

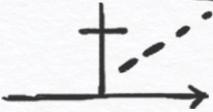
HUMANITY



DIVINITY

JESUS

ATONEMENT



REDEMPTION

DEPRAVITY

[ME]

--- NEW CREATIONS 

CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS FOR

THE HEAD AND THE HEART

JOHN S. DICKERSON

“Most Christians would tell you they believe the Bible to be God’s Word. And yet many of those same Christians could not even articulate what the core beliefs are to the Christian faith. In *Jesus Loves Me*, John Dickerson does a great job of helping believers understand the basic teachings of Scripture. This is a great resource for any Christian who needs to build a stronger foundation to their faith.”

Steve Poe, lead pastor of Northview Church, Carmel, Indiana

Praise for *Jesus Skeptic*

“*Jesus Skeptic* is a different kind of book. It examines the positive social impact of those who believe in Jesus. That impact is widespread and far greater than most people realize. Moving from one area to another, Dickerson documents that influence and then looks deeper into what and who is behind it. This is a fascinating read that may just surprise you.”

Dr. Darrell L. Bock, *New York Times* bestselling author
and senior research professor of New Testament studies
at Dallas Theological Seminary

“My hometown of Portland, Oregon, is filled with wonderful people, especially millennials, who gravely misunderstand who Jesus is and have little understanding of the ways his followers are making our city and the world a better place. My friend John S. Dickerson has written a much-needed book to help alleviate that! The story of the church, of the community of people filled by the Spirit of Jesus for more than two thousand years, is a story of radical love and justice that has shaped education and healthcare, catapulted scientific inquiry, helped to abolish slavery, and led the way in protecting human rights. Understanding this impact can encourage wavering believers and soften the hearts of many skeptics.”

Kevin Palau, president of the Luis Palau Association

“As with his other work, Dickerson’s words are extremely insightful and relevant.”

Dr. Jim Denison, CEO of Denison Forum
and author of *How Does God See America?*

“This generation isn’t simply asking, ‘Is Christianity true?’ They want to know, ‘Is Christianity good? Does the faith actually promote human rights, alleviate suffering, and enable humanity to flourish?’ In *Jesus Skeptic*, John Dickerson provides a compelling answer to these pressing questions. He leads readers on a lively tour through the ancient world, demonstrating Christianity’s positive impact at key moments in history. This book is a remarkable accomplishment.

John Dickerson, *Jesus Loves Me*

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It is sweeping in scope yet deeply personal. Dickerson, a reporter and pastor, reveals Christianity’s impact on history—then zooms in to explore what Christ means for each person. The evidence Dickerson offers will enlighten believers and non-believers alike. In the introduction, he writes that skeptics ‘are safe here.’ That’s true—but their skepticism is definitely in danger.”

Drew Dyck, contributing editor at CTPastors.com
and author of *Your Future Self Will Thank You*

“Only John Dickerson could so artfully weave history, politics, pop culture, and personal stories in a way that is both educational and entertaining. As a devout agnostic, I thoroughly enjoyed learning about a different perspective—presented in a thoughtful, engaging, and enlightening way.”

Amy Silverman, award-winning journalist, editor,
and author of *My Heart Can’t Even Believe It*

“Many scholarly works make points and arguments for Christ and Christianity similar to those John Dickerson makes here; however, his book seems more readable and engaging than most. The length seems ideal for the book’s intended audience—not so short as to appear inconsequential, yet not so lengthy as to be uninviting. It is well worth reading!”

Dr. Hugh Ross, astronomer, pastor, and president of Reasons to Believe

“My good friend John S. Dickerson has unearthed his biggest story ever as an investigative reporter. *Jesus Skeptic* is an eye-opening and desperately needed resource in a world of revisionist history. Honest skeptics as well as parents and pastors will find facts—not opinions—to answer their most challenging questions about Jesus’s life, teaching, and impact in history. I highly recommend this book.”

Chip Ingram, author of *Why I Believe* and teaching pastor
at Living on the Edge

“More than ever we need an articulate and detailed study of the importance and impact of the Christian faith that is not charged with emotions but is loaded with evidence. I am pleased to recommend John’s work to you, knowing that it will surprise you and draw you into the greater narrative of God’s unfolding mission within history. If you are a skeptic, this book is especially for you, and John’s arguments and research will intrigue you and invite you further into dialogue with history’s most significant person, Jesus.”

Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Billy Graham Center

JESUS
LOVES
{ME}

JESUS

LOVES

ME

CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS FOR

THE HEAD AND THE HEART

JOHN S. DICKERSON



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IF YOU HOLD TO MY TEACHING,
YOU ARE REALLY MY DISCIPLES.
THEN YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH,
AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE.

JOHN 8:31-32

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WHY SHOULD YOU READ THIS BOOK?

If I want to experience God's power and salvation, what do I need to believe? If I respect Jesus, does it really matter what I believe?

This book answers these questions and helps you know what you believe as a follower of Jesus. It's a primer on basic Christian beliefs. Read it to completion, and you will know how to access the power of God. You will learn the essentials any person or church must hold in order to experience Jesus on His terms.

Let's begin by answering this question: *Do the basic beliefs really matter?*

Yes.

These essential beliefs are a matter of life and death.

Here's a fascinating true story that demonstrates why you must know what you believe.

My friend Ralph serves as a fire chief in Arizona. One day Ralph was driving in his pickup when he heard an emergency call on his firefighter radio. The 911 operator was sending out a distress call; an infant had stopped breathing.

A baby had been left in a hot car at a gas station. The Arizona sun had baked the parked car, raising its interior temperature to 120+ degrees. By the time the child's mom realized she had left her baby in the car, the little girl was unresponsive, moments away from death.

Ralph listened, waiting to hear the address of the gas station where the accident occurred. When the street name was given, Ralph realized he was only two blocks away. He could get to this dying child faster than any fire crew in town.

He hit the brakes, did a quick U-turn, floored the accelerator, and sped toward the gas station where a terrified young mom was cradling her lifeless infant.

When Ralph got to the scene, he jumped out of his truck. With the speed of a trained professional, he scooped the baby away from the mom, who was screaming and crying uncontrollably.

Ralph knew exactly what to do. He shouted for people to go inside and get ice to cool the baby's body temperature, then immediately began CPR on the tiny infant who was cradled in his two hands.

If you ever take a CPR class, you will learn that CPR rescue breaths, also known as mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, work differently with a small child. On an adult, you plug the person's nose with your hand and place your mouth over their mouth. On a small child, though, you put your mouth over the child's entire nose and mouth together. This way the rescue breaths can quickly fill the tiny lungs.

As Ralph breathed into the lifeless child's mouth and nose, he watched as his own breath entered her lungs. He could see the baby's chest rise up, now filled with the breath from his own lungs.

After giving the right number of breaths, Ralph started to give the accompanying small pushes on the chest to restart that baby's tiny heart.

You've likely seen how doctors or paramedics on TV push down on an adult's chest during CPR, with full-force compressions,

using both hands and straight arms. It's different with a little baby. Because the heart is so small and the body so fragile, you just use two fingers to firmly press into the sternum, or chest bone, to restart the unmoving heart. An infant's heart is so little and beats so fast that these rapid, miniature compressions work best.

Ralph was giving those rapid compressions with his two fingers on the baby's chest. He was breathing those short breaths into those tiny lungs, and all along Ralph was wondering, *Is this little girl going to live or not? Did I get here fast enough?* As a believer in Jesus, Ralph was praying for God's help and intervention, even while he did everything in his own power to resuscitate the child.

Ralph then experienced the most unbelievable moment—an incredible sensation few others have experienced. He had his mouth on this baby's face, and he was praying, timing his breathing, and doing everything he could to save the infant's life.

Then—after he exhaled once again—Ralph felt the baby breathe back out.

What a moment. The baby began gasping and crying, breathing and living. Her heart, not moving just moments ago, began beating. The little girl opened her eyes.

Ralph continued holding the baby, monitoring her and calming her down as much as possible. He continued to watch closely. That day, he breathed life back into a baby who was otherwise dead.

It's an incredible true story. And it's a picture of what God did when He came to earth. You see, God's Word describes that, before we believe in Jesus, we are spiritually dead in our mistakes and sins. God came into this earth to breathe life into us. Just like Ralph raced to that gas station to save that infant, God raced into our world, in the person of Jesus, to save us.

This is why Jesus declared: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Jesus came to breathe life into our souls. He came to breathe eternal life into us, so that we can be with God in heaven after we leave this earth.

He came to breathe this life into all who will believe and receive His free gift of salvation.

Wherever we are dead in our wrongdoings, Jesus races into our world to breathe life back into us. All humans—of all religions, beliefs, and backgrounds—ultimately long for the relationship Jesus offers. We long to be spiritually raised to life, to be reconnected to our Creator, and to live with Him in a place where there will be no death, no pain, no suffering. This is what Jesus came to earth to accomplish.

When my friend Ralph performed CPR on that infant, it was something that only a human could do. No existing machine or robot could have swooped in and saved that baby's life. It took human lips to connect to a human face. It took human lungs to breathe human breath into those smaller, lifeless lungs. It took a human hand to do those little compressions on a human chest, coaxing a tiny heart back to life. And in the same way, to rescue us from the disorder of sin, God had to become human like you and me.

Jesus is fully human, without sin, and Jesus is fully God.

Jesus chose to humble Himself and take human form. Then He chose to further humble Himself and take upon Himself the consequences of our wrongdoings. This is what Jesus did at the cross; He performed our spiritual rescue. This is why the cross is the center of Christianity. At the cross, Jesus performed spiritual CPR, and now His new life is freely available to anyone who will believe in Him as the Messiah, or Savior.

Jesus willingly became human, leaving heaven, in order to rescue us.¹

As Christians, this is the Jesus we believe in—not merely a good person named Jesus or an idea named Jesus or even an inspiring teacher named Jesus. We believe in the Jesus who is God in a human body, the Messiah who died on the cross for the sins of the world and rose from the dead.

Now, here is the purpose of this book. While most Christians today would say, “Yes, I agree with that statement,” I am concerned that fewer and fewer can actually declare the central beliefs required to connect us to God’s lifegiving power. This book will help you answer the question, *What do I believe as a Christian?*

We live in a culture where many people define Jesus by their own opinion. In their mind, they make Jesus whatever they want Him to be. But Jesus does not allow for this. We must define Jesus by *His* terms and accept Him by those terms if we want His lifegiving power and salvation. The essential Christian beliefs are unchanging truths that have never been more important. They are the terms by which we receive Jesus’s forgiveness and life. These terms were dictated by God, not by humans. They do not change, and they can be understood by all of us.

Aligning our beliefs with Jesus is not just about “being right.” It is about being *rightly connected* to God and His lifegiving power, in both this life and the next.

Underneath every sturdy house, an unseen foundation upholds the weight of the entire structure. This book lays such foundational beliefs for our Christian faith. Miss one of these essential beliefs and your house of faith will sag or even collapse.

More positively, place these essential Christian teachings at the base of your faith, and you will be able to see God build a life of stability and craftsmanship. God’s Word defines these basic truths. This book helps you inspect the foundation of what you believe as a Christian—so you can build a life of great faith.

Just like that infant girl gasping, inhaling, and coming to life, our initial faith in Christ begins miraculously. We inhale God’s lifegiving power during a supernatural moment when God breathes into our souls and opens our eyes, and we respond by choosing to believe in Jesus.

We do not need to read a book to receive salvation, be raised to spiritual life, and be adopted into the family of God. But where do we go from there? That lifeless baby was given the gift of life

for a purpose. My friend Ralph wanted her to grow up, be healthy, and experience a full life. God wants the same for us. God wants us to be growing as Christians.

How do we grow up into our salvation?

We grow by believing what God says in His Word and then by obeying it. It is a simple daily process. Believe-obey. Believe-obey. Believe-obey. Just as children grow by eating and moving, we grow by believing and obeying. Day after day.

In the Bible, God speaks of believers growing like babies. We begin by feeding on the sweet milk, the easy truths of God and simplest beliefs. As we mature, we are able to chew solid food, which enables more growth.²

Many books and churches describe the steps of obedience that help us grow, things like praying, reading God’s Word, gathering with other believers, serving, and so forth. Our focus in this book is the “believe” half of that believe-obey growth process. We are answering the question, *What must I believe to be a growing Christian?*

This book is “solid food” from God’s Word, prepared so believers of all ages can enjoy it. My prayer for new and young Christians is that you finish this book well fed and more confident about what you believe. For longtime believers, I pray this book is a Thanksgiving dinner to your soul—something you’ve tasted before, but how enjoyable it is to experience it again!

This direct declaration of our basic beliefs, arranged so simply, has been refreshing for me. I’m a chef who has been snacking while preparing this meal, and it has ministered to me. What follows is a six-course meal for your soul and mind.

So, welcome to the table. Don’t worry about spilling or staining the tablecloth. Just focus on getting God’s truth into your soul. Savor the flavors. Enjoy the meal.

May we all finish this meal more in love with Christ, more confident about what we believe, and more strengthened to obey our good God. He alone breathes life into our lungs. He alone gives life.

WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL?

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

John 8:31

Visualize a car you have driven or ridden in lately. It has many thousands of parts. Of these, some are essential and others are not. That car could function without windshield wipers. It could function without headlights or a radio. Those components are not essential, but if you remove the engine, the car will not be driven anywhere. In this book we are learning the “engine truths” of Christianity.

The Essentials Matter

What are the essentials? *The essentials are the basic teachings of Christ. Remove one of them, and the house of Christianity falls down.*

Why do these essentials matter?

If you lose one of these essentials, you lose the power of Christ to transform you. If a church loses one of these essentials, it will

lose God's saving power to transform its people and community. Churches that lose the essentials stall out, having lost their spiritual engines.

Who defines these essentials?

The Word of God defines these essentials. I did not invent them, though I did design this book to make them understandable and memorable for you. As you learn the basic essentials, you will find that Scripture is the backbone for these beliefs.

Why should we care to know the basic beliefs of Christianity?

Each day, an unseen war is being waged for our souls. This war between good and evil is fought in the realm of ideas. You and I are bombarded with hundreds of social media posts, videos, and opinions. In this storm of ideas, our basic Christian beliefs can become buried or blurry. This book is a weapon to empower you to fight for clarity about your beliefs.

Jesus teaches that precise beliefs lead to heaven or to hell. He also teaches that your beliefs will lead you to a life of supernatural power or to a life of stumbling in the dark.

We need accurate beliefs about Jesus, just as much as that lifeless baby in the previous chapter needed CPR. According to Jesus, we access His life and His power by believing. *Believing what, exactly?* That is the question we'll answer in this book. Jesus taught specific things about Himself, about us, and about the world. Jesus was adamant that only those who "believe" will experience His power and salvation.¹

You don't need to study at seminary or be a pastor to know these "engine truths" of Christianity. All believers can know these. Here are eight reasons why you should read this book and clarify your Christian beliefs.

1. Knowing these core beliefs will assure you that you are indeed a follower of Jesus.
2. You will be more confident as a Christian when you know what you believe.
3. These core beliefs will form a stable foundation of faith on which you can build a rich and vibrant life that glorifies God.
4. Learning your core beliefs is an obedient response to Jesus, who expects His followers to know what He taught in order to strive to obey those lessons.
5. God wants you to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind,” which happens when you shape your beliefs to His Word.²
6. These essential truths provide God’s power for your life.
7. When you know God’s big ideas, the Bible will begin to make more sense. For that matter, people and world events will begin to make more sense too.
8. Knowing these core beliefs will also help you identify pastors and churches that are accurately teaching God’s Word. This protects you from “false teachers,” who Jesus warned will be among us and will teach deceptive, dead-end ideas about Him.

Pluck an average American Christian out of a church and ask them, “What must I believe to become a Christian and have eternal life?” and some would struggle to answer. It’s not that they don’t love God. They just haven’t been taught what to say.

How about you; how would you answer?

If somebody handed you a blank sheet of paper and said, “I would like to know Christ and go to heaven. Please write down what I must believe to become a Christian,” what would you write?

Would you like to be able to answer that question with confidence?

Would you like a simple, accurate answer you can carry for the rest of your life?

This book gives you exactly that.

Twelve Words

There's an old story about a respected theologian.³ This world-famous seminary professor studied Jesus and Christianity for decades. His books influenced a generation of thinkers. One day, in a crowded lecture hall, a student asked the professor a question.

“If you had to summarize everything God wants us to know, how would you summarize it?”

The theologian paused, then answered in an unexpected way. He quoted twelve words from a well-known children's song: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Maybe you learned that song, “Jesus Loves Me,” as a child. Its simple opening line does indeed capture the essentials of Christianity:

Jesus / Loves / Me / This I know / For the Bible tells me so.

Christianity is that simple at its core, if we know what those words mean. For example,

What do we mean when we say “Jesus”?

What specifically does it mean that He “loves” me?

If Jesus loves me, does that mean that He doesn't care what I do or believe?

In the following sections of this book, we will answer these questions and more, working through the five phrases in the lyrical line. This process will give you a simple memory tool to carry the Christian essentials wherever you go. It will also help you clarify your beliefs in these five key areas, aligning your thinking with

Jesus's teaching and God's Word. By the end you will be equipped to confidently answer questions like:

Who am I—according to God?

What is the difference between someone who merely claims to be a Christian and someone who experiences the supernatural life Jesus described?

What are the beliefs I must hold to if I really want to follow Jesus?

Do I have to believe the Bible to be a growing Christian?

If we want to continually experience the power of God, then we must have a commanding grasp of these twelve simple words and what they mean according to God.

Knowing these engine truths will affirm your own power, identity, and security in Christ. Using the “Jesus Loves Me” line, you will be able to recall your beliefs quickly and easily. Whenever you wonder, *What do I believe?* or *Is that really what a Christian should do?*, you will know where to find the answers.

In such a busy world, do the essentials really matter? Yes.

Never has it been more important for Jesus's followers to know what they believe. This is of chief importance to Jesus. If it were not, He wouldn't have packed this into His final command, known as the Great Commission:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (Matthew 28:18–20)

Jesus's life plan for you and me includes “teaching . . . everything” that Jesus “commanded.” *How can we teach others what Jesus commanded if we ourselves do not have a commanding grasp of the basic beliefs?*

What Is an Essential?

Whether you are teaching your own soul, reminding yourself, or preparing to influence others toward Christ, let's reclaim the solid foundation of our faith in Christ.

P.S. You can invite a small group, Sunday school class, book club, or group of friends to journey through this book with you. Find free study questions, personal devotionals, and video messages that accompany this book at JohnSDickerson.com.

DEATH BY SCHOOL BUS

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.
Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 8:31–32

When I was fifteen years old, I took a “drivers education” class at Midland High School in Michigan. We students drove vehicles equipped with a second brake pedal, located where the instructor sat in the front passenger seat. This pedal, I would soon learn, was very important.

Most students in my drivers ed class didn’t pay a lot of attention. At fifteen and sixteen, we were more concerned with our latest zit or newest crush than with the confusing diagrams our instructor drew on the chalkboard.

I remember some of it, like the instructor telling us to hold our hands at the “10 and 2 o’clock positions” on the circle of the steering wheel.

But let me tell you one thing I will never forget about drivers ed. The story starts with an acne-faced fifteen-year-old driving on a public road. I was sitting in the back seat of the car. Our instructor was sitting in the passenger seat.

We were driving fast on a country road when we began approaching an intersection. This intersection had a two-way stop, meaning we had to stop but the vehicles crossing our path at fifty-five miles per hour did not.

A loaded school bus was trucking along toward this same intersection, going at least fifty-five miles per hour and headed straight for us. The school bus did not have a stop sign.

As we sped toward that intersection, the fifteen-year-old driving our vehicle failed to see the stop sign. He was going to drive us straight into the path of the speeding bus.

Thankfully, our instructor *did* see the stop sign. He slammed on the secondary brake pedal. Our car skidded to a stop, halting our forward movement just as the yellow school bus careened past our car. We were so close to it the breeze of the rushing bus shook our car side to side.

That instructor saved at least three lives that day: his, the student driver's, and mine.

It's been about twenty years since I took that drivers ed class. I don't remember any of the cute girls who were in the class. I've also forgotten many of the things that instructor taught us about lane changes and parallel parking. But I do remember the basics.

And I especially remember the importance of stopping at stop signs.

Stopping at stop signs is an *essential* of safe driving.

Christianity is similar. The Bible gives us hundreds of promises and principles. They all work if you obey them. They all matter. But don't let the size of the Bible overwhelm you.

We don't have to remember every word in the Bible to be a good Christian, yet there are a few essential truths we must never forget.

Just like safe driving depends on a few basics—stopping at stop signs, for example—there are a few basic things we must never forget if we want to follow Jesus, stay on His road, and experience His power in our lives.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the most important Christian basics are captured in the short first line of “Jesus Loves Me.” Think of it this way:

“Jesus”	What I believe about Jesus
“Loves”	What I believe about God’s love, proven on the cross
“Me”	What I believe about myself
“This I know”	What I believe to be sure of my salvation
“For the Bible tells me so”	What I believe about God’s standard for my life

Like putting your foot on the brake when approaching a stop sign, these are simple but important basics.

Parts 1 through 5 will summarize God’s Word on these essentials. Each part relates to one of the five words or phrases above.

As a preview, here are some conclusions we will see. Each conclusion is a simple, concentrated statement that reflects the most important Scriptures on that topic.

JESUS

Jesus is fully God and fully human, the Messiah.

LOVES

Jesus came into our world on a rescue mission. He died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead.

ME

Every human is both glorious—and ruined. We are made in the image of God but contaminated by sin. Where evil has corrupted us, Jesus can restore us into a “new creation.”

THIS I KNOW

We cannot earn salvation, but we must use our will to admit our need (repent), acknowledge Jesus as God, and believe in His work on the cross. After we receive salvation by faith, we express that belief in Jesus through baptism.

FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

We choose the Bible as the unchanging standard for all we do and believe because Jesus did. We must read and obey the Word of God to realize our identity in Christ.

What Is at Stake?

If my drivers ed instructor had not slammed on his brake pedal, we would have collided with the other vehicle. It turns out that stopping at stop signs is not a matter of personal opinion; it is a matter of life or death.

Imagine this. My drivers ed instructor saw that we were speeding to our death but chose not to step on his emergency brake. Instead, he looked at the fifteen-year-old student driver and said, “Well, my truth is that you should stop at the stop sign. But you have your truth, and I have my truth. If your truth is to keep going, then you do you. You have to follow your heart and be true to yourself.”

If my instructor had said those words, I would not be here today. Nope. The “Blue Bird” logo on the front of that yellow school bus would have been the last thing I saw on Planet Earth.

Jesus teaches that our beliefs are a matter of life and death

In one of the most famous verses of the Bible, John 3:16, Jesus says that “whoever *believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Notice how Jesus continues this theme of belief in verse 18. He says: “Whoever *believes* in him [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not *believe* stands condemned already because they have not *believed* in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

Those are strong words. In that one passage Jesus uses the word “believe” seven times.¹ In Jesus’s world, what a person believes determines where they will spend eternity.

Jesus says that a proper belief leads to life and a wrong belief leads to death. Whether or not you experience “eternal life” after this world depends on what you choose to believe in this world.

We have to decide for ourselves

When it comes to driving, you can paint your car whatever color you want. You can argue about turn signals and other details, but *you have to decide for yourself* if you will stop at the stop sign when a loaded school bus is charging your way. That is an essential of driving.

The same is true of your spiritual beliefs and faith. While other people may spend their lives never committing to a belief or claiming that your beliefs don’t matter, you must decide for your own soul what you do believe.

Even in this world, we can see extreme examples that prove the importance of what we believe. What people believe can lead them to suicide or to hope. Beliefs can lead a person to murder others or to live a life of service in helping others. Our beliefs shape our emotions, our decisions, our habits, our choices—and in the end, the very course of our lives.

For this reason God’s Word cautions each of us to “guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”² Our emotions and decisions in this life will be shaped by our beliefs. Our destination in the next life will also be determined by our beliefs.

Because He loves you, God says you should be protective about what you believe. Be intentional about what you believe. Filter the voices that tell you what to believe. Only allow into your heart those beliefs that align with Jesus and His teaching. This is for your own benefit and your own safety and well-being.

Jesus’s teachings lead to freedom and life. So much so that modern data and statistics show an increased life span and other benefits for people who follow Christ’s teachings.

What Is a Christian?

A Christian is a person who has chosen to believe what Christ says. The word “Christian” comes from the name Christ, a title that means “Messiah.” This is a title Jesus claimed for Himself. If I call myself a Christian, then I strive to accept Christ’s commands for my life.

Christ put it this way: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32).

A sincere Christian strives to believe what Christ says about sin, about self, about God, and about the world. None of us live Christ’s teachings perfectly, but a genuine believer is a person who chooses to believe and obey.

Today, many people prefer the term “follower of Jesus” to “Christian.” And this same principle applies for all who claim to be followers of Jesus. The word “follower” is a literal translation of the word “disciple” in John 8:31 above. If we really follow Jesus, then we will do our best to know and do what He said. This is not about being perfect but about making a consistent choice to follow Him.

I cannot encourage you enough that you *are* following Jesus by confirming your faith in Christ and finding Christian resources like this one. By doing so, you are studying and learning to make sure your foundational beliefs are aligned to His Word. Way to go! The God who promised to never leave you nor forsake you is with you on this journey (Hebrews 13:5). He is pleased when you bring your mind and life to Him as an act of worship.³ As the psalmist once prayed, we are saying to God, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14 NLT).

Where you have a desire to fulfill God’s plan for you, God is pleased.

Throughout this book you will find prayers to help you connect with God. Right now, you might call out to God and pray these simple words:

Jesus,

I do believe in You, and I do want to hold to Your teachings in every area of my life. Open my eyes and my heart on this journey. Help me absorb these truths from Your Word. I want my thinking to be transformed. Please shape my thoughts and beliefs, so I live the life You've planned for me. Help me see myself and my world as You want me to. Help me see You as You are. Help me believe what You want me to believe. Amen.

Your Key Ring

Do you have a key ring? What does it look like? Some people's key rings are slim and serious, with only the keys they need on a metal ring. Other people bedazzle their key rings with extras: carabiners, lanyards, membership cards, mascots, logos, even stuffed animals.

No matter how simple or bedazzled your key ring is, the beauty of a key ring is that it allows you to carry multiple keys around with you—and to do so easily.

Just like we can take all of our important keys anywhere with the use of a key ring, every follower of Jesus can also carry the basic Christian beliefs wherever they go. You don't need to be a pastor to know what you believe. And while it's great to have a Bible with you, you can know these simplest beliefs by heart.

Remember the line from "Jesus Loves Me"?

"Jesus"

"Loves"

"Me"

"This I know"

"For the Bible tells me so"

Each of these keys unlocks God's power and promises for specific areas of your life. You can think of them as the keys of Christianity. In the journey of this book, you will learn to use these keys to journey deeper into God's territory. In that sense, it's a bit of a road trip, an expedition to discover the contours and vistas of our faith.

So grab your keys and join me.

I'm not a perfect driver, but I promise not to pull out in front of any school buses.

Whatever God calls you to do, He will empower you toward that right action by His Holy Spirit. The choice you must make, just like the choice of learning to whistle or swim, is if you will seek “the moment” and embrace this new way of Spirit-powered living.

This moment will happen when you look to the Spirit in your dead ends of frustration. Like other learned skills, we learn, one dead end at a time, to invite the Spirit to strengthen us where we are unable.

Where are you powerless?

Powerless to be faithful?

Powerless to do some right thing?

Or powerless to not do some wrong thing?

Whatever your dead end of frustration, call out to God now. Ask specifically for His Spirit to be unleashed in that area of your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you in God’s paths for your life.

Just like He empowered those first 120 Christians.

Just like He empowered David.

Just like He empowered Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is alive and moving today. He is a rushing current. A raging rapid. An irresistible force. He is carrying nations and eras into God’s eternal purposes. You’ve heard the rush of the waterfall. You’ve read the stories.

Time to step into the current.

Here is a prayer to help you express your desire to fully experience God’s Holy Spirit in your life.

Almighty God,

You see the areas of my life where I lack the power to do Your work. You see the areas of my life where I lack peace. You see the areas of my life where I lack the comfort that Jesus promised from “the Comforter,” the Holy Spirit.

Today I want to experience the power, peace, and presence of Your Spirit. I ask that You open my eyes and open

my heart. I desire to live a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life, as You describe in Your Word. I desire to see Your Spirit work powerfully in me and through me, just as You promised in Acts 1. I desire to experience the comfort and guidance of Your Spirit, as Jesus promised in John 16. Lord, I am Your servant and Your child. Thank You for giving me a power source, a source of peace and purpose in Your Spirit. Please forgive me if I have stifled or grieved Your Spirit in any way, and please teach me to walk in the fullness, freedom, and joy that You desire for me through the gift of You living in me, in the person of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Power to Solve Your Greatest Problems

Does It Really Matter If I Get
the Christian Beliefs Right?

The word “gospel” found in Romans 1:16 encapsulates the Christian essentials we have learned in this book.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16)

In our journey we have learned precisely what a person must believe in order to experience “the power of God that brings salvation.” This power of God is freely available “to everyone who believes.”

God has entrusted to you this power to change the world. As a believer in Christ, you stand shoulder to shoulder with believers like the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Paul the apostle, and hundreds of history’s other greatest leaders who believed these same Christian essentials.

Don't let anyone make you think that being a Christian is weak or irrelevant. It wasn't weak or irrelevant for Dr. King, it wasn't weak or irrelevant for the Christians who fought to end slavery in the United States, and it sure wasn't weak or irrelevant for those early Christians in the book of Acts. Their obedience changed the course of world history.

In Christ, we have the very power of God that brings salvation.

Christians from different backgrounds, traditions, or cultures may disagree about matters of worship, personal life, or politics, but these basic essentials unite all true followers of Christ. We cling to these essential Christian beliefs, knowing that if we lose them, we lose the power of God that brings salvation.

Like the European power plug I described earlier in this book, these Christian essentials are the prongs that plug us into the power grid of the universe, almighty God.

Before I was a pastor I worked as a full-time journalist. Like many of my colleagues in the news industry, I investigated stories that had a common theme: the world's great problems. Whether the problem was drug addiction, crime, injustice, or violence, my job was to document humanity's problems and solutions.

During my early years as a journalist I began to seriously investigate Jesus. I began seeing that sincere followers of Jesus—transformed by His gospel—were often at the forefront of humanity's great needs, where I would see them serving and helping others.

I began attending Scottsdale Bible Church in Arizona. Once a month I would pile into an SUV with other young professionals from the church, and we would drive from Arizona down to Mexico. Within a number of hours, we would journey from one of the wealthiest cities in Arizona to one of the poorest slums in Mexico. There, in a village built atop an old garbage dump, I saw Christians from various churches working together to build homes for the poor.

The more I studied Jesus, His message, and His followers, the more I became convinced that Jesus's message is not only the power for individual salvation but also the greatest power for human good. I saw firsthand that Christians were starting orphanages, feeding the hungry, and working for the justice of the oppressed. I met Christians making laws in state capitals and feeding the hungry in urban ghettos.

As I grew more passionate about this, some of my non-Christian news colleagues would tease me. My zeal was making me look like a religious nutcase. These were highly educated intellectuals, and my uninhibited passion for Jesus sounded foolish to them.

It didn't matter though. I was experiencing Jesus's ability to transform me. In my church small group, I was seeing Jesus transform real people. I imagined what a society could look like if all its people experienced this heart transformation from Jesus. Such a society would not need locks or courts or prisons. It would be the kingdom Jesus described and promised in the Gospels.

God was growing my love for this gospel of Jesus. It is indeed the greatest news for humanity, and we should carry it with urgency. We have the solution to the problems everyone else is trying to solve.

One time, at a national journalism awards presentation, a national TV news anchor asked me why I would leave a promising career in journalism to become a pastor. As I answered, God brought Romans 1:16 to my mind:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

That word, "gospel," literally means "the good news." I was leaving this world's news business so that I could give my life to proclaim the greatest good news ever known to humanity.

Ten years later I am still not ashamed of this good news I am experiencing. *Why not?* Because this message about Jesus is not

just another belief system. It is not just one religion in a buffet of world religions. No, it is actually the power of God, and I've experienced it.

Christianity according to Christ is the power of God *that brings salvation*. That is, it brings deliverance from our own broken habits and addictions. It restores our relationship to God and creates a pathway for restored relationships with others. It brings eternal life.

Christianity according to Christ sets us free from the fear of death. One of my favorite Scriptures declares:

Since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14–15)

Because of the truths discussed in this book, we no longer live under the fear of death. We know that eternal life is ours through Christ's work on the cross.

Christ's message is the power to change our world and ourselves for the better.

You are now equipped to confidently know and carry this message with you everywhere you go. God's nature and His Word are as vast as the galaxies He created, but the foundational truths of Christianity are not complicated.

As you carry the essential truths of Christianity with you, I want to encourage you that God has called you to be a world changer. He has a job for you in bringing about His kingdom. He has "good works," which He prepared in advance for you to do (see Ephesians 2:10).

Your "good works" today could be giving someone a cup of water in Jesus's name or representing Christ in a courtroom or classroom. Your faithful obedience to the precise good works God has set out for you will bring about the kingdom of Christ.

Earlier I mentioned Martin Luther King Jr., who is one of my personal heroes. Dr. King is undoubtedly one of the greatest humanitarians and champions of civil rights in all of history. In his lifetime, he was called “Reverend” Martin Luther King Jr.

Read Dr. King’s writings. Listen to his recorded sermons, and you will find that the teachings of Jesus run through them like steel beams, undergirding the way Dr. King viewed himself, the world, and society at large.

He held to the Christian essentials we have learned in this book. And it was this view of God and humanity that empowered him to be so fearless in his fight for human equality and human rights as God defines them.

The world is a better place because of the work of Jesus’s words and teachings in and through Martin Luther King Jr. And he is not a rarity among sincere followers of Jesus. Millions of Jesus’s followers have improved humanity in widespread ways that still benefit us today—people like Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and so many others who were shaped and motivated by the essential Christian beliefs.¹

The beliefs we have learned in this book have led sincere Christians to create schools, orphanages, hospitals, social welfare systems, and human rights laws that did not exist before Christianity.

Christianity is not just a theory. Yes, it leads to eternal life, but it also makes a real difference in our present lives and world.

Because we want the people we love to have freedom, we should pass these Christian essentials from generation to generation.

I want you to imagine a community where thousands of us are plugged into this power source of the universe. As the world gets darker and darker around us—darker in hatred, greed, and immorality—as people around us wrestle with addictions and sexual abuse and hundreds of other problems, we get to bring light and warmth to them. We get to bring powerful hope. We get to

travel through this broken world, not as walking theological dictionaries but as glowing lights in the darkness. Glowing because we are plugged into the Power Source.

We are able to love our neighbors. We are able to live free from selfishness and self-defeating vices. We are able to live free from death. We are able to model a life of power and purpose. We can display for our neighbors, our friends, our children, and our grandchildren that in Christ we have found “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16).

Father,

We are so thankful You injected Your power into this broken world as the Messiah. We believe You that we are now “the body” of the Messiah, placed here for a purpose: to continue bringing souls into Your kingdom.

Lord, give us a sense of purpose and courage as we carry Your gospel in this broken world. Help us to live lives that bring Your kingdom here on earth.

Keep us plugged into Your power to change our lives and change our world. Please show Your power to the people we love in our families, neighborhoods, and places of work or school. Please change the world through us, for Your glory.

Father, without Your power, we have no good thing. As the psalmist wrote in Psalm 19:14, may the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts, and the works of our hands be pleasing in Your sight. Empower us to accomplish Your purposes.

We have tasted and seen the power of the universe surging through us to change our thoughts, our relationships, and our lives. Please keep us plugged into Your power. Make us a people who are a bright light in this dark world.

We ask in Jesus’s name, Amen.

Key Scriptures on “The Power and Peace Jesus Promised”

Jesus promised that God’s Holy Spirit would live in His followers, encouraging us and empowering us in supernatural action. To experience God’s power we must live in step with His Spirit and be aligned with His Gospel.

Jesus promised His followers that the Spirit of God would help us live for Him.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another *advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth*. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for *he lives with you and will be in you*.
(John 14:16–17)

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit, living within us, will teach us how to follow Jesus in our time. The Spirit can also aid our minds and hearts in remembering God’s Word.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:26–27)

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit can be so powerful in our lives that it is actually better to have the Holy Spirit living within us than to have Jesus walking alongside us.

But very truly I tell you, *it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. . . . But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.* He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:7, 13)

Note: According to Jesus's own words, the Holy Spirit will never lead a believer or church to do anything that contradicts Jesus's words or the words of Scripture. Instead, true movements of the Spirit will empower Jesus's people to live out His words and the words of Scripture.

Just like Jesus, we should also be led by the Holy Spirit in our daily lives.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. (Romans 8:14)

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25)

Jesus promised that His followers would receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the connection to God's power in our lives.

But you will receive *power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.* (Acts 1:8)

The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. (Romans 8:26)

When a group of believers needs spiritual encouragement from God Himself, the Holy Spirit can provide it.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and *encouraged by the Holy Spirit*, it increased in numbers. (Acts 9:31)

The Holy Spirit empowers us to say no to old desires that are sinful and say yes to the work of God in our lives, empowered by Him.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:12–13)

Throughout Scripture, when the Spirit of God surfaces, there is power. We can claim this power to live for Jesus and do what is right whenever we need it.

I pray that out of his [God’s] glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. (Ephesians 3:16)

While the Holy Spirit can bring power, the power He brings is often in the daily emotions and interactions of our lives.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22–23)

CONCLUSION

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthians 4:7

On Jesus's final night with His disciples He did not give them a written quiz to test their mental recall of all He had taught them. The twelve men had been with Jesus for three years of lessons, miracles, teaching to thousands, and daily dialogue. Instead, Jesus grabbed a towel and began to wash the disciples' feet.

Almighty God used His human fingers to wipe manure, dust, and dirt from the toes of Judas, who would soon betray Him. He washed the arches, ankles, and heels of Peter, who would soon deny Him and fail Him in spectacular fashion.

As Jesus did this, He demonstrated the nature of God. He proved the theme of His entire ministry and incarnation on Planet Earth. Yes, precise beliefs connect a person to God, but that same God wants to capture our hearts and entire beings, not just our minds.

I subtitled this book "Christian Essentials for the Head *and the Heart*" because the Christian essentials grow cold and lifeless if we

only think about them in our heads. Seminaries turn to cemeteries and churches turn to empty, cold buildings when Christ's followers fail to carry the good news in our hearts as well as our heads.

We must hold these truths in our hearts and let them affect all we are and all we do.

Now that you have confirmed your basic beliefs as true facts, let me encourage you to carry them in your heart. Invite the love and grace of God to become the mortar between every brick of "belief" you have established. Invite the Holy Spirit to inject His passion and compassion into the way you see yourself and every human being.

As you and I do this, we will see ourselves daily as God does: glorious yet imperfect, but ever being restored by Christ the Redeemer. We will see the evil people, the sinful, the addicts, and the dishonest politicians as Jesus sees them: with compassion. They, too, are glorious ruins in need of restoration. And we exist on earth to broadcast the good news of Christ to them.

Scripture warns us that "knowledge puffs up," and God says the solution to this is that "love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1). If we ever carry our biblical understanding as a weapon to harm others rather than a tool to free them from sin and slavery, then we have become "puffed up."

If we become more concerned with proving others wrong than with helping them be made right through Christ, then we have become "puffed up."

The solution is not to forsake knowledge. It is to elevate love. This is why Jesus, in His incarnation, came to humanity "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). If we are to follow Him, we will be unflinchingly clear about the truth, even as we dirty our hands, bend on aching knees, and wash the feet of people who will betray us and fail us. "Grace and truth" intertwine intrinsically in the nature of our Messiah whom we follow and to whom the Holy Spirit empowers us to become more like each day.

In the opening text of this book, I mentioned how Christians and children are alike. Children grow by eating and exercising;

Christians grow by believing and obeying. This book focused largely on believing. But we cannot properly end this study of our basic beliefs without reminding ourselves that “belief” with Jesus always implies action—obedience. People act upon what they truly believe. So let us now go and live out what we have learned.

May we continue to grow in God’s truth as we continue to read His Word and engage with Him in our minds. And may we always *obey*. May we do and practice what Jesus says—a life of actionable grace. Grace is not merely a feeling or good intention. Grace shows in dirty water running down our forearms as we serve those around us. May we become “full of grace and truth” as our Messiah is.

Full of truth, may we carry our unchanging beliefs with courage and confidence, clinging to them even if we are mocked or belittled.

And at the same time, may we live out the words that Jesus taught as the foot-washing water softened the skin of His hands before His crucifixion, while He washed 120 toes belonging to His imperfect disciples. As Jesus washed those toes He showed and declared the heart of God, and He said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Almighty God,

You have given us the gift of truth in Your living Word and in the Word who was made flesh. Please shape our hearts to be like Yours—full of grace and truth.

Please strengthen us to become more like You in our thinking, in our believing, and in our obeying. We desire to follow You with our hearts as well as our minds, with our lives as well as our souls.

We desire to become more like You in every interaction, Jesus. Help us carry the Light of the World. Help us know You more each day. Help us experience You. Help us reach those You have called us to reach. Help us train up those You have called us to train. Amen.

POSTSCRIPT

You did it. You've strengthened and clarified your grasp on the essential Christian beliefs. Now you can recall these basic beliefs anytime, anywhere, using the simple lyric, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

The same God who created light to shine into the darkness of the universe has now made His light shine in our hearts by giving us the light of the knowledge of Christ.

In an age of clanging noises and opinions, we can know with clarity these Christian essentials, which are nonnegotiable and which connect us into the light and power of God.

At the start of this book, I described these basic beliefs as the foundation of a house, and now you've confirmed the sturdy foundation of your faith in Christ. You've claimed what you believe. Way to go!

On this foundation you can now build so much more as you continue to believe what the Word of God says and obey Jesus. I encourage you to continue seeking God daily by reading His Word in *The Life Application Study Bible*, which I described earlier in this book.

Postscript

I'd also be thrilled to encourage you daily. I text out a brief devotional video of Scriptural encouragement every day. You can begin receiving these messages by texting the word DAILY to 317-350-1996.

You can also connect with me on social media @JohnSDickerson.

If you'd like to get free study guides or learn about my other books, send an email to Friend@IAmStrongBook.com.

And finally, you can find small group videos and discussion questions for this book at JohnSDickerson.com.

Let's keep following our great God together.

NOTES

Why Should You Read This Book?

1. Philippians 2:5–8.
2. 1 Peter 2:1–12.

What Is an Essential?

1. John 3:16–18.
2. Romans 12:1–2.
3. I am paraphrasing a story reported to me by some friends who read an early draft of this book. I cannot attest to this story’s accuracy, but I have no reason to believe it is not true.

Death by School Bus

1. Most translations include “believe” and its variations seven times between John 3:12 and 18.
2. Proverbs 4:23.
3. Romans 12:1–2.

Chapter 2 The Messiah within the Trinity

1. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 231.
2. See John 3:16–18.

Chapter 4 Jesus Proves His Love with Actions

1. I wrote at length about the anxiety, pain, and suffering this produced in my book *I Am Strong: Finding God’s Peace and Strength in Life’s Darkest Moments*. If you want a free sample of that book, just send an email to Friend@IAMStrongBook.com.

Chapter 7 Glorious but Ruined

1. In a video at JohnSDickerson.com/media, I walk viewers through pictures of rusted junk. Each of those pictures looks like scrap metal. But each is actually a close-up of a classic “barn find” car that is a glorious ruin.

2. Hebrews 4:15.
3. See 2 Corinthians 5.
4. Philippians 1:6.
5. Philippians 1:6.

Chapter 8 Being Restored the Moment You Believe

1. See Titus 2:12.
2. See Galatians 5:1.
3. This is my paraphrase.
4. If you or someone you love is sick or living in a body that is falling apart, I encourage you to read or listen to my book *I Am Strong: Finding God's Peace and Strength in Life's Darkest Moments*. The audio is available on the Audible app, and the print book is available anywhere books are sold. *I Am Strong* details how we can continue choosing God, even as our bodies or emotions ache and flare with pain.

5. 1 Timothy 2:4.

Chapter 10 Knowing Your Salvation

1. Romans 5:8.
2. Colossians 2:14.
3. 1 John 2:2.
4. Matthew 19:24.

Chapter 11 Pictures of Your Salvation

1. I first told this same story, in more detail, in my book *I Am Strong*. This telling is a simplified reporting of the same documented events. In my years as a pastor and researcher, I have not found any better visual to demonstrate what Jesus did for us on the cross. I recommend *I Am Strong* for anyone who is facing sickness or discouragement.

2. Romans 5:12.

3. I am paraphrasing here not to put words in Jesus's mouth but rather to try to capture the essence of His many claims around this theme.

4. 1 Timothy 2:4.

5. I first told this story about Mickey in my book *The Great Evangelical Recession*. I recommend *The Great Evangelical Recession* for any ministry leaders, whether pastors and paid staff or volunteers. The book is designed to help boards, elders, deacons, and other leaders guide their ministries through the financial and cultural challenges that Christian ministries will face in the next decade.

6. See Romans 8, particularly the end of the chapter.

Chapter 13 Jesus's Standard for What You Believe

1. Hebrews 4:15.
2. For a more complete list of these brilliant Jesus followers who believed every Word of Scripture to be divinely inspired by God, see my book *Jesus Skeptic: A Journalist Explores the Credibility and Impact of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019).
3. See Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 3:16–17.
4. There are passages of Scripture that say exactly what to take off and what to put on (see Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 2).

Chapter 14 God's Love Letter to You

1. Psalm 1:3.

Chapter 16 The Holy Spirit

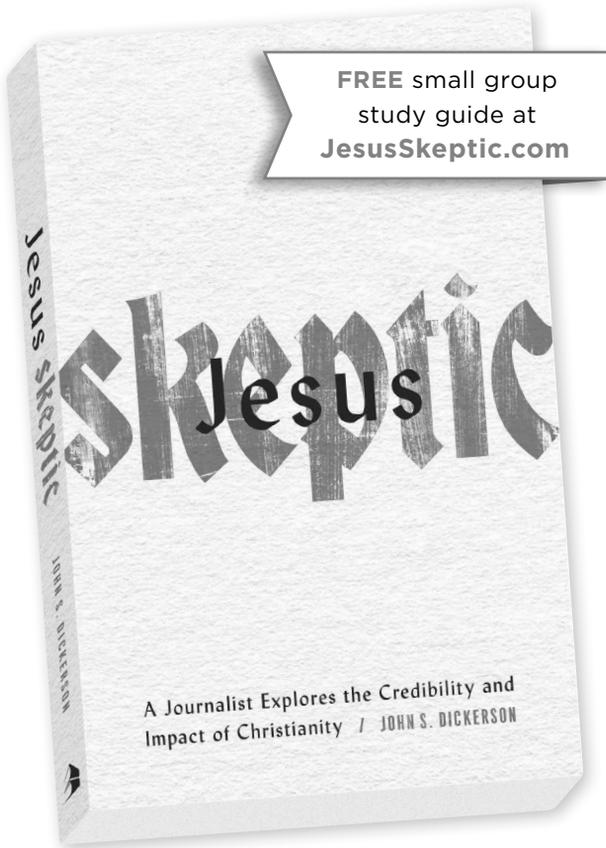
1. For the record, I deeply love this brother. Thank you, David and Julie, for paying for my first semester of seminary and being used by God to help me get a start in life. And, David, thank you also for popping up out of that water.
2. See Philippians 2.
3. See Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32.
4. See Mark 1:12.
5. See Acts 10:38.

Chapter 17 The Power to Solve Your Greatest Problems

1. In my book *Jesus Skeptic*, I show the actual journals and writings of these and many other well-known heroes who were motivated by their faith in Christ. Evidence reveals that Jesus's followers played crucial roles in launching the Scientific Revolution, creating modern education, eradicating disease, ending open slavery, and so much more.

John S. Dickerson is a seminary-trained pastor and bestselling author. He serves as lead pastor of Connection Pointe Christian Church in Indiana and online at www.ConnectionPointe.org. A recognized voice in American Christianity, he has spoken at some of the most influential churches and seminaries in the country. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times* and *USA Today*, and he earned the Livingston Award for Young Journalists, given by Tom Brokaw of NBC News and Christiane Amanpour of CNN and ABC News. Learn more at JohnSDickerson.com.

Can we know if Jesus actually lived?



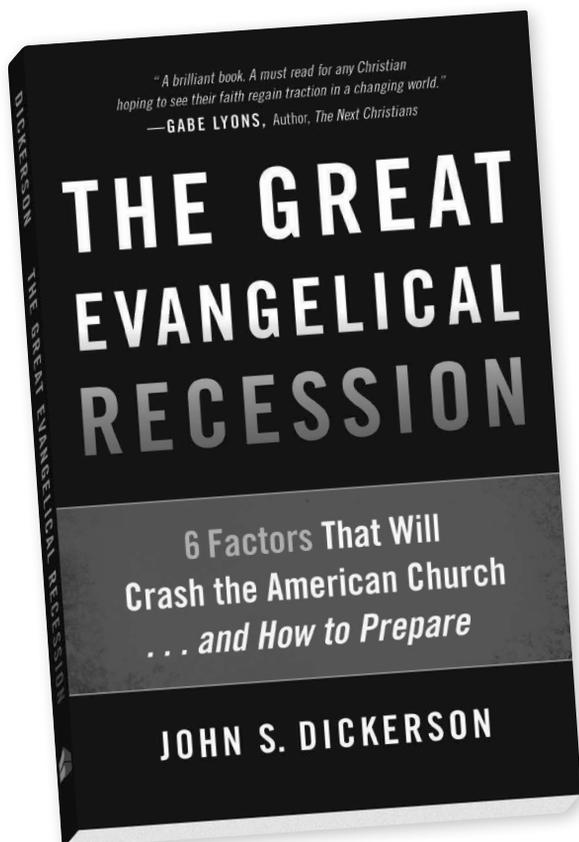
A first-of-its-kind book for a new generation, *Jesus Skeptic* takes nothing for granted as it explores whether Jesus actually lived and how his story has changed our world. In a generation that wants to make the world a better place, we can discover what humanity's greatest champions had in common: a Christian faith.

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JOHN S. DICKERSON



In *The Great Evangelical Recession*, award-winning journalist and pastor John S. Dickerson identifies six factors that are radically eroding the American church and offers biblical solutions to prepare us for spiritual success, even in the face of alarming trends.



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