

TEN

**tough
things**

A bold plunge into the Christian life

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10 Tough Things

A 10-Week Expedition Into the Core of the Christian Life

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FOREWORD

ALEX and BRETT HARRIS

We were 16 when we started calling other teenagers to join us in choosing to rebel against low expectations and do hard things for the glory of God. The response has blown us away. Teenagers today want to be challenged. They need to be respected. They're not stupid. And they're frustrated when people don't expect them to understand or care about things that actually matter. What's more, they're starting to realize that God wants to use them right now, as teenagers—they don't have to wait!

In the past three years we've come across countless young people who are changing the world for Christ. These are young people who were 12 when they began to hate slavery, 14 when they had compassion on the homeless, or 16 when they decided that bringing clean water and the gospel to Sudan was not impossible. These are young people who are reaching for more, doing hard things, and raising the bar.

In 1 Timothy 4:12 the Apostle Paul not only commands young people to reject a culture that looks down on them because they're young, but he also challenges them to be examples to fellow believers in every area of their Christian lives. We see our peers grabbing hold of that high standard, taking responsibility to do, to act, and to lead.

But teenagers aren't the only ones who are waking up to what God is doing. Rick Lawrence is one of many leaders who have recognized that teenagers are tired of being labeled "good kids" for all

the bad stuff they don't do—that they want to be known for what they *do*. Rick realizes that teenagers are ready for youth group to be more than a place to go on Wednesday night for a funny skit, a slice of pizza, and a Bible verse. And he understands that teenagers need mentors who will challenge them to reach their full, God-given potential.

By writing this set of small-group studies, *10 Tough Things*, Rick has done a tremendous service to the body of Christ—not just for youth pastors and leaders, but for teenagers themselves. This 10-week series is not about keeping your youth occupied and entertained. It's about equipping them and sending them out. It won't keep them out of trouble, but it just might get them into the right kind of trouble—the kind that comes when a young person steps up to the challenge to trust God, dream big, and do hard things for Christ.

*Twin brothers Alex and Brett Harris are the founders of TheRebellion.com and bestselling authors of *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations* (Multnomah Books). Based in Portland, Oregon, they are currently freshmen at Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia.*

INTRODUCTION

RICK LAWRENCE

I started thinking about creating this 10-week study after I read Alex and Brett Harris' culture-changing book, *Do Hard Things*. The book's message has already resonated so deeply with a vast army of teenagers. The tagline says it all: "A teenage rebellion against low expectations." Alex and Brett didn't start this rebellion, but they've done a great job of naming it and fueling it.

Aside from how their book has personally influenced me, I think the Harris brothers have tapped into a huge undercurrent in teenage culture. I know from personal experience that so many teenagers are tired of the missionless life they've been handed by adults, and they're hungering for something more...something hard-but-good. If you're a teenager reading this, maybe that describes you. I know that, because of this hunger, I feel a greater sense of kindred spirit with today's teenagers than I've felt at any time during the last two decades of serving as editor of *Group Magazine* (the world's most popular youth ministry resource).

Teenagers want more, and I want more.

More of Jesus.

More of the "fully alive" life that St. Irenaeus was targeting when he wrote, "The glory of God is man fully alive."

And so I felt a momentum building in me to respond to what *Do Hard Things* stirred in me, and what it's stirring in the hearts of teenagers. These Bible studies are geared for hungry people and for people who don't know they're hungry but really are. I've

led portions of all of them in a variety of settings—small groups, retreats, Sunday school, and larger gatherings.

Although these studies have no direct connection to Alex and Brett's book, they're "swimming in the same pool" in that they ask something of you. The expectations are set high, not low.

The studies are based on these premises:

- Teenagers are smart, insightful people who can see and embrace deep truths.
- Teenagers like to explore things in the context of relationships.
- Teenagers are willing to try new things and experiment with new ways of learning.
- Teenagers want to feel respected. They're drawn to things that are challenging and demanding.
- Teenagers want to have fun—to feel fully engaged—when they're exploring the Christian life.

If I were standing in front of you right now, I'd have a big smile on my face and a look of excitement in my eyes. It's the same look you have before you get on a roller coaster or go bungee jumping... or pray as someone commits his or her life to Christ. So thank you. Thank you for taking a risk and taking a plunge into something that will change your life. I'm diving with you.

Mapping the Adventure

Here's a quick overview of what you can expect as you launch this journey:

1. The studies are designed so anyone—adult or teenager—can lead the group through them. Everyone in your small group or class needs a book, but anyone can lead. It's best to choose someone in advance to be the leader of each study, because sometimes there are a few things to gather in advance of the study. But as long as you have the supplies gathered in advance, anyone in the group—adult or teenager—can lead. You can assign someone to lead each study, or different people in the group can lead different portions of each study.

2. The instructions for these studies make leading a snap. The designated leader will need to do a little advance preparation but not much.

Usually, it just means renting a DVD or gathering a few basic supplies. If you're leading one of these studies, pay close attention to the instructions so you can easily give them to everyone. Also, I often lead people into experiences or conversations by asking everyone to just "play with it." I often catch myself saying something such as "There's nothing on the line here. We're just going to experiment, and I'd love for you to just go with it." This gives people permission to be uncomfortable but clearly communicates that you won't give them an "out." If you're a teenager leading these studies, don't be afraid to simply read some of the stuff you're supposed to say. Follow the instructions, and you'll quickly feel comfortable leading. A lot of what you'll be doing is simply asking good questions.

3. These 10 studies have a progression to them, but it's loose (except for the two studies on becoming a disciple). Feel free to mix up the order of the studies if you want or to skip one if you need to. The topics aren't "siloeed." They overlap with each other all the time and even reference each other. I'm merely separating them for the sake of focus.

4. The studies use a variety of methods to engage people, moving them from mere listeners to full participants. You'll enjoy learning by using film, experiences, great conversations, and group explorations. Some studies have almost no preparation; some require that you find and cue up a film clip or gather a few easily found supplies. The key thing is to enter into these studies with an attitude of curiosity and adventure—the kind of attitude that says, “Let’s just try it!”

5. The studies use a fun, engaging learning strategy. You won't find lectures or fill-in-the-blanks—strategies that have questionable long-term impact on participants. In a typical small-group Bible study or Sunday school class, the leader talks most of the time. Sometimes a couple of discussion questions get tossed out, but often they're only a side dish to the real meat of the study. In this series, *everyone* talks. A lot. If you're leading one of these studies, you'll feel more like a ringmaster than a lecturer. That's good because research shows that people learn best by *doing*. In fact, the people who learn the most in any class are the teachers because they have to “own” what they're teaching.

6. Many of these studies include experiences that you'll do and then “debrief.” By “experiences,” I mean activities that require everyone to participate, not just sit back and listen. These might be fun, meditative, or mildly uncomfortable. But the goal is to plunge into activities that make you feel fully engaged. Debriefing is just another way of saying that you'll talk about how the experience affected you.

7. Bring a Bible with you to these studies. And bring extras, if you have them, for people who forget to bring one.

8. Finally, the best “supply” you can bring to this study is your own curiosity. I believe these studies will change and deepen the way you live your life and will draw you closer to Jesus. Thanks for having the courage to dive in.

Tough Thing

Nº. 1

GET OFF THE SIDELINES

Study Prep

The point of this study is to help people experience the difference between a life lived on the sidelines where it's "safe" and a life lived on the playing field where everything we are and do matters. Jesus is inviting teenagers to join him on his "grand adventure"—to leave the sidelines and get out on the playing field with him. If we're going to live in the adventure that Jesus has reserved for each of us, we'll have to lose our lives in order to find them (see Matthew 16:25). That's a tough but good thing.

Note on Supplies

You'll need a DVD of the film *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (extended edition).

Video Clip



To begin, play the "Coming Home" scene from *The Return of the King*, the last film of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Cue up the extended edition of the film to Side B 1:40:10, and play the clip until 1:41:41. The scene opens with Frodo narrating the four hobbits' journey home and ends after Sam leaves the table to talk with Rosie.

After the clip, someone should say: The background of this scene from the last film of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is pretty simple. It's the aftermath of one of the grandest adventure stories ever written or filmed. In this scene, the four hobbits return home to the Shire after helping save the world from an overwhelming evil. They left home as immature boys whose main occupation was getting into trouble and drinking beer. They returned as seasoned warriors who'd experienced more terror and triumph than their whole village put together. In a bit, we'll look at this scene again, but a lot more closely.

Partner Talk: (2 minutes) Get together with a partner, and discuss these questions for two minutes or so:

- What's the greatest adventure you've had in your life? What exactly made it an adventure?

After two minutes, get back together as a group.

Someone should say: Call out some specific words (at least 10) that describe adventures. Everyone should record the words in his or her book.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Someone should say: It's interesting that not all our words are "happy" words. Some are difficult or even scary words (for example, *risky* or *dangerous* or *unknown*).

Someone should ask: (5 minutes)

- What makes an adventure "exciting" or "exhilarating"?
- If there's no possibility of danger, can something still be an adventure? Why or why not?
- If there's no challenge to overcome, can something still be an adventure? Why or why not?

- What are some of the differences between being in an adventure and being an observer of someone else’s adventure?

Someone should say: It’s one thing to watch or read about an adventure like *The Lord of the Rings*, but it’s another thing to actually be *part* of such a grand adventure. When Jesus invites us to join his family by committing our lives to him, he’s also inviting us to join the grand adventure he’s on. Maybe the greatest question we can ask ourselves—and maybe the hardest to answer—is “What is the meaning of life?” But another way to ask that question is “What is my role in the adventure God has invited everyone into?” Let’s explore that question by taking a much closer look at that same clip from *The Return of the King*.

Video Clip

Once again, play the “Coming Home” scene from *The Return of the King*, the last film of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Cue up the extended edition of the film to Side B 1:40:10, and play the clip until 1:41:41. Ask everyone to pay close attention to the characters in this scene and try to discern what’s going on inside them.

After the clip, someone should ask: (2 minutes)

- Now, after we’ve watched this clip more closely, what do you notice about these guys?
- The adventure seems to have changed them—how?

If no one else mentions them, the study leader can talk about the “Hobbit Insights” on page 18.

Someone should say: Let’s compare this scene and the grand adventure it represents to a scene from the Bible. *The Lord of the Rings* could be a parable of Matthew 10, where Jesus tells his disciples about the grand adventure he’s sending them on. This is where he moves them off the sidelines and into the game.

Trio Talk: (10 minutes) Get with two others to form a trio. Together, scan Matthew 10, where Jesus prepares to send out his disciples

two by two. He wants them to spread the good news about the Messiah, heal people, and cast out demons. But Jesus won't be going with the disciples this time; they'll be on their own. In your trio, pick out every instruction and expectation Jesus gives them for their adventure. List them here:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Gather again as a group, and have a spokesperson from each trio read the trio's list. Each trio should share things on its list only if the things haven't been mentioned already by previous trios.

After the trios answer, the study leader can talk about the "Adventure Prep From Jesus" points on page 19 if no one else has mentioned them.

Someone should ask: *(3 minutes)*

- What are the similarities and differences between the adventure the disciples are about to undertake and the one the hobbits have completed?

Someone should say: Just like the hobbits, when the disciples return from their adventure, something profound has changed in them. The Apostle John records a scene that happens after he and the others have returned from their adventure. Jesus tells his disciples and the gathered crowds that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

That bizarre statement is enough to drive everyone away; the crowds of thousands leave. Finally, only the 12 disciples are left.

And Jesus asks them, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” (John 6:67). But the disciples’ adventure has cemented their relationship. They’ve experienced what it means to live a life that’s dependent on Jesus for everything. So Peter answers, basically, “Nope, where else would we go? We’re committed to living in the adventure you’ve plunged us into.”

Someone should ask: (2 minutes)

- What are some similarities and differences between this scene from the Bible and the scene we watched with the four hobbits from *The Return of the King*?

Someone should say: Steve Jobs, the legendary co-founder of Apple Computers, successfully recruited PepsiCo president John Sculley to take over as CEO of Apple by asking him, “Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?”

We have to ask ourselves, “Do we want to look like the villagers in this scene who get pretty excited about a big pumpkin, or do we want a look in our eyes like the hobbits have? Do we want a look that says we’re part of something way bigger than ourselves, something significant, something deep in the heart of God?”

But what is deep in the heart of God? What would we be doing if we joined Jesus on his adventure? I think we get a pretty clear picture in Luke 4, when Jesus announces the start of his ministry.

Someone should read aloud Luke 4:18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Someone should ask: (3 minutes)

Jesus is telling everyone why he came. He’s describing what he intends to do on his grand adventure. If we were to join him, what exactly would we be doing? What would it look like for us to

- proclaim freedom for the prisoners?

- help people who are blind recover their sight?
- release people who are oppressed?
- proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (a time when debts were canceled and people were freed from oppression)?

After the group answers the questions, someone should say: Dave Freeman co-wrote the book *100 Things to Do Before You Die*. Not long ago, he fell at his home and died at age 47. If we're looking to find our role in God's big adventure, we could read Freeman's book (he didn't complete his own list). Or we could go see the film *The Bucket List*, the story of two men who create lists of things they want to do before they "kick the bucket." Or we could ask Jesus for our own personal bucket lists.

Someone should say: (5 minutes)

Put everything down and relax your body. (*Pause.*) Take a deep breath. (*Pause.*) Now pray, asking God to help you hear—to sense—his voice and his guidance. (*Pause.*)

Now ask God the following two questions, and wait for the answers. If you sense something from God, write it in the space below.

Two Questions

1. God, what's one adventurous thing you want me to do before I die?

2. God, what's one adventurous thing you want me to do this week?

Close by asking people who'd like to share what they wrote to do so. If one of the "this week" ideas will work for the whole group, decide how you can all do it together. Then have someone offer a prayer of thanks to God.

HOBBIT INSIGHTS

- The adventure created a kind of gravity—or weight—to the characters.
- The adventure seemed to make the hobbits feel like outsiders. They felt somehow different from the people around them.
- They've left behind “childish things” and are acting like men.
- In the trilogy's first film, before the hobbits are swept into this adventure, Sam loves Rosie (the girl in the scene) but doesn't have the courage to tell her. Now, after living a grand adventure, he knows he has something to offer her.

ADVENTURE PREP FROM JESUS

1. Jesus has a *specific* mission for his disciples.
2. Jesus wants them to “freely give” what they have to others.
3. Jesus wants his disciples to feel utterly dependent. He doesn’t want them to count on themselves but to trust God to take care of them.
4. Jesus promises that other people will aid them in their adventure. And for those people who don’t provide aid, it won’t go well for them.
5. Jesus says the disciples will be at the mercy of people around them.
6. Jesus says they’ll be betrayed and opposed, so they shouldn’t be surprised. He’s been treated harshly already, and he promises the disciples they’ll be treated even more harshly.
7. He tells them they’ll be misunderstood and even hated.
8. He reminds the disciples that God greatly values them, no matter what their circumstances or what others say about them.
9. Jesus tells them their job is to bring light where there’s darkness.
10. He asks the disciples to lose their life for him.

EXTRA-MILE IDEAS

- Plan a *Lord of the Rings* Lock-In—Show all three films back to back during an overnighter or a retreat. Use the films as the central focus of your time together. After each film, do a short Bible study that's targeted to that film's message:
 1. *The Fellowship of the Ring*—Do a Bible study on the role of community in our adventures.
 2. *The Two Towers*—Do a Bible study on the spiritual battle all Christians are part of and what our role in it is.
 3. *The Return of the King*—Do a Bible study on the qualities we need to persevere in our adventures.
- Study the book *Do Hard Things* by Alex and Brett Harris—Use the book's online study guide (at therebelution.com) to go through the book together.