

“From its opening pages, Dai Hankey’s *Hopeward* had my heart gazing at Jesus as my greatest need and greatest hope in the world. This book is gritty, powerful and rich with good news. I didn’t realise just how much I needed to read it. Dai writes as one who knows what it means to hold on to hope through the inevitable dark seasons of life. I thought often of the words of 17th-century pastor Thomas Watson, who wrote, ‘When God lays men upon their backs, then they look up to heaven.’ That is exactly what Dai does through each and every chapter. Here you will find not only the light of biblical theology but also the warmth of pastoral tenderness and personal experience. No matter where you are in your walk with Jesus, this is a book that will, I am confident, put fuel in your tank and rekindle fire in your heart.”

**ADAM RAMSEY**, Lead Pastor, Liberti Church, Gold Coast, Australia; Director, Acts 29 Asia Pacific; Author, *Truth on Fire* and *Faithfully Present*

“If you have come to the point of collapse, or you fear that you will soon fall or you dread that there is nothing left then Dai Hankey is writing for you. As well as for me. *Hopeward* is an honest, warm and kind book for Christians who are struggling to feel anything like hope. It is honest, warm and kind because that is how Dai writes, but more because he writes about Jesus. The deep and clear focus on how the Lord himself is all we need when we have nothing left will bring hope. This book will not bring you back to Christ, it will show how Christ comes to you, and brings you back to life.”

**JOHN HINDLEY**, Pastor, BroadGrace Church, Norfolk; Author, *Serving without Sinking* and *Refreshed: Devotions for Your Time Away*

“Dai, in his characteristically honest, vulnerable and raw style has put together a much needed ‘MOT’ for all those on the narrow path. New follower of Christ or old war horse—this is for you. We all need to stop and recalibrate. If you’re burned out, this is for you. If you’re doing great right now, this is for you. Each chapter also has some pithy questions you can look at in small groups or with your mates. Read, reflect and get on the front foot of God’s purposes for your life.”

**CARL BEECH**, CEO, Edge Ministries

“Full of the fresh air of grace, this book is like gospel rehab for the weary. Short and simple (in the best sense of the word!), and yet full of honest, heartwarming and healing truth, reading this will do your heart good.”

**LINDA ALLCOCK**, Author, *Deeper Still: Finding Clear Minds and Full Hearts through Biblical Meditation*

# HOPEWARD

DAI HANKEY

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*To Hodgey, Owens and Nick—  
the finest of friends through the toughest of times!*



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# THE HOPEWARD TRAJECTORY

RUN >>

WALK >>

GROW >>

FEAST >>

ABIDE >>

RECEIVE >>

COME >>



# WELCOME

I LAY IN A CRUMPLED HEAP  
NOT STRONG, BUT WEAK  
A PITIFUL MESS BUT BLESSED  
TO COLLAPSE AT THE MASTER'S FEET.

This is a book for weary pilgrims, discouraged disciples, broken-hearted believers and faltering followers of Jesus.

It's a book for the deflated and defeated.

For the done-in and the burned out.

It's for people who secretly want to quit—or who have already.

It's a book for doubters and sceptics whose minds are a frenzy of unresolved questions; it's for fearful friends whose hearts are crippled with anxiety; it's for prodigals, rebels and wretches who know exactly why their faith is in tatters but are not sure if there's a way back.

It's a book for people who are holding it together but feel like the string is about to snap.

And it's for people who are well past breaking point already: who find themselves in a crumpled heap with nothing left to give and nowhere left to turn.

People like me.

The truth is that this book is written as much for myself as it is for anyone else. Or to put it another way: this is not a sermon—this is my story.

This is the testimony of a broken man who recently, and not for the first time, found himself down-and-out—a pitiful mess in deep distress. Please believe me when I say that I have had to navigate many dark days when I didn't know how to carry on. I felt like a spent force with a faith that barely flickered. The future was a terrifying fog of chaotic uncertainty.

Perhaps you can relate to some of that? Or maybe you're not there yet, but you can feel yourself slipping, sliding, slumping—and it's scaring you.

The reasons that drove me to that place of defeat are many and varied and will no doubt spill out in the pages that follow. But by God's grace I have lived to fight (and write) another day and it is my prayer that this book will help you to discover what, or rather *who*, pulled me through. The hero of this book is not me; it is my merciful Saviour—Jesus Christ. He saved (and continues to save) me and graciously put me on a hopeward pathway to recovery, restoration and renewal.

He can do the same for you too. So, if you're up for it, let's begin where I had to start: in a crumpled heap at the Master's feet...

# 1. COME TO JESUS

(He welcomes the weary)

MY TROUBLED SOUL WAS WEARY

MY HEART WAS COLD AND HEAVY

“COME, RECEIVE MY REST”

HE WHISPERED TO ME GENTLY.

*“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden,  
and I will give you rest.” (Jesus in Matthew 11:28)*

I’ve lost track of how many times over the years I’ve preached these words of Jesus to weary souls, scribbled them in cards for the burdened, and prayed them over the broken-hearted. Surely there are no sweeter words than these, spoken by the gentlest and most loving person who ever walked the earth—the Lord Jesus Christ. They have served me well as I have sought to encourage others through life’s darkest seasons, both as a pastor and a friend.

Yet if I’m honest, for most of my Christian life they were words that were great for other people—but not so much for me.

I was always more excited by some of Jesus’ other commands and exhortations. For example, his invitation to *“Follow me”* (Mark 2:14), given to working-class fishermen

and crooked tax collectors, was an offer that I could get on board with. It had a ring of adventure and divine purpose to it which really appealed to an adrenaline junkie like me. So when Jesus held that offer out to me as a good-for-nothing 15-year-old, I grabbed it with both hands.

I later learned that there was also a significant cost to following Jesus: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Now Jesus was not just calling me to follow him but to carry a cross while I did. Wow! This was the next level. Far from daunting me, this verse inspired me even more—it smacked of passionate sacrifice, and I’d seen enough movies to know that sacrifice was the greatest expression of love and also the best way to die. “Yeah, sign me up for adventure and sacrifice for King Jesus,” I thought. “Let’s go!”

And there was more...

As my love for Jesus deepened, I discovered what my “laid down” life should look like. I realised that following him required more than simply reading epic promises in my Bible and pouring my guts out in prayer (though those are great things to do). Prior to heading back to heaven, Jesus had left specific instructions for his people to obey:

*Go ... and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)*

More than mere sacrificial adventure, Jesus was sending us on a mission. And what a mission—a search and rescue operation that was global in scope and eternal in significance. And even better (for a gobby so-and-so like me) it involved opening my big mouth and telling other people about the same love that had transformed my life. Perfect!

Follow me on an adventure worth giving your life for. ✓

Go and change the world in my name. ✓

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. ✕

Nah, I didn't need verses like that last one—they were for weak Christians, not for the strong, sorted, spiritually courageous types like me.

I was happy to “go” for Jesus, but I really didn't feel the need to “come” to him.

Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”.

I was such a proud fool!

## **A CRUMPLED HEAP**

I can't really put my finger on exactly what happened or why...

Maybe it was the demands of ministry. My family and I had been living and serving for two decades in some of the toughest communities in South Wales. Perhaps it was an accumulation of the countless soul-crushing discouragements, disappointments, betrayals and rejection we had faced.

Maybe it was physical. Had the many years of destroying my body on a skateboard (and the multiple surgeries that followed) finally caught up with me?

Maybe it was emotional. Perhaps I had never really grieved properly after Mam died, or fully come to terms with the emotional fallout of my wife's recent bout of poor mental health.

Maybe it was spiritual. Preaching the gospel, planting churches and fighting modern slavery involve a level of brutal spiritual warfare that is easy to underestimate.

Maybe I'd been mugged by middle age.

Or maybe, like for so many other people, it was lockdown.

Like I said, I don't really know. It could have been all of the above or none of it, but a time came towards the end of 2020 when I broke. Strong, cocky, courageous Dai lay flat on his back staring obsessively at a crack in the ceiling. I was deaf to my wife's voice, numb to her touch, oblivious to a world beyond my shattered self. Frantic thoughts were ricocheting around my mind—furious one minute, panicking the next. Blaming others. Hating myself. Trying to work out how to fix it. Then how to quit. How to correct the skid. Then how to crash as hard as I could. What to do next. What all this meant for my family.

Flip...

Would my family not just be better off without me?

My wife certainly deserves better...

My church could do so much better...



And Jesus gave me a job to do—

He told me to go...

... but I've literally got *nothing* left to give.

I'm empty.

I'm out.

It's over.

### **AT THE MASTER'S FEET**

I am aware that my experience will not resonate with everyone reading this. Some of you will have equally extreme stories. Some even more so. Others, however, may have never found themselves in this place... yet. However, you often feel jaded and discouraged. Life feels like a relentless treadmill that just... won't... stop...

Whoever you are, and wherever you're at, it is my prayer that what you read in these pages will encourage you that a crumpled heap at the Master's feet is far from finished. I would even go so far as to say that it is only when we have come to Jesus and collapsed in exhaustion before him that we are able to start plumbing the true depths of his grace. The hymnwriter Annie Johnson Flint was right on the money when she wrote:

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*His love has no limit;  
His grace has no measure.  
His pow'r has no boundary known unto men;  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

At some point in the midst of my crumpling, God opened my eyes to a beautiful truth: that I was in very good company lying at the feet of Jesus. Indeed, the Gospels are full of men and women who found themselves in the exact same place:

- The leper knelt at Jesus' feet and was cleansed (Matthew 8:1-4).
- The demon-possessed man fell at Jesus' feet and was delivered (Mark 5:1-20).
- The sinful woman wept at Jesus' feet and was forgiven (Luke 7:36-50).
- Jairus bowed at Jesus' feet and his daughter was raised from death (Mark 5:21-43).
- The lame, blind, crippled and mute were laid at Jesus' feet and were all healed (Matthew 15:29-31).
- Mary sat at Jesus' feet and soaked up every wonderful word he spoke (Luke 10:39).

## **THE INVITATION**

It was here, wrecked at the feet of Jesus, as God tenderly crushed the pride out of me, that I was able to hear this gracious invitation with fresh ears for myself:

*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)*

And I was glad to respond.

These words are now some of the sweetest words to me in all of Scripture. They were strong, kind words that cut through the chaos of my turbulent mind and whispered grace and peace and hope to my weary soul when I really needed them.

There is so much that can and has been written about these words. (I would recommend Dane Ortlund's book *Gentle and Lowly* if you'd like to dig deeper.) My purpose in this chapter, however, is simply to introduce this invitation as the starting point of a hopeward journey that this book is going to take us on. And there are three things about this invitation that I particularly want us to consider.

#### **1. WHO THE INVITATION IS TO**

This is not an invitation for the sorted and strong but for the weak and weary.

The passage is not explicit about what the source of this soul weariness is. Could it be sin? Suffering? Temptation? Perhaps just the trials of life? Given the context of where this appears in Matthew's Gospel, there is a strong case for it being primarily aimed at those wearied by the demands of self-righteous religion. You know, those insane

individuals who think that they can serve God in their own strength and out of their own resources (cough!), who don't really think they need verses like this one (cough, cough!).

The great news, however, is that if you're exhausted—you qualify. This invitation is directed at shattered saints like us. Praise God!

## 2. WHO THE INVITATION IS FROM

These words are especially sweet because of who spoke them—this invitation comes straight from the gentle, humble heart of Jesus Christ.

He is, after all, the flesh-and-blood embodiment of the God who neither breaks bruised reeds nor snuffs out faintly flickering candles (Isaiah 42:3).

He is the good shepherd who diligently searches for his lost sheep and, upon finding it, scoops it up and carries it all the way home with a joyful song on his lips (Luke 15:5).

He is the friend of sinners—irresistible to the miserable, magnetic to the pathetic and a refuge to the wretched, the distressed and the oppressed.

How amazing it is to think that the Son of God—the second Person of the Trinity, the Creator and sustainer of the universe, the glorious Saviour of the world—does not look at us in our crumpled mess and write us off. He doesn't push us away or chide us for not being strong, stable or holy enough. Instead, he draws us to himself. The passion in his heart for the lost, the lowest and least burns ever hotter and brighter. If we could fully grasp the

true depths of Christ’s love for us, we would not be able to stop ourselves from coming to him and clinging to him with desperate faith for all that he is worth.

### 3. WHAT IS BEING OFFERED

The offer that Jesus puts on the table is what our hearts most desperately need: *rest*. Rest from striving to be good enough (or pretending that we are). Rest from religion and performance-based faith. Rest from trying to earn God’s favour or to pacify his anger. Rest for our weary souls. Rest in what Jesus has done for us on our behalf, through his death and resurrection. This is the gospel—the “good news”.

But it gets even better: Jesus offers his commitment to serving us as a gospel coach. That’s the idea behind the word “yoke”—an image of two oxen pulling together. He’ll help us to live out our faith in new ways that are neither heavy nor burdensome (the absolute opposite to whatever got us into this mess in the first place!). And ultimately, he promises perfect rest with him in the bliss of his heaven when all of this is over.

Accepting this invitation—for the first time, or the thousandth time—is the initial step on a journey to being refreshed, restored and renewed by Jesus. So to all my fellow strugglers and stragglers, limping sheep and crumpled heaps—let’s do this. Let’s respond to the voice of the Master and take him up on his generous offer. Let’s come to him, crawling if we have to, collapse at his feet and rest in his gracious embrace. Let’s wrap our feeble fingers around the treasure of his beautiful gospel and refuse to

let go. Let's fill our lungs with the oxygen of fresh faith.  
And let's start moving hopeward.

You ready?

*Lord Jesus, you have invited me to come, so here I am!  
I come with fragile faith and in desperate need of your  
grace. I'm a mess, Lord—but I'm happy to be your mess.  
Please wrap me in your loving arms and speak to me  
through your word. Let me hear your voice and help me  
to believe. Please thrill me again with your gospel. Heal  
me, forgive me, restore me, I pray. Flood my heart with  
hope and grant rest to my weary soul. I need you, Jesus,  
and I love you. Amen.*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the various factors that have caused or could cause you to crumple?
2. In the list of people at Jesus' feet, who do you most relate to? Why?
3. What has struck you afresh about Jesus' invitation to "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden..."?