



DOING HARD THINGS
RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

ALEX & BRETT
HARRIS

with Elisa Stanford

**START
HERE**



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MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

START HERE

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All the stories in *Start Here* come from real young people around the world. Their words have been edited for style and length but not for content. Used by permission.

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*To our grandmothers, Lily Sato and Frances Harris,
thank you for all your love and prayers.*

*To Randy Alcorn,
a faithful mentor and a living hero.*

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YOU ARE HERE

Opening the door to your own rebellion

Simple ideas and unbelievable dreams. First steps and great miracles. Ordinary teenagers and a God who still uses young people to accomplish His big plans.

That's what our first book, *Do Hard Things*, is all about. *Do Hard Things* shows how young people can take hold of a more exciting option for their teen years than what society suggests. We wrote the book to counter the Myth of Adolescence, which says the teen years are a time to goof off and have fun before "real life" starts. We invited our peers to choose to do hard things for the glory of God and, in the process, turn the world's idea of what teens are capable of upside down.

We were nineteen when we wrote *Do Hard Things*, twin brothers who wanted to follow God's call and challenge our generation. We're twenty-one now and sophomores in college. We still dream big dreams, still want to follow God completely, and still believe just as strongly that God wants to use our generation to change the world. (And, as you might have guessed, we're still twin brothers.)

Whether or not you've read *Do Hard Things* (we'd recommend it—but, of course, we're a little biased), this companion book continues the *Do Hard Things* message and piles on stories, practical suggestions, and detailed how-tos. You can use it either on your own or in a group setting, depending on your situation.

In other words, *Do Hard Things* marked the beginning of a movement. *Start Here* is your personal field guide to jumping in and getting involved.

The Rebelution Movement

The concept of doing hard things actually started as a blog we created when we were sixteen. We called it The Rebelution—a combination of *rebellion* and *revolution* to create a whole new word with a whole new meaning. We defined *rebellion* as “a teenage rebellion against low expectations.” (By the way, the blog still exists. Check it out at TheRebellion.com.)

Since *Do Hard Things* came out, the Rebelution movement has exploded. In the past year, rebelutionary teens have raised tens of thousands of dollars to bring the gospel to and dig wells in Africa, won prestigious film festivals, fought human trafficking in the United States and around the world, and made it on the cover of *ESPN The Magazine*. Around the world, young people are moving out of their comfort zones—whether that means standing for Christ in a hostile classroom, raising money to build a dormitory for orphans in China, or mending relationships with parents or younger siblings.

Maybe you're part of the Rebelution already, or maybe you

just want to find out more. Maybe you're asking one of the questions we get most frequently from readers: "Where do I start?"

This book is about taking the next step. It includes ideas from us and dozens of other young people on topics like:

- how to stand up for what you believe
- strategies for overcoming stage fright, fund-raising fright, and phone-calling fright (hint: it gets easier as you go!)
- ways to get going when you feel stuck and keep going when you feel discouraged
- how to understand God's will and glorify Him through your efforts
- God-honoring ways to think, feel, and act *after* you've completed a big project

In short, this is a handbook full of practical steps and real-life stories to encourage and equip you on your journey of doing hard things. We want you to feel as if you're at one of our conferences, or in a small group of people talking about doing hard things—which you may be!

All the questions in the pages that follow come from people just like you, collected on our website and through personal conversations. We'll do our best to answer them with stories and insights from our own lives. We're traveling alongside you in this adventure—and we want to share with you what God has been teaching us these past few years.

But just like *Do Hard Things*, this book isn't about us. It's about the incredible, seemingly impossible things God is doing in our generation. That's why in *Start Here* you'll find dozens of true stories from rebelutionaries who are making a difference in their homes, at their schools, and around the world. We love

sharing other young people's stories because they challenge us as well—and remind us that we're not alone. We also love the way real-life stories provide a glimpse of the diverse ways God wants to use each of us to do hard things for Him.

Toward the end of the book, we'll be sharing the stories of two rebelutionaries in particular: Ana Zimmerman and John Moore. As you'll see, Ana and John took on very different hard things, each with the purpose of glorifying God and helping others.

At the age of fifteen, Ana raised more than six thousand dollars and organized an event called Love the Least in her hometown. The event introduced her community to the work of Abort73, an organization that exists to show the injustice of abortion.

With a group of fellow teens, John Moore wrote, produced, and directed his own feature film at the age of nineteen—and went on to win the \$101,000 grand prize at the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival.

John and Ana faced many of the same hurdles and questions you're encountering. Their stories provide an in-depth look at the beginning, middle, and end of the "do hard things" process. We think you'll be encouraged and inspired.

Pursuing Faithfulness, Not Success

As thousands of young people around the world are discovering, doing hard things is the most satisfying, thrilling way to live some of the best years of our lives.

So where do you start? As you'll find in the pages that follow, the answer is: right where you are. Being a rebelutionary means committing to doing even ordinary things extraordinarily well.

As each of us is faithful in that, God will be faithful to prepare us for whatever calling He has for us.

For some of us, that calling will be big in the world's eyes, and for some of us it will be small. Whether it is big or small, God will be glorified—and the world will be changed by a generation that gives up seeking worldly success to pursue a life of faithfulness.

That's when the ordinary becomes extraordinary. And that's what this book is about.

Ready to start?

GETTING STARTED

What that first step looks like

If you're feeling lost in trying to figure out where to start, you might be asking practical questions about how to create a plan, get others involved, and make your project work. Those are good questions, and we'll be tackling all of them (and more) in the next chapter. But most of the time, those *aren't* the right questions to be asking—at least not at first.

The best question to ask right at the beginning is “*Why* am I doing hard things?” When we remember that we're doing hard things to glorify God and become more of who He created us to be, it puts the “How do I start?” question in a different light.

As you think and pray about what God wants *you* to be doing, keep in mind that you don't have to fight God in order to do hard things. He *wants* you to do hard things! The Bible says that He has prepared good works for you and has prepared you for those good works (see Ephesians 2:10). God is far more concerned about His glory, your good, and the good of those around you than you are. That means you don't have to engineer something—you can trust Him, be faithful, and be ready for *His* timing.

So here are some thoughts on responding to what God is already eager to do in your life.

I'm ready to get started—on *something!* What should I do now?

When we think or talk about doing hard things, it's easy to think only about the big stuff. If we assume that being a rebelutionary means fighting slavery, digging wells in Africa, running a political campaign, or writing a book, then it *is* hard to know where to begin!

But if our goal is to glorify God—to point other people to Him and show more of what *He* can do—then our first priority is to be faithful with what He's *already given us to do*, not embark on a big new adventure. *What* we're doing doesn't necessarily change right away, but *how* and *why* we're doing it will change dramatically.

Let us introduce you to the first of many real-life stories we'll be using in this book. As you'll see in Elisabeth's story, the place we start doing hard things is right where God has us already—such as sitting in a car on a snowy night.

I was ready to go out and conquer hard projects. Big responsibilities. Things far outside my comfort zone. I prayed for God to work through me in big ways. He answered me, but not quite in the ways I expected.

For instance, one night on the way home in a blizzard, my dad and I stopped for a few minutes to pick up some necessities at the store. I waited in the car and surveyed the nearly empty parking lot until my eye caught a lone car with a person scraping off snow. As I looked closer,

I saw that it was an elderly lady trying to scrape off her car while leaning on a cane. She wasn't making much progress because the snow was falling faster than she could wipe it off. I felt instinctively that I had to help her. I ran out with my scraper, and soon a few other people joined me in clearing off her car.

Nothing outwardly significant happened then, but this was the first time I had strongly heard God's voice and responded to it. As I tuned in, I began to recognize His voice at other times. I sensed that I should go talk to the girl who was crying in the bathroom at school—it turns out she was pregnant and needed help. Or that I should offer tips to someone who was trying out for the sports team—it turns out she needed advice on deeper areas of her life that she normally wouldn't have opened up about.

What I have found is that in order to do hard things and conquer big challenges, we need to be willing to listen to that little voice the Holy Spirit uses. The more you listen, the clearer it becomes. And in order to do the great things, you must first be a servant.

—Elisabeth, age 17

Raymond, Maine

Even though Elisabeth had dreams about the hard things *she* wanted to be doing, she was tuned in to God's voice when He spoke. God answered her in ways she didn't expect, but she was ready to hear Him. And with one simple act of obedience, Elisabeth became aware of many other opportunities for doing hard things.

When your heart and mind are alert, you can see opportunities to do *hard things* in *everyday things*. It might start with a renewed commitment to excellence in your schoolwork or a decision to help more around the house. School and chores are things you probably do already, but now, as a rebelutionary, you are doing them with a new attitude. Your primary goal isn't to do something extraordinary but to do all things, even the ordinary things, extraordinarily well.

We want rebelutionaries to dream big, but we've also observed that God often passes over the person with grand, me-focused plans in favor of the one who has a heart to love others, to trust Him, and to do the small things for their own sake.

Doing hard things doesn't mean being preoccupied with something bigger, different, and more exciting all the time. It means being ready and willing to obey, no matter how big, small, or hard it might be. Elisabeth's openness to God's leading made her available to several unexpected opportunities to show the love of Christ. Faithfulness in small hard things is always the fuel for bigger hard things.

If we say we want to do hard things for God, but we're not satisfied with pursuing excellence where He has placed us (at home, at school, and at work), it's likely that we're really more interested in getting glory for ourselves than in getting glory for Him.

So where do you start? Right where you are—with a new attitude, a new heart, and a mind open to how the everyday hard things available to you right now will lead you to the next step.

How can I tell the difference between good hard things in general and good hard things / should be doing?

Every rebelutionary has asked this question at one time or another. We know *we* have, whether it was when we were trying to decide if God was calling us into filmmaking the summer before we started the Rebelution (He wasn't) or when we were trying to decide whether to write this book the summer between our freshman and sophomore years at college (we did).

Sometimes the struggle is due to the fact that there are so many options and so many needs. We know God doesn't call us to do *everything*, but we don't know how to identify the things we *are* supposed to do.

Charity's story offers some great ideas and questions for discerning what hard thing to tackle next:

Ever since I was about eight years old, I have loved to crochet. I often made things as gifts for newborn babies. I had been pondering for a couple years how I could serve others through crocheting but never came up with a concrete plan.

Once I heard about the idea of doing hard things, I thought I should quit trying to come up with a perfect idea and just do something simple. So I decided to collect handmade hats for orphans overseas. After talking to my parents about my idea, I came up with a plan to collect two hundred hats by Christmastime. That gave me three months to carry it out.

I live in a small town of eight hundred people, and at that time I could count on one hand how many people

I knew who could knit, crochet, or sew. This meant that I would either have to make way more hats than I possibly could or I would have to find people who I didn't know to make hats. There was a little doubt in my mind as to whether this could happen, but I put it in God's hands and let Him decide the outcome.

I realized that I needed to get in contact with someone who could distribute the hats for me. For years, I've packed shoe boxes for Operation Christmas Child, which is part of Samaritan's Purse, an organization that sends gifts and necessities to children overseas. I have always dreamed of helping them distribute those boxes someday. I couldn't think of a better organization to distribute the hats.

After getting things figured out with Samaritan's Purse, I began to collect the hats. First, I posted my idea on TheRebelution.com. To my amazement and delight, quite a few girls promised to make hats and send them to me for the project. They were all so encouraging and energetic that it made the project a lot of fun. Many of them invited their friends to help out. One was even able to get her school to make hats! Another girl told her mother and grandmother, and together the three generations made over forty beautiful hats.

As I talked to other people where I live, many wanted me to teach them to crochet in order to make a hat. Not only did these people learn how to crochet and give me a couple hats, but they also continued crocheting and are now still making things and giving them away as gifts. I never dreamed anything like that would happen, but it did.

By December, I had over three hundred and fifty hats to send to Samaritan's Purse. People from Australia, Japan, and the United States donated to this project. I can't believe it when I think of all the people who donated. I didn't even know the names of many of them. Isn't it great how God can use the simplest idea and make it a success?

—Charity, age 18
Glennallen, Alaska

Take a look at some of the questions Charity asked as she set out to do hard things.

What Do I Like to Do?

Serving God does *not* mean being miserable. Yes, doing hard things is challenging, but as Charity discovered, it often involves doing something we are gifted at and something we enjoy. God may be calling you to something totally outside your current area of interest or expertise, but it's more likely He's calling you to ***take the next step*** with something you're already doing.

If people comment on how welcoming you are to others, could God be calling you to reach out to new students at your school? Maybe you're good at making an argument but hate public speaking—could God be calling you to use your gift of debate to stand up for a good cause? Or maybe, like Charity, you have a talent or hobby that could be used to serve others in a greater way.

In other words, you don't start doing hard things just ***where*** you are but also with ***who*** you are. The gifts, interests, and talents God has given you all provide clues to what hard things He is calling you to do.

Who Can Help Me Think This Through?

Proverbs 20:29 says that the glory of youth is “their strength” and that the glory of the old is their “gray hair”—or accumulated wisdom (NIV). As young people, we have a lot of energy, but we don’t always know what to do with it. Sometimes we have trouble choosing among all the options. If we’re not careful, we can even use our strength in ways that are destructive to ourselves and others by moving forward without considering the implications of our actions. That’s why God gives us parents, older siblings, teachers, pastors, and mentors to help us tell the difference between a good hard thing, and a good hard thing *we* should be doing.

Charity found encouragement as well as practical advice when she turned to her parents with her idea. They helped her settle on a solid goal for how many hats to collect and provided a sounding board for her ideas.

As you work to understand God’s calling, seek out the advice of others who are living godly lives—and who can share the wisdom of their own life experiences.

Would This Conflict with the God-Given Obligations I Have?

God is good, and because He is good, He doesn’t give us conflicting obligations. There will always be enough time to do everything He has given us to do—and no time to waste.

As young people, we’re in the season of preparation. Our main focus during this season is to prepare for mature, effective adulthood: work, marriage, family, service to others, leadership, and ministry. This doesn’t mean that we can’t work, lead, or minister to others as students, but those things are not the main focus. Our preparation is.

Understanding this concept changes our question from the fuzzy “Is this hard thing something *I’m* supposed to do?” to the more helpful “Does this help me to prepare for adulthood or distract me from my preparation?” If it is a distraction, you shouldn’t feel bad about passing on it. Sometimes doing hard things means saying no.

As an eight-year-old, Charity may not have been ready to organize a hat drive for orphans overseas, but those years learning to crochet prepared her for a hard thing God called her to do as a teenager. Faithfulness in one season prepares us to step into the next season with strength. Who knows what God is preparing for her (and for you) next?

In chapter 3, we’ll be looking at a few more guidelines for when to say yes and when to say no to a specific hard thing. For now, remember that being faithful in the season of preparation means saying yes to some hard things and no to others. More specifically, it means saying yes to preparation and no to distraction.

But don’t overanalyze. If God gives you an opportunity to do a hard thing, your parents or godly mentors are supportive, and it doesn’t conflict with your other God-given obligations, trust God and go for it! Just as He did for Charity, He will provide what—and who—you need to fulfill this new responsibility.

What if I just want to join other people in what *they* are doing?

In America we’re taught to admire the rebel and the loner. While going against the flow of a lost culture is good, allowing the go-it-alone mentality to pervade our thinking can be dangerous.

Because whether we're leading or assisting in a project, it's not about us.

I've loved computers forever. Looking back, I don't know what made me contact Leslie and Lauren Reavely about designing a website for their organization, H2O, but I did. That's obviously where God was working "behind the scenes."

H2O—which stands for Hope 2 Others—distributes lunch bags to homeless people and panhandlers across the country.¹ I didn't have a ton of experience in web design (I was thirteen), but I was willing to help.

I honestly thought Leslie and Lauren would reply with a no since I'm some guy on the other side of the country who they don't know. Also, I'm not really talkative or a very good communicator. But somehow God was able to use me to reach out and help these two girls who were doing incredible things for God.

We launched the new Hope 2 Others (H2OBags.com) site on New Year's Day last year. It's been amazing to see the response. We had over five hundred unique visitors within the first couple months, and the response continues to grow.

I must admit, it hasn't always been easy. During the six months it took to get the site going, God enabled me to overcome the fear I had of communicating with people I didn't know. He helped me get through all the uninteresting parts of designing the site that I would've preferred to skip. He also taught me perseverance.

Then last April, my family and some good Christian friends started a church plant. My dad pastors it, and last

November I designed the website. My mom and I were up until six the morning we launched it. While only about thirty people attend our church each week, God has richly blessed us.

Recently, other people have asked me to work on their websites as well. It's quite different having someone come to me versus the other way around. But God is doing amazing things, and I'm thankful that He has allowed me to be part of them.

—Matthew, age 15

Charlottesville, Virginia

God didn't make us to be independent but *interdependent*. Think about a nation, a business, an army, a sports team, or a family. A quick look around shows clearly that we were created to depend on others and have others depend on us. Matthew offered his gifts to others—and the founders of H2O were humble and wise enough to receive them.

As young people, we're called to do hard things as part of the family team in particular. We honor and obey our parents by joining them in the work they're doing—whether it's putting on an event at church or cleaning up the yard.

What is your family doing right now that you could be an active and willing part of? It doesn't have to be helping with a church plant like Matthew did. Teaming up with your family might mean doing something as simple as having a good attitude about setting the dinner table or taking care of your siblings so your parents can take a break.

Yet even more important than our role in our family or on a

team is the fact that we are part of the church—the body of Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, “God has so composed the body...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:24–26).

We’re *all* part of someone else’s project: God’s. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to be united, striving side by side for the gospel. Rather than caring about who gets the credit, we’re commanded to “outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10). God’s plan is for us to work together in community.

It can often be harder to work with others than it is to work on our own. We have to share the credit, deal with people who are sinful and crabby, and let others see our own faults and shortcomings. But joining with others to do God’s work is the way His biggest plans get accomplished. It’s also one of the best ways for us to grow in Christlike character and bring glory to Him. And that’s why we do hard things.²

So as you try to follow God’s calling, remember that you don’t have to be doing your own thing to be doing something hard for God. God might be calling you, as He did Matthew, to join someone else who needs help with a hard thing.

Do small hard things really count?

To answer this question, take out the word *small*. Do hard things really count? Of course! Remember, *small doesn’t mean easy*. We should still be stepping outside our comfort zones, going above and beyond expectations, and doing what is right, even if our

actions don't seem all that impressive to most people. Why? Because big or small, the hard things God calls us to do are about Him, not us.

That's why, to fully answer the question, we have to ask a bigger one: what *ultimately* counts? If the answer is "being famous" or "what people think about me," then small hard things don't matter much. But when we read God's Word, we find that small things have great significance, not just to prepare us for bigger things, but also for their own sake. And sometimes small hard things are the hardest things of all.

In Colossians 3:23, Paul writes, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (NIV). In 1 Corinthians 10:31, he writes, "Whether you eat or drink or *whatever you do*, do it all for the glory of God" (NIV). What Paul is saying is that everything—even something as simple as befriending someone in gym class—can be done for God's glory. And that means *nothing* we do for God is insignificant.

This year I started attending a new public high school. It was in one of my PE classes during the first month of school that I began noticing the "outsiders." As part of the class, we had to warm up by running five or six laps around the school track. For most of the kids in the class, including me, this was no problem. But not everyone was in the greatest shape after a long summer.

After finishing my laps, I was standing around and saw a girl who was behind everyone else. She was struggling to keep up. At first I didn't give her a second thought, but as I saw how much she was hurting, the Lord put her on my

heart. I sensed that God was saying, *Hannah, I want you to go run with her!*

I felt really, really weird. I immediately argued back, *What, Jesus? Are You serious? I've never even spoken to that girl! I don't even know her name!* But I knew I had to obey Him, even though everyone else in the class might think I was dumb.

So, saying a silent prayer, I jogged out to the girl. She was crying and struggling to breathe, but her face radiated with surprise and thankfulness as I came up beside her. Even though I didn't know her, the love of the Lord brought us together, and we finished those laps strong.

—Hannah, age 17

Chesapeake, Virginia

We doubt anyone in Hannah's class patted her on the back, and her story certainly didn't make the newspaper. Was it still worth it? It depends on how you answer the question we asked earlier: what ultimately counts?

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (an early Q and A about Christian beliefs) says, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." That means that simple acts of obedience, like Hannah's, matter a lot. It also means that it is possible to dazzle people with the hard things we do and still waste our lives if we're doing those things only to impress others and bring glory to ourselves.

Small hard things might have "small" results in this life, but as Paul encourages, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

God will bring a harvest—whether in this life or the next—if we persevere in the everyday things He has given us to do at school and at home.

Do you feel God calling you to do something big for Him? Don't despise the day of small beginnings. Not only are big hard things usually made up of a lot small hard things put together (so you're getting good practice!), but also God has a way of opening new opportunities when we least expect it.

Big hard things often start with one small step. Just ask Jaime Coleman.

A few years ago, Jaime's church partnered with a missions organization that uses humanitarian projects to share the gospel in rural Kenyan communities. Her church adopted the town of Karogoto, and Jaime soon discovered a pressing need in the town for something that most of us take for granted: shoes.

Jaime figured that her family wasn't the only one with shoes in the closet they didn't need. She set a goal to collect 150 pairs of shoes. Her plan was to kick off the drive with a Barefoot Mile at her high-school's track. People would come, donate shoes, and walk four laps around the track barefoot. Some adults questioned whether anyone would show up—but it didn't take God long to prove them wrong.

"There were definitely low expectations," Jaime tells us. "It was discouraging, but I knew God could make it happen. On a rainy Saturday, fifty people showed up at the track—with 1,164 pairs of shoes! By the time the drive was over, God had brought in over 4,200 pairs of shoes for the people of Karogoto."³

Why do we share Jaime's story in response to a question about "small" hard things? Because Jaime didn't set out to collect 4,200 pairs of shoes. Her desire was to participate in the work of

her local church. Her goal was small: 150 pairs of shoes. And even now, when we talk to her, she refuses to take credit for what God has done.

Stories like Jaime's remind us that God wants (and will use) faith, humility, and availability—not glory seeking, pride, or a preoccupation with our own ideas. If Jaime had thought, *A few dozen pairs of shoes isn't going to make enough of a difference*, she would have missed a chance to see God do *incredible* things with a simple idea. If Hannah had second-guessed God's prompting to do a "small" hard thing in gym class that day, she would have missed an opportunity to show His love to someone else.

Nothing we do for God is insignificant. When we have this as our mind-set, then we won't get proud if God allows us to do something big and we won't get discouraged if we feel stuck in the small things. Remember, neither fame nor obscurity is the goal. The goal is obedience to God, effectiveness in whatever He gives us to do, and a heart that glorifies Him.

Whether we are called to live life on a big stage or behind the scenes, we cannot forget the words of Jesus in Matthew 23, who modeled this mind-set for us: "The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (verses 11–12).

I know God wants me to do something with this idea, but I'm not ready for it now. What can I do to get ready for doing this hard thing later?

What do you mean when you say, "I'm not ready"? If you mean, "I don't feel adequate," you might just be making an excuse. No

one is adequate to do the kinds of things God calls us to do. In fact, God tends not to use people who feel adequate because they are usually full of pride.

Are you really meaning, “I’m afraid,” or, “My motivations aren’t pure enough”? The day will never come when we stop feeling afraid and our motivations are perfectly pure. True courage is not the absence of fear; it is refusing to allow our fear to control our actions. And while keeping our motives in check is a constant battle, good motives now are better than perfect motives when it’s too late. (As one rebelutionary told us, “When I am scared or unsure about doing something hard, I think about the person I want to be when I am older and how doing this hard thing will help me become more like that person.”)

On the other hand, if you’re saying, “God has put something on my heart but wants me to be patient about beginning it,” this might be a season of preparation rather than completion. Preparing *now* to do a particular hard thing *later* is not only helpful on a practical level, but it also keeps you prayerful and alert to see when the right time comes.

What parts of your project suggest that you need to wait? Do you need more time, money, or experience than you have now? What *is* available to you now?

For example, maybe you feel that God is calling you to make a film that honors Him, but the specific project you have in mind is way beyond your current resources or abilities. You know you want to do it, but you’re not sure you can do the project justice until you’ve gained further experience. Ask yourself what practical things you could be doing now to prepare for the day when you can complete that hard thing: What smaller projects might you tackle in order to gain the skills you’ll need later? Who could

you seek as a mentor in this field? How should you be praying about the future?

Ian's story captures another aspect of what we're saying here:

Last year, when my dad was in the hospital, I realized that there was no hope for him on Earth. I turned to the only person who could help him: Jesus.

I made my way from my dad's bedside to the hospital chapel to pray. The door was locked. That was how I felt. Locked out from God and locked out from hope.

Thursday, May 13, Dad died. The funeral came and went, and my grades started to slip. I was usually pretty good in school, but now I was doing the bare minimum, just enough to pass each class.

Every Friday night, I went to a youth club in my church, but I never took much interest in it. Then one night we went to a Christian festival. I was blown away by the amazing worship, the amazing sermon, and the amazing thought that was planted in my head—that God really does love me, the guy who doubted Him, the guy who put out little effort at school, the guy who never loved Him.

At the end of the night, there was an appeal for those who wanted to accept Jesus as their Savior. I grappled internally. My heart told me that I loved Jesus and wanted to take Him in. My mind told me that it was too big a commitment to make. That night my heart won.

I went away that evening with hopes of seeing my dad again. He was a Christian, and I realized that a Christian

friendship doesn't end with death—death is just a brief pause in an eternity-long friendship.

When I told my minister that I had become a Christian, he gave me a copy of *Do Hard Things*. After reading the book, I had a vision of changing the future, but I realized that I would have to change myself first.

So instead of scraping by, I am now releasing my full potential. I am working hard to get good grades in every class I take. I learned how to play the guitar, and I play in my church's praise group several times a week. Every day I encounter obstacles, peer pressure, and temptation. But every day of my new life is a blessing. I hope, by the example I set, that others will come to know Jesus and live a life for Him.

—Ian, age 16

Belfast, Northern Ireland

“I had a vision of changing the future,” Ian says, “but I realized that I would have to change myself first.” Doing hard things involves a paradox: we dream big about changing the world, and we believe that God will help us do it. And we have to start with ourselves, right where we are. If that means putting “bigger” plans on hold for a time, we can still look for ways that God can prepare us for those plans when the time is right.