

"Let's Do Difficult"

Galatians 6:9

Psalms 33:12 NIV

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD."

Cultural Engagement

Every week we need to pray for wisdom and discernment and godly strategies to bring our nation back to God's intended foundations of faith, family, and freedom, and then the second thing is to say "Yes" and show up!

In 2008, when they were nineteen, Alex and Brett Harris wrote a book titled *"Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations"*. It challenged teenagers to reject society's low expectations and instead pursue responsibility, growth, and positive impact, drawing on biblical principles using historical and real life examples. The book became a best-seller and is considered influential among Christian teens, encouraging them to do hard things for the glory of God. Now Alex and Brett are young adults - one of them's married and one of them went to work in the judicial system. These are the kind of guys that give us hope for the next generation.

Galatians 6:9-10 NIV84

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

"Hard times create strong men. Strong men create good times. Good times create weak men. Weak men create hard times." - Rick Green

We can see the cycle there. There's something about difficulty - something about living through a tough season that was difficult, with the challenges we have to navigate, and the losses we have to deal with, and then the rebuilding we have to do to recover from that. We all have those seasons - every family goes through them. They're hard and arduous times and we feel the weight and gravity of them. But here's the flip side to that coin - we look back on those seasons and we say to ourselves that we don't want to repeat them but they were one of the best things that ever happened to us because when we came out on the other side, we were stronger.

We see when we're going through the Valley of the Shadow of Death that Psalm 23 talks about, it actually says that we're not to *stay* there - but we're to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We don't *stop* - we don't pitch a tent - we don't sightsee - but we go through it. We keep walking and keep moving and we don't stop - we keep our feet moving.

That's just a rule of life (and football). We don't *stop*. People that stand still get plowed over. When we're moving, we stay alert. That's situational awareness. We live that way so we keep moving through the valley of the shadow of death, and at the end of it we don't have to fear any evil because we know we're going to come out on the other side. When we have history in God, what does that mean? That means we've walked with him and we've talked with him, but we've also gone through some things with him - and we realize that, every time we start into a difficult season.

We've read the end of the book. We know we win in the end. In the *meantime*, we will have battles to fight and difficult seasons to go through, but because we have history in God, we always say this, *"God didn't bring us this far to let us down. He didn't get us this far to let us go. He didn't get us this far and then decide to change his mind and just stop."* No, we walk with him, and when we have *history* with God we go back to that history. We review it and go, *"Wait a minute, He got us through that season why wouldn't He get us through this one?"* It's how we relate to the season we're in that matters, so we're going to talk about what it means to do *hard* things - to do "difficult."

God has put so many amazing things in front of us but there's some *hard* things too, and the choice to do the hard things comes into dozens of micro-choices that we make every day. We tend to think in epic terms - *"Oh, we have to do the hard things. Let's go part a sea. Let's go move a mountain. Let's go raise the dead."* That's all the epic stuff, but in-between those epic moments is going to be the daily stuff we do every day - the choices we make. We can choose to do a hard thing - like drive the speed limit - but there are things that we do - *choices* we make - and we don't go epic - we go daily. Think about the "dailies" of our life - how will our days be different if we begin to choose to do hard things and to do difficult.

Let's do hard things

John 16:33 NIV84

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Look what Jesus says here - *"In this world you will have..."* - what? - hard things - you'll have *difficult things* - you'll have hard, rough seasons in this world. It's not a matter of if these things are going to happen, it's just a matter of when. That's not to live fatalistically - that's not to think just living by thinking that around every corner there could be a hard thing waiting - there could be a difficult thing - there may be and there may *not*. Life tends to follow patterns where it seems like things are going good for a while and we might get nervous when things go good for too long, and if there's no difficulty or resistance, we can wonder if we're actually doing anything that's *worthy* of resistance from the enemy.

Are we actually living our life at a level where where we're *not* a threat to the devil? Maybe we're not creating any resistance because we're not living in a way that would merit resistance. Jesus said, *"In this world you will have hard things - you will have trouble,"* but then he says, *"But take heart."* In other words, *"Be encouraged - I have overcome the world!"*

Romans 12:1 NIV84

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."

A sacrifice involved taking a pure, spotless animal and then taking a knife and ceremonially slicing and dicing that animal up so that it bled out - so that its blood was spilled - the blood of an innocent to atone for the guilty. And when Paul says that we're to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, he's saying in a very metaphorical sense there will be blood spilled and it's going to be *ours* - to offer *ourselves* as a living sacrifice. We almost make this so simple, so impotent, because we don't think about it in terms that to be a sacrifice means we must lose our life in order to save it.

Let's do "difficult" - putting ourselves on the altar of God and saying, *"God I consecrate my life I'll consecrate everything that I am. I consecrate my identity. I consecrate my stuff. I consecrate my whatever - talents or abilities or gifts I have that came from you. I consecrate those to you. That means to ritually cleanse - that means to give them up - that means I'm literally giving over to God my life and I'm saying, "Use me like You want to use me."*

And that's what it literally means to be a "living sacrifice", which means in Paul's words, *"I die daily."* That's what being a living sacrifice means - it means that we're willing to lay our life down for God and for others.

Why don't we enjoy the journey every day and say, *"Okay, I know I'm late but maybe God has something for me to do along the way."* We all have opportunities to be living sacrifices and plant the seeds of the Gospel everywhere we go. We want to be living sacrifices - to lay our life down - to offer our bodies in view of God's mercy as living, holy sacrifices - that means set apart, and that we've been consecrated and are pleasing to God. He says *"This is your spiritual act of worship."* What we do here on a Sunday morning - we're singing and maybe we're putting our arms up or we're clapping. That is worship but that's not all that worship is.

Did you know that unloading the dishwasher can be an act of worship? Taking out the trash can be an act of worship if you consecrate it to God. Brother Lawrence was a monk who lived in a French monastery in the 1600's. He was lame in one leg so he couldn't move around very good which, in that society and in that culture, he was the lowest of the low. He was a cook in the monastery. Brother Lawrence put together a series of letters that he wrote to friends and to his family that got compiled into a little booklet called "The Practice of the Presence of God" and that book has changed lives through the centuries. It's one of the most impactful books ever written because it talks about turning every moment and everything we do into an act of worship.

In the book he said, *"I would not but pick up a twig off the ground if not for the glory of God."* When's the last time we picked up a stick off the ground and said, *"I'm doing this for God's glory?"* We can actually find ourselves taking a glass out of the dishwasher saying, *"I do this for the glory of God - taking out the trash, I'm doing this to honor Jesus right now."* It will be well with our soul when we do it that way instead of by gritting our teeth.

That's the difference between living as a living sacrifice - choosing what seems like a simple thing but is really the *hard* thing, by turning everything we do into an act of worship. We need to choose to do hard things and offer our lives as living sacrifices. Can you imagine flipping omelets in a monastery for the glory of God and being content with that? His writings were so compelling that bishops, dukes, governors, and kings sought him out - and here he was the lowest of the low - but those letters got out and it changed everything. So we should also offer ourselves as a living sacrifices to God.

"These are the times that try men's souls... Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

- Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine was saying that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph. In our own lives, we can look back on some of the hardest seasons that we went through and maybe we felt like we just barely got through, it but we did get through it. We know that because we're sitting here and we still have a pulse, so there's still a *purpose*. God's not done with us yet. Whatever we've done in our life that we think disqualifies us from being used by God is a lie from the pit of hell. God *can* and will still use us if we will move into the place of choosing to do hard things.

Let's do inconvenient things

Galatians 6:9-10 NIV84

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

This is our theme verse - at the proper time we *will* reap a harvest. In order to reap a harvest we have to sow a seed - then we'll reap a harvest if we don't give up. That's assuming we are sowing seeds - then, "as we have opportunity" let us do good to all people. In the Greek that literally means what it says - to all people - not just people we like - not just people who vote like us. People all over the world in other cultures are warm and inviting if we would take the time to sow the seeds of kindness and grace and joy. We reap after first doing hard things like listening which can be inconvenient because we don't always *want* to be nice or if things don't go our way.

People can lose their minds because there was some mess up on their ticket or they missed their flight because they were late or the gate got moved and they didn't know it until it was too late. That stuff happens all the time. There's *always* opportunities to be offended and to be upset and then feel entitled, but as the scripture says, *"Brothers, that should not be so among you..."* As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

We have daily opportunities to sow some seeds of life into people that will maybe prompt them to start going back to church - to hear the Gospel and to get the freedom they need to become everything Jesus has made them to be. That's what can happen by choosing to do inconvenient things one little thing at a time by the dozens of micro decisions we can make every day to do inconvenient things. It's in those moments that we see what we are made of.

"The greatness of man cannot be seen in the hours of comfort and convenience, but rather in moments of conflict and adversity." - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Let's do costly things

Let's do things that cost us something. It's not a sacrifice if it doesn't cost us *anything*, and it's easy to do things when we've got the means, the time, the resources, and the talent - we can and we will do those things all day long, but what will we do when it actually costs us something so much that it hurts - that we feel it so much that we actually lose something because of it. *Let's do costly things.*

Luke 9:23-25 NIV84

"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?'"

"Deny" means to put ourselves aside - to *deny* ourselves and take up our cross - that means bearing the weight *daily* and following Jesus. We learn to bear more weight *by bearing more weight*. This is nothing that comes easy. This isn't something that happens on automatic pilot. We will never get stronger unless we increase the resistance. That's true in life for us as believers - we will never get stronger in prayer unless we press through when we don't feel like doing it. We'll never read the Bible more unless we press through and continue to do it when it's inconvenient when it's a hard thing - when it doesn't make sense but we continue to do it.

We bear more weight *by bearing more weight* and it will not come any other way. When we get these opportunities, or challenges, to bear more weight, there are two ways we can look at it - we can look at it as *"I can't believe this is happening to me. Why me? I can't believe God would let this happen to me. Why would God do this to me?"* We are getting the opportunity to bear more weight because the next time something comes around, if we will take the challenge and will bear the weight and we get through that, when the next one comes we'll feel like it is nothing compared to what we did before, and people watching us go through it will say, *"My goodness you're strong!"*

When people see us bearing up and standing strong, walking tall, taking the challenges as they come, it's because we do it over and over, and have gone through other things to now be able to bear more weight.

There's a lot of weight being borne by many of us right now but we can look at it as something that will make us stronger - *"I will not quit. I will not give up. I will not cave in. I will not turn back. I will not surrender. I will not throw in the towel. I will not wave the white flag. I will stand. why? - because I can stand in Him and I can stand on the promises of his Word. He is faithful when nothing else is."* So we do the costly things forever.

"The value of liberty was thus enhanced in our estimation by the difficulty of its attainment, and the worth of characters appreciated by the trial of adversity." - George Washington

He was saying that what was hard, costly, and inconvenient helped them bear up under that and it brought out the best in them. This is the man that knelt in the snow and prayed to God for wisdom and prayed to God for his men who were losing their feet to frostbite. He prayed to God for a breakthrough and they saw a miracle as they crossed the river when God literally changed the weather pattern right in front of them.

Let's do painful things

Romans 5:3-5 NIV84

"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

We know that suffering produces perseverance if we rightly relate to it but for some people suffering *crushes* them and they're never able to get back up again. It's how we *respond* - how we *relate* to the challenges, the weight, and the adversity that comes that will dictate the other side. Will we come out stronger or will we come out weaker - it's our choice. Let's do difficult. Let's do hard things. Let's do inconvenient things. Let's do costly things, and let's do painful things. Suffering produces perseverance and perseverance produces character and character produces hope.

Bible hope is *not* JC Penney *wishbook* hope. We're not *wishing* for something. That's not what we're talking about. The word for *hope* in the Bible literally means "the joyful and confident expectation of a desired good - joyful and confident expectation - it means, *"I'm joyful in this and I'm confident God will come through. He may not answer my prayer the way I want but He will come through. I may not get through unscathed but I will get through because He will come through for me."* That's hope - real hope - confident and joyful expectation.

Jesus in the garden sweated great drops of blood even before the Lord. He said *"Lord if it be Your will would You let this cup pass from me?"* He's saying, *"This is going to be painful."* He knew what was coming and he knew the prophecies about himself. He knew he was going to shed blood - he would be the Sacrificial Lamb - and he was asking God if there's any other way around this, this would be a good time to let me know and he said *"but nevertheless not my will but Yours be done."* Aren't you thankful he said that? Aren't you thankful he did painful things? The reason we are born again and saved is because Jesus was willing to do hard things - to do difficult things - to do what was costly, inconvenient, and painful.

James 1:12 NIV84. The Result of Doing Difficult

"Blessed [happy] is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

God, the One who fills us with resurrection life, the One who fills us with his Holy Spirit says *"I'll never leave you as orphans. I'm going to let you have a Comforter, a Helper, the Holy Spirit, who will be with you always. He's going to help you navigate things he's going to bring wisdom you don't have. He's going to tell you things and he's going to help you understand what I've taught you he's going to be your advocate. He's going to be your intercessor and He will be your friend,"* and when Jesus says *"I will never leave you or forsake you,"* he meant because his presence in the Spirit would be with us forever. Can you imagine getting almost to the end and quitting - almost to the end and giving up? I can't. I won't. Let's do *difficult*. Don't think epic - think daily ...even as you walk out of this place.

Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Holy Spirit, show us what it looks like to do "difficult" - to be in and to do "inconvenient" - to do "painful" - to do hard things - to do costly things. What does that look like for us?" Show us what it means, not the big epic stuff, but the micro decisions that give us the ability to navigate our day. Lord, we believe that Your Word is practical for our life. We believe that living for Jesus is practical for our daily life, so please give us Your grace to do "difficult". In Jesus' name. Amen