by reforming some sins for which the minister rebukes them.
The sinner who is convinced of his own utter inability to please God at last reaches up a little higher and sees that all his performances, prayers, and duties have no power in themselves. He sees that he must leave all and cleave only to Christ by faith, and he thinks he can do this well enough in his own power and so thrusts himself upon Christ, thinking all the work is then done and needs no more attention. If he sees that this fails him too, then he goes still further and confesses that he cannot come to Christ, except that Christ gives him His hand and helps him up. He now, therefore, begins attending to the ordinances, and labors and stirs himself hard in the use of all good means, conceiving in this manner to hammer out, at last, a faith of his own to make him happy. And here he rests, hanging, as it were, upon the outside of the ark for so long, until at last, with the waves and winds growing fierce and violent, he is beaten off and so sinks forever.

Besides these, there are other kinds of barriers which do not indeed deprive a man of a claim and interest to eternal happiness but make the way tedious and uncomfortable, so that the true believer cannot draw near to Christ so readily as he desires and longs to do. The reason is that men, out of worldly thinking, manufacture other ways to come to Christ other than that which He ever ordained or revealed. We set up our standards alongside God’s standards or our threshold alongside His (Ezek. 43:8), and out of our own imagination we make another state of believing other than that which Christ ever required or ordained. It is
no wonder that we come short of Him. For in this way we bar our path, handcuff our hands and fetter our feet, and then say that we cannot take hold or go to Him. So it is with you poor Christians, and the fault is your own.

Among many gracious hearts there are several surprising barriers that keep them from drawing close to Christ and keep them from receiving that comfort which He is willing to impart to them. I will address some of these hindrances in this chapter and the remainder in the next.

First, the distressed soul, being, so it seems, truly humbled, takes notice of the beauty of holiness and the image of God stamped on the hearts of His children and of all those precious promises which God has made to all that are His. Now the soul, seeing these, begins to reason with itself in this way, saying, “Surely if I were so holy and so gracious, then I might have hope to receive the pardon of my sins; or if my heart were so moved to perform Christian duties and, if my heart could be so carried with power against my inward corruptions to master them, then there would be some hope. But when I have no power against sin nor have any heart to seek so persistently for Christ, how can I dare to think that any mercy belongs to me, lacking these as I do?” In this way they do not dare to come to the promise of God, and they will not venture upon it, because they do not have that growing desire to perform duties and that power against corruption that the saints of God sometimes have.

But we must understand that this does not hinder us and that we make this out to be an obstacle when, in
truth, it is not. We must not think that we should bring our heart’s desire and hope to the promise, but we must go to the promise to obtain them. Hope must be stirred, and desire quickened, and love and joy kindled by the promise. But who made it a condition of the covenant that a man must have so much desire before he can come to the promise? Our Savior, being our husband, requires no portion to be with us nor did He ever look for any in us. All that He looks for is mere poverty and emptiness. If you have nothing, He will yet have you with your nothing, provided that you will have Him. Therefore it is written, the rich He sends away empty, but the poor He satisfies, and the thirsty He refreshes with good. And so, as this is the case, there is nothing required on our side but to receive Him as husband. For, buy without money, says the text. You must not come and think to buy a husband. The Lord looks for no power or sufficiency within you, in and of yourselves, nor in yourselves any power against corruption or desire unto duties. If you will simply be content that Christ will take all from you and do with you as He will, then take a Savior, and you will have Him.

But the poor soul says, “If I continue in this way, might I be only deceiving myself? How will I know that I do not presume, and how will I know that I have a true claim to the promise?”

I answer: there is no better argument in the world to prove that you have an interest in Christ than this, that you take the Lord Jesus Christ as a Savior wholly and as a husband only. John 1:12 says, “But to