

## Do Hard Things

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### Introduction:

In **Matthew 7:13-14**, Jesus told us to avoid the wide and easy way because it only leads to death. Instead, He wants us to walk the narrow, strait and difficult way. It is the only way to life. The pathway to Christ's eternal kingdom is not a cake-walk, following our own path of least resistance. No, we must follow in Christ's footsteps. That means we must choose to do hard things. This past week, I was blessed to read a book by Alex and Brett Harris by this same title, Do Hard Things. It would be impressive if it had been by adults for adults. It is even more impressive because it is by teens for teens. It promotes a rebellion against our culture's low expectations for teenagers. Within that message, however, they provided some great insight for us all. The book hearkened back to exactly what Jesus said in **Matthew 7:13-14**. We're Christians. We don't take the easy path. We take the hard path because that is the path Jesus took. I especially appreciated their breakdown of the "Five Kinds of Hard" and wanted to share that with you. We are starting a new year this week. I want you to face this new year with a new paradigm. A model that says we'll face up to the challenges of the hard things. We will no longer accept mediocrity, even when others accept it and call it excellent. We are going to do hard things and walk Christ's hard road.

### Discussion:

- I. Hard Thing #1: Do things outside your comfort zone.
  - A. We start here because this is the gateway to all the other hard things. The path of least resistance means we only do what we find easy and natural. When we are asked to step outside our own comfort zone, we balk. We fear stepping outside our comfort zone because we fear failure. We fear rejection. We fear the laughter of others.
  - B. Think of Moses in **Exodus 3:11; 4:10**. God had called him to do one of the greatest works of all time, lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Moses' first response was, "Who am I to do this?" He continued to balk at this and finally said, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech and tongue" (ESV). God was asking him to step outside of his comfort zone.
  - C. Think of Gideon in **Judges 6:15**. When the angel of the Lord called him to go against the Midianites, his response was, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (ESV). God was calling him to step up and lead. Gideon wasn't comfortable with that. He had to step outside his comfort zone.
  - D. Think of Peter in **Acts 10:9-16**. God called Peter to eat what had previously been unclean. This vision had been given to encourage Peter to go to the Gentiles. But Peter responded, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (ESV). He would never go into the house of a Gentile either. Let's not miss the significance of this. Do you think Peter was comfortable in Cornelius' house? No. God had called him out of his comfort zone.
  - E. We are Christians. God has called us away from the easy path of least resistance that leads to death and destruction. He has called us to walk a higher road. He has called us to walk the hard road. He has called us to do hard things. He has called us to step outside our comfort zones. This will mean working on weaknesses. It also means taking our strengths to new levels in areas we were afraid to go. Are you uncomfortable inviting people to our assemblies? Do it anyway. Are you uncomfortable having brethren in your home? Do it anyway. Are you uncomfortable praying with others? Do it anyway. Are you uncomfortable holding yourself accountable to others? Do it anyway.
  - F. Here is the crux of the matter. If you only ever do what comes easy, you will never grow. The parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14-30** makes it clear; the one talent man was not comfortable because he considered his abilities so small. The others used what they were given and they stretched themselves and grew. The one talent man stayed where he was comfortable and God judged him. As Christians and as a congregation, let's do the hard thing. Let's stretch outside our comfort zone and grow.
- II. Hard thing #2: Do things that go beyond what is expected or required.
  - A. Sadly, I fear there are many people and churches just like Sardis in **Revelation 3:1**. "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (ESV). Perhaps this was a

reputation based on past work they were no longer doing. On the other hand, perhaps they were judged by faulty standards. Let's face it, our world is satisfied with mediocrity. Many times it is even satisfied with below mediocrity. So low are our world's expectations if someone is just slightly more than mediocre they are praised as excellent. Too many of us find our natural ability exceeds what others expect and we become satisfied with simply doing what comes naturally. We need to remember we are called to a higher calling. We are not sinners because we are worse than others around us. We are sinners because we have fallen short of God's glory (**Romans 3:23**). Therefore, we are not holy simply because we are in the upper half of the bell curve among people. We are holy when we are like God (**I Peter 1:16**).

- B. Sadly, too often, we are busy looking for minimum requirements. What is the least I can do to get into heaven? It doesn't work that way. We cannot earn our way into heaven, therefore we cannot expect to cross some minimum requirement line to get it. We gain heaven by Christ's grace. But Christ's grace leads us on a path of growth. If we are not growing, we are not on Christ's path of grace. Think of Philemon as our example. In **Philemon 21**, Paul said he knew Philemon would do even more than he asked. That is the Christian's mindset who does hard things. He/she goes beyond what is expected or required.
- C. I don't want to minimize what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:38-42** to the modern concept of simply going the second mile. However, the heart of Jesus' statement is that His people who walk the difficult road go beyond what is expected and required. If a Roman soldier pressed them into service, they were only legally bound to go one mile, but the Christian would go two. If sued for their tunic, they would go above and beyond and give their cloak as well.
- D. This is hard because it is simply so much easier to do just enough to have a good reputation. If we are satisfied with the praises of men, that will be our only reward (**Matthew 6:2, 5, 16**). We are not seeking to please men, but God. With that in mind, we need to push and challenge ourselves to go way beyond what men expect or require. Are you leading singing? Men are happy if you just fill the slot. When is God happy? How much prep time do you put in. How much planning and forethought. Are you presenting a lesson? Maybe a sermon, a Bible class, an invitation or a talk before the Lord's Supper? Are you able to put together something folks will like with just a few minutes prep? Does that really glorify God? Children, are you obeying your parents when they say clean your room or clean the kitchen? Will they be satisfied if you just get most of the dishes in the dishwasher and leave the rest in the sink? Why not go all the way and wash the rest by hand? To be prepared for our Bible classes, you only have to do a minimal amount of work on lessons. Do you reckon that alone glorifies God in your life?
- E. We are Christians. God has called us away from the easy path of least resistance that leads to death and destruction. He has called us to walk a higher road. He has called us to walk the hard road. He has called us to do hard things. He has called us to go beyond what people expect and require. That means working when others are resting. That means pushing when others have given up. That means persevering when others oppose.
- F. Here is the crux of the matter. We bear the name of Christ and our work reflects on Him. Do we want the world to see just good enough? Or do we want them to see excellence? Let's face it, Jesus wasn't required to die for us. God wasn't required to sacrifice His Son for us. God did that out of love. He excelled for us. Can we excel for Him?

### III. Hard Thing #3: Do things that are too big to accomplish alone.

- A. In one sense, we can accomplish nothing on our own. We live, move and exist only by God's strength and power (**Acts 17:25, 28**). However, when I speak of this hard thing, I'm not talking about our reliance on God. I'm talking about our need to work together with each other. The reality is, there is not much worth accomplishing that can be accomplished by a single person. I believe that is at least one reason God grouped us in congregations.
- B. Consider **Ephesians 4:15-16**. This body is supposed to grow by what every working part supplies. Let me just get personal with us as a congregation here. For five years now we have been bumping along at about this same size. I say it is time we step up to the plate, do the hard things and start getting the gospel out to Middle Tennessee. That is going to take people inviting. That is going to take people recommending. That is going to take people making guests feel at home. That is going to take people studying with others. That is going to take people having

group home studies every week. That is going to take people mentoring leaders within our midst. That is going to take people shepherding folks at every level of spiritual growth. Let's face it. It's easy to stay where we are right now. If we are going to get beyond this and glorify God with our work, we have to pull together and do the hard things. Evangelizing Middle Tennessee is too big a task for one person or one small group. We need to work together. We can do this.

- C. Think about Barnabas in **Acts 11:22-26**. He got to Antioch and realized the task was too big for him. He brought Saul/Paul to work with him. Look at the work you can do, whether it is teaching classes, serving widows, visiting the sick, going into prisons, taking the gospel to the poor and homeless, knocking doors, lifting up the weak. Tap somebody on the shoulder to do that work with you. Yes, it's hard work. But nothing worth doing is worth doing alone.
- D. We are Christians. God has called us away from the easy path of least resistance that leads to death and destruction. He has called us to walk a higher road. He has called us to walk the hard road. He has called us to do hard things. He has called us to do things too big for us. Yes, we rely on God's strength. But God often provides His strength through other people.
- E. Here is the crux of the matter. Jesus, the one person in world history who actually had the intrinsic power to do everything all on His own, didn't. Instead, He gathered a team of men to work together. If Jesus did that, how much more should we?

#### IV. Hard Thing #4: Do things that don't earn an immediate payoff.

- A. When we hear about evangelizing Middle Tennessee or other big hard things, our blood gets flowing, our hearts start pumping, we get excited. That would be awesome. However, before we are able to accomplish big things, we have to work on small things that don't seem to get us anywhere in the moment—daily Bible reading and study, memorizing scripture, daily prayer, hospitality, attending the assemblies and classes, sending encouraging notes to our brothers and sisters, visiting the sick and shut-in, inviting neighbors and co-workers to our assemblies, etc. If we missed one day of any of these things, would it really be that big of a deal? I studied my Bible this week, but didn't get that much out of it. I like this sermon, but this sermon alone probably can't accomplish much. We can put off all these things and not seem to see much of a difference. These are small things and taken at a level of individual occurrence they don't seem to amount to much. However, put them together on a repeated basis and they pack a wallop.
- B. Think about it this way. I can skip a meal and it won't hurt me at all. I could probably skip meals for an entire day and it wouldn't hurt me at all. I'd feel hungry, but I wouldn't be physically hurt. But what if that added up to a week or a month. That could kill me. The same is true in the spiritual realm; we just don't see it as starkly. The problem with these small things is they are habits. We either develop the habit to do them or we develop the habit not to. Each day we don't read our Bibles makes it easier not to do so the next. Each assembly and class we miss (even if we are missing legitimately) makes it easier to miss the next. I don't know what it is about these things. They are really the easiest things in the world to do. God is not asking us to climb Mt. Everest every day or even every week. He has simply provided us with small actions that over the long haul produce amazing results. Yet, they seem to be some of the hardest things to actually keep up with over time. I think that is because Satan is actively working to get us to stop.
- C. We need to remember the passages that encourage us to do these small hard works. **Acts 17:11** encourages us in daily study of the Word. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** encourages us to pray without ceasing. **Hebrews 10:25** encourages us to be faithful to congregational assemblies. **Romans 12:13** encourages us to hospitality. The list could go on and on.
- D. We are Christians. God has called us away from the easy path of least resistance that leads to death and destruction. He has called us to walk a higher road. He has called us to walk the hard road. He has called us to do hard things. He has called us to do small hard things that don't seem to have an immediate payoff. But trust me on this one, when we do these small things repeatedly over time, they provide huge dividends in our spiritual lives and in our congregations.
- E. Here is the crux of the matter. God has not called us only to do big things. The same Jesus who died on the cross, spent nights in prayer with no one watching. The same Jesus who taught thousands, spent regular time alone with just 12 men. Jesus did huge things. He also did small things that paid off big in the end. If we shoot for the big things but bypass these small ones, we'll never succeed. These are the building blocks for the big hard work God has for us.

- V. Hard Thing #5: Do things that go against the grain of cultural norm.
- A. Once again, we look to one of the seven churches of Asia. I fear there are too many Christians and too many congregations like the seventh church of Asia, Laodicea in **Revelation 3:14-22**. Their lukewarm nature did not indicate they were only halfway on fire for the Lord. It indicated they had been too influenced by their surroundings. Like hot coffee cools down and ice water warms up to meet the temperature of the air around it, the Laodiceans had let their culture impact them too much. Instead of standing out, they fit in.
  - B. Look across the religious landscape as each and every religious group on the spectrum moves closer and closer to the world because they fear being called judgmental, narrow, picky. The groups on the left are beginning to accept even the continued practice of homosexuality, fornication and abortion as acceptable. Joel Osteen, fearing being seen as judgmental, intimated it was possible someone could be saved outside of Christ on national television.
  - C. This one is last because it is the culmination of the others. If we do the others, by default we will be going against the grain of the cultural norm. The point is we have to be ready for the rest of our culture to be upset at us. Think of the apostles in **Acts 5:29, 41**. They knew they had to obey God rather than men. When the men beat them for it, they went away rejoicing. They were prepared for cultural backlash. We must be as well. Perhaps we will be laughed at, looked down upon, ostracized. We will be out of the loop on many things our culture is in on. We'll look behind the times, prudish, Victorian.
  - D. The world will not understand why we choose to read our Bibles and pray when we could be watching television. The world will not understand why we insist on missing their drinking parties but keep inviting them to our prayer services. The world will not understand why we would choose to miss or be late to a family function, entertainment, recreation or sporting event in order to assemble with the saints, go to a Bible class or have a Bible study. The world will not understand why we will not laugh at their jokes or be entertained by their sins. Not only will they not understand us for it, they will hate us for it (**John 15:18-20; 3:19-21**).
  - E. Here is what will hurt the most, however. We can often take it when folks in the world mistreat us. However, the real hurt will come when Laodicean type Christians, folks who are supposed to be on our side, begin to mistreat us because our doing hard things is a light that shines on their mediocrity. I don't mean this in a judgmental, we're better than anybody sense. I'm just letting you know that some of the hardest part of this will not come from our worldly culture, but from the religious culture and even from other Christians. When you step up to the plate to do the hard things and walk the narrow and difficult path of Jesus Christ, other Christians who want to keep one foot on the broad path will be among the first to give you a hard time. If the Alexander of **II Timothy 4:14** is the same one as **I Timothy 1:20**, we see an example of this very thing—the unfaithful Christian causing harm to the faithful. We must be ready for this and stand up to it with gentleness as Paul encouraged in **II Timothy 2:24-26**.
  - F. We are Christians. God has called us away from the easy path of least resistance that leads to death and destruction. He has called us to walk a higher road. He has called us to walk the hard road. He has called us to do hard things. He has called us to go against the grain of cultural norms. No matter the consequences, we must add steadfastness, endurance and perseverance to our faith, virtue, knowledge and self-control (**II Peter 1:5-8**).
  - G. Here is the crux of the matter. If our Lord and Savior was willing to steadfastly endure persecution and suffering in order to save us, how much more ought we be ready to steadfastly endure our culture's hatred and oppression to glorify Him? No, it's not an easy thing. It is, however, the right thing. Let's stand together and strive together against those who would oppose Christ and His will (**Philippians 1:27-30**) and rejoice when we are allowed to suffer for Jesus.

### Conclusion:

Do hard things. That is going to become a motto for me. I want to encourage you in this **Matthew 7:13-14** paradigm as well. We are Christians. God has called us away from the easy path of least resistance that leads to death and destruction. He has called us to walk a higher road. He has called us to walk the hard road. He has called us to do hard things. Let's do them together.