

“Will prove to be one of the most life-changing and culture-changing books of this generation.”

—RANDY ALCORN

**New!**

**Real stories  
from young people  
who took up the  
challenge.**

**A TEENAGE  
REBELLION  
AGAINST  
LOW EXPECTATIONS**

# **DO HARD THINGS**

**ALEX & BRETT  
HARRIS**

**FOREWORD BY CHUCK NORRIS**

**Praise for**  
***Do Hard Things***

“*Do Hard Things* is an extraordinary book. In fact, I believe it will prove to be one of the most life-changing, family-changing, church-changing, and culture-changing books of this generation. I’d love for every teenager to read this book, but I’m just as eager for every parent, church leader, and educator to read it. If you do the hard thing of saying no to distractions and yes to this remarkable book, I guarantee you’ll be richly rewarded.”

—RANDY ALCORN, best-selling author of *Heaven*  
and *The Treasure Principle*

“Adult expectations for youth are too low. And these twins are out to raise them. Don’t adapt to the low cultural expectations for youth. Set high ones. Youth can become examples for adults. Think that way. Dream that way. Or as the Harris brothers would say, ‘Rebel against low expectations.’ May God give us a vision for the next generation that glorifies the gospel of Christ and leads thousands of young people to the cross, where they find forgiveness of sins, broken-hearted humility, and Christ-exalting courage to rebel against low expectations and do hard things.”

—JOHN PIPER, Desiring God Ministries and best-selling  
author of *Don’t Waste Your Life*

“*Do Hard Things* is so important. It is challenging teenagers to rebel against the low expectations placed on them, not the least of which are low spiritual expectations. And the voices that are asking teens to rise to meet this challenge are voices

from their own generation. That thrills me. If you've got a teenager—or a grandson or granddaughter—I encourage you to pick up a copy of *Do Hard Things*. It would make a great graduation present or summer reading. And don't just give them the book; make a point to ramp up your interaction with the teens God has put in your life. Become a spiritual mentor and help them rebel against low expectations. Help them become rebels with a good cause, seeking more out of life than mindless channel-surfing."

—CHUCK COLSON, founder of Prison Fellowship  
and best-selling author of *How Now Shall We Live?*

"*Do Hard Things* is easy to read, but it will challenge you to the core. It is inspiring, insightful, and practical. Parents, this book will get your teens into the right kind of trouble—the kind that comes when they dream, take risks for God, and dare to flout the status quo. Put it in their hands. Read it yourself. It's never too late to do hard things."

—JOSHUA HARRIS, pastor, author, and older brother

"Alex and Brett Harris are two extraordinary young men with a revolutionary message. In a culture where laziness and ease is often the order of the day for teenagers, *Do Hard Things* presents a radical and provocative alternative. I heartily recommend this book."

—R. ALBERT MOHLER JR., president of Southern Baptist  
Theological Seminary

“This book is a refreshing wake-up call to our generation. We *can* do hard things and give ourselves to something huge for the kingdom of God!”

—LEELAND MOORING, Grammy-nominated  
recording artist

“This book will create a distinct distaste in your soul for living an easy and comfortable life. I pray that God will use this book to inspire many young people (and old alike!) to do hard things by God’s grace for the glory of His name.”

—C. J. MAHANEY, Sovereign Grace Ministries, author of *Living the Cross-Centered Life* and *Humility: True Greatness*

“Alex and Brett capture the passion and potential of our generation perfectly in this book. In *Do Hard Things*, they encourage us to go above and beyond the status quo in everything from schoolwork to serving the poor. This is a truly unique and sorely needed book.”

—ZACH HUNTER, abolitionist and author of *Be the Change*,  
age 16

“*Do Hard Things* is exactly the message our generation needs to hear. This book challenges us to stop and recall the things God has put in our hearts to do and take time to do them *now*. Let’s address the low expectations and call our generation to rise up and see what the Lord can do when we do hard things.”

—BARLOWGIRL, recording artist

“This is an important book. And not just for those wanting to launch successfully into adulthood, but also for discontented twenty- and thirty-somethings who long to be catapulted into significance. The propositions in this book are neither wishful thinking about what could be nor a wistful reflection on how things used to be. The Harris brothers demonstrate with their lives and through the examples of countercultural dream-big teens around the world that young adults can achieve great things and live rich, intentional, excellent, and meaningful lives.”

—TED SLATER, editor of *Boundless*, Focus  
on the Family

“Alex and Brett Harris are leading the way for the fight to save their generation, and in *Do Hard Things* they are beckoning others to join them. I pray that teenagers will listen to their cry and join them on the front lines.”

—RON LUCE, founder of Teen Mania Ministries  
and author of *Battle Cry for a Generation*

“If you are a young person who wants to affect this world for Jesus Christ, read this book! I have watched Alex and Brett take on new and daunting endeavors with resolve and determination and, as a result, mature and develop into leaders for this generation and an example for *all* generations of reaching to fulfill your full potential in and for Christ.”

—JUSTICE TOM PARKER, Alabama Supreme Court

“Alex and Brett are the real deal, and *Do Hard Things* is a real wake-up call not just for young people but for all God’s people. I can’t recommend it highly enough.”

—SHANNON ETHRIDGE, best-selling author of *Every Young Woman’s Battle* and *Completely His*

“Add years to your life! This book is a how-to guide for recovering the years thirteen to nineteen. It’s a good read—the trap of low expectations, the danger of leisure, surprising stories—this is stirring stuff! *Do Hard Things* is a winning combination of optimism and challenge.”

—MARK DEVER, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church and founder of 9Marks.org

“*Do Hard Things* is the textbook for anyone who works with teens; it’s a philosophical and foundational must-read.”

—TIMOTHY ELDRED, executive director of Christian Endeavor International

“As a university professor, I am well aware of the Gen Y propensity to demand more recognition for less effort and to associate self-esteem with mere being rather than for actual accomplishment. *Do Hard Things* is a call to teenagers everywhere to channel their energy into world-changing activity with eternal significance. I highly recommend it.”

—DR. ALEX CHEDIAK, associate professor of engineering at California Baptist University and author of *With One Voice*

“Our generation is filled with apathetic, complacent, and immature wimps. By contrast, Brett and Alex are leaders in our generation, and their message is that you can be too.”

—HANS ZEIGER, author of *Reagan’s Children*  
and *Get Off My Honor*

“The simple title, *Do Hard Things*, in one sense summarizes the high-energy, cheerleader-like optimism of the book’s pages. Just do it! Do it! Do it! The argument is buttressed with stories and anecdotes to encourage the faint-hearted. But this book’s foundations are much, much deeper. By their words and by their example, the Harris twins are provoking Christian teenagers to raise their sights. If I have any reservations about Alex and Brett’s book, such doubts are less about them and more about the readiness of the evangelical culture to hear and respond to such a heady, serious challenge. But that, of course, is exactly what this is all about—a couple of nineteen-year-olds, wise beyond their years, asking the rest of us to do hard things.”

—JOEL BELZ, founder of *World Magazine*

**To read endorsements from real teens, parents,  
and youth workers, visit [TheRebelution.com](http://TheRebelution.com)**

A TEENAGE  
REBELLION  
AGAINST  
LOW EXPECTATIONS

# DO HARD THINGS

ALEX & BRETT  
HARRIS



MULTNOMAH  
BOOKS

DO HARD THINGS

PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, CO 80921

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from The Message by Eugene H. Peterson. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).

Italics in Scripture quotations indicate the authors' added emphasis.

The stories featuring teenagers in this book have been used by permission.

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-60142-112-8

eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-161-6

Copyright © 2008, 2013 by Alex Harris and Brett Harris

Foreword copyright © 2008 by Chuck Norris

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

MULTNOMAH and its mountain colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Harris, Alex, 1988–

Do hard things : a teenage rebellion against low expectations / by Alex and Brett Harris. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60142-112-8

1. Self-actualization (Psychology)—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Self-actualization (Psychology) in adolescence. 3. Expectation—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Adolescent psychology. I. Harris, Brett, 1988– II. Title.

BV4598.2.H36 2008

248.8'3—dc22

2008006226

Printed in the United States of America

2015

30 29

SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available in special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail [SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com) or call 1-800-603-7051.



*To our parents, Gregg and Sono Harris.  
This book is the message of your lives.  
Our triumph is your triumph. We love you.*

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Chuck Norris . . . . .	xiii
Introduction to the Five-Year Edition: Looking Back, Looking Ahead . . . . .	xv

## **PART 1 RETHINKING THE TEEN YEARS**

1 Most People Don't . . . . .	3
<i>A different kind of teen book</i>	
2 The Birth of a Big Idea . . . . .	9
<i>Rumblings of a rebellion</i>	
3 The Myth of Adolescence . . . . .	26
<i>Exposing the low expectations that are robbing our generation</i>	
4 A Better Way . . . . .	46
<i>Reclaiming the teen years as the launching pad of life</i>	

## **PART 2 FIVE KINDS OF HARD**

5 That First Scary Step . . . . .	63
<i>How to do hard things that take you outside your comfort zone</i>	
6 Raising the Bar . . . . .	86
<i>How to do hard things that go beyond what's expected or required</i>	

CONTENTS

7 The Power of Collaboration . . . . . 107  
*How to do hard things that are too big for you  
to do alone*

8 Small Hard Things . . . . . 131  
*How to do hard things that don't pay off  
immediately*

9 Taking a Stand . . . . . 146  
*How to do hard things that go against the crowd*

**PART 3**  
**JOIN THE REBELUTION**

10 Generation Rising . . . . . 167  
*Creating a counterculture from scratch  
(and a dash of salt)*

11 A Thousand Young Heroes . . . . . 183  
*Stories of new beginnings, impossible challenges,  
and the teens who are living them*

12 World, Meet Your Rebelutionaries . . . . . 210  
*Transforming your mission from a decision into  
a destiny*

Appendix A: Do Hard Things, the Gospel, and You . . . . . 225

Appendix B: Questions (and Stories) to Get You  
Started . . . . . 233

Appendix C: 100 Hard Things . . . . . 245

Appendix D: Conversation Guide . . . . . 253

Notes . . . . . 267

Acknowledgments . . . . . 271

## FOREWORD

### BY CHUCK NORRIS

**A**s a young man, I discovered the power of doing hard things. Abject poverty, a father's alcoholism and desertion of our family, and my own shyness were a few of the obstacles I faced and overcame growing up. My mother always told me, "God has a plan for your life." And she's right. Each of us is called to reach for greatness. There really is a hero in all of us. We've all been designed by God to be a blessing to many—a hero to some.

But there's only one way to get there—it's described by the title of this book: *Do Hard Things*.

Today we live in a culture that promotes comfort, not challenges. Everything is about finding ways to escape hardship, avoid pain, and dodge duty. In the past, young people were expected to make significant contributions to society. Today, our culture expects very little from teens—not much more than staying in school and doing a few chores. A sad consequence of such low expectations is that life-changing lessons go unlearned.

To whom can we turn to motivate a new generation of giants? I've found the answer. Alex and Brett Harris and their book, *Do Hard Things*.

I know the twins personally and can vouch for their integrity and wisdom. I've seen their passion to raise up a new

generation of tough-spirited young people. They are amazing young men, uniquely qualified to inspire others to reach for great things.

One of my life's principles is to develop myself to the maximum of my potential in all ways and to help others do the same. Brett and Alex come straight from the same mold, but with an even greater potential to reach young people around the world.

Their book is far more than a typical how-to book. From an insightful historical overview of the teen years to personal plans for helping teens hurdle tough obstacles, the authors sound a battle cry to raise the cultural bar on teenage potential and to challenge young people to reach for their God-given best.

*Do Hard Things* will help recruit, develop, and deploy a new generation of young culture warriors. With God's help, the book you're holding will usher in an era in which it can once again be said of our youth, "I write to you, *young men*, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14).

Start reading now. Then do hard things!

—Chuck Norris

[www.chucknorris.com](http://www.chucknorris.com)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE FIVE-YEAR EDITION

# LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

Only yesterday, it seems, two teenage brothers got excited about a big idea that young people were being underestimated—badly, and with devastating consequences. What made it worse, the brothers believed, was that a whole generation of teens had bought into a culture of low expectations. Kids everywhere were essentially being groomed for failure before they had ever been tested for success. Before they'd ever been invited to set their minds, wills, and hearts on making a mark for God in the world.

How tragic!

And history showed it didn't have to be that way. History showed, in fact, that the teen years were meant to be a season of daring, of high hopes and real achievements, a one-time-only opportunity for a guy or girl to set a course for a truly remarkable life.

The brothers—okay, that would be us, Alex and Brett—came up with a plan to change all that, then invited other young people and their parents to join in. And that was the beginning of the Rebelution.

What a difference five years have made! What started as a blog (TheRebellion.com) became a best-selling book, *Do Hard Things*, which led to youth conferences around the country every summer. And all of that, by God's grace and a lot of hard work, had spawned an international youth movement with this red book as its manifesto.

To date, *Do Hard Things* has been translated into over a dozen languages, including French, Korean, Czech, and Portuguese, sparking sister campaigns in Europe, Asia, and South America. Young people from New York to Los Angeles, from São Paulo to Manila, are rebelling against low expectations for the glory of God.

"Regards from snowy Poland," reads a recent e-mail from sisters Kornelia and Eunika Chojeckie. They wrote to say they had just finished a "do hard things" presentation in Lublin.

The Chojeckie sisters are two of the founding members of a Rebelution-inspired youth campaign spreading across

Eastern Europe. They're sponsoring events and a growing, multilingual social networking site with users from Poland, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Kazakhstan.

Here in the United States, rebelutionaries have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for missions and charity, won prestigious film festivals, earned Grammy Award nominations, fought human trafficking around the world, and been invited to speak at the White House on multiple occasions.

"Do hard things" is slowly entering the national consciousness, making cameo appearances in *ESPN The Magazine*, nationally syndicated comic strips, blockbuster feature films, as well as in the speeches of major political leaders from Senator John McCain to President Barack Obama.

But the true engine of the Rebelution has been the steady, long-term faithfulness of thousands of young people you've never heard of, quietly stepping outside their comfort zones, going beyond what is expected or required, investing their teenage and college years in undertakings of real and lasting consequence, and never backing down from hard things worth doing.

Across the globe—from Parisian neighborhoods to Ivy League classrooms—a generation of rebels is rising through steady, one-foot-after-the-other, daily obedience to Jesus Christ. This is a quiet, worldwide revolution, and you're invited. Our mantra is "do hard things," and our mission statement is 1 Timothy 4:12, "Don't let anyone look down on you because

you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (NIV).

We were eighteen when we wrote *Do Hard Things*. Since then we’ve been able to travel and speak in dozens of major cities in the United States, Canada, Switzerland, and Japan—reaching hundreds of thousands of teens, parents, and youth workers through live events and media appearances. We’ve been able to preach the gospel to our generation and seen thousands of bold professions of faith in Jesus Christ. We’ve written another book called *Start Here*, a field guide for putting the “do hard things” mind-set into practice.

We attended and graduated from college (Patrick Henry College, Purcellville, Virginia), becoming the first in our immediate family to do so. We watched our mother bravely battle cancer and go to be with Jesus on July 4, 2010. We’ve fought our own personal battles against sin, wrestled through questions of calling, and for long stretches of time, stepped out of the limelight to just practice what we preach.

And we both got married—Alex to Courtney, and Brett to Ana. All together, the last five years have been the most significant and challenging years of our lives. We’ve been stretched, pushed, and strengthened. We haven’t backed down, and we haven’t let up. It’s been hard—and it’s been good.

Which brings us to the fifth anniversary edition you’re holding. When WaterBrook Multnomah approached us about

an update, we were faced with some important questions: How do you update something without changing it? How do you offer something new without compromising what made the old so effective?

In the end, we opted for a conservative approach, leaving the original content untouched while adding new material as appendixes. It's the same book, but better. And whether you're a first-time reader or a long-time rebelutionary, we think you'll really like it.

This new content begins with "Questions (and Stories) to Get You Started," which delves into the queries we hear most often:

- "I'm ready to get started—on *something!* What should I do now?"
- "Do small hard things really count?"

Next you'll find the list "100 Hard Things" to get your own creative juices flowing. These are real-life examples of hard things young people just like you have done—from making care packages for members of the military, to starting an after-school Bible study, to training for and running a marathon.

Finally, we've included a *Do Hard Things* study guide for personal or group use, along with information about downloadable video resources we created with LifeChurch.tv.

We think you'll find these new tools helpful and encouraging as you champion the vision of teenage *high*

## INTRODUCTION

expectations in your area and apply your heart, mind, and strength to the adventure ahead.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.” Our hope and prayer is that you would join us in doing hard things, that together we would be *the* generation of Christian young people who find it difficult to follow hard after Christ...and yet still try.

Together for His glory,  
Alex and Brett Harris



PART 1

**RETHINKING THE  
TEEN YEARS**

# MOST PEOPLE DON'T

## A different kind of teen book

**M**ost people don't expect you to understand what we're going to tell you in this book. And even if you understand, they don't expect you to care. And even if you care, they don't expect you to do anything about it. And even if you do something about it, they don't expect it to last.

Well, we do.

This is a different kind of teen book. Check online or walk through your local bookstore. You'll find plenty of books

written by fortysomethings who, like, totally understand what it's like being a teenager. You'll find a lot of cheap throwaway books for teens because young people today aren't supposed to care about books or see any reason to keep them around. And you'll find a wide selection of books where you never have to read anything twice—because the message is dumbed-down. Like, just for you.

What you're holding in your hands right now is a challenging book *for* teens *by* teens who believe our generation is ready for a change. Ready for something that doesn't promise a whole new life if you'll just buy the right pair of jeans or use the right kind of deodorant. We believe our generation is ready to rethink what teens are capable of doing and becoming. And we've noticed that once wrong ideas are debunked and cleared away, our generation is quick to choose a better way, even if it's also more difficult.

We're nineteen-year-old twin brothers, born and raised in Oregon, taught at home by our parents, and striving to follow Christ as best we can. We've made more than our share of mistakes. And although we don't think "average teenagers" exist, there is nothing all that extraordinary about us personally.

Still, we've had some extraordinary experiences. At age sixteen, we interned at the Alabama Supreme Court. At seventeen, we served as grass-roots directors for four statewide political campaigns. At eighteen, we authored the most popular Christian teen blog on the web. We've been able to speak

to thousands of teens and their parents at conferences in the United States and internationally and to reach millions online. But if our teen years have been different than most, it's not because we're somehow better than other teens, but because we've been motivated by a simple but very big idea. It's an idea you're going to encounter for yourself in the pages ahead.

We've seen this idea transform "average" teenagers into world-changers able to accomplish incredible things. And they started by simply being willing to break the mold of what society thinks teens are capable of.

So even though the story starts with us, this book really isn't about us, and we would never want it to be. It's about something God is doing in the hearts and minds of our generation. It's about an idea. It's about rebelling against low expectations. It's about a movement that is changing the attitudes and actions of teens around the world. And we want you to be part of it.

This book invites you to explore some radical questions:

- Is it possible that even though teens today have more freedom than any other generation in history, we're actually missing out on some of the best years of our lives?
- Is it possible that what our culture says about the purpose and potential of the teen years is a lie and that we are its victims?

- Is it possible that our teen years give us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for huge accomplishments—as individuals and as a generation?
- And finally, what would our lives look like if we set out on a different path entirely—a path that required more effort but promised a lot more reward?

We describe that alternative path with three simple words: “do hard things.”

If you’re like most people, your first reaction to the phrase “do hard things” runs along the lines of, “Hard? Uh-oh. Guys, I just remembered that I’m supposed to be somewhere else. Like, right now.”

We understand this reaction. It reminds us of a story we like to tell about a group of monks. Yep, monks.

On the outskirts of a small town in Germany is the imaginary abbey of Dundelhoff. This small stone monastery is home to a particularly strict sect of Dundress monks, who have each vowed to live a life of continual self-denial and discomfort.

Instead of wearing comfy T-shirts and well-worn jeans like most people, these monks wear either itchy shirts made from goat hair or cold chain mail worn directly over bare skin. Instead of soft mattresses, pillows, and warm blankets, they sleep on the cold stone floors of the abbey. You might have read somewhere that monks are fabulous cooks? Well, not

these monks. They eat colorless, tasteless sludge—once a day. They only drink lukewarm water.

We could go on, but you get the picture. No matter what decision they face, Dundress monks always choose the more difficult option, the one that provides the least physical comfort, holds the least appeal, offers the least fun. Why? Because they believe that the more miserable they are, the holier they are; and the holier they are, the happier God is.

So these miserable monks must be poster boys for “do hard things.” Right?

Wrong!

We’re not plotting to make your life miserable. We’re not recommending that you do any and every difficult thing. For example, we’re not telling you to rob a bank, jump off a cliff, climb Half Dome with your bare hands, or stand on your head for twenty-four hours straight. We are not telling you to do pointless (or stupid) hard things just because they’re hard. And if you’re a Christian, we’re certainly not telling you that if you work harder or make yourself uncomfortable on purpose, God will love you more. He will never—could never—love you any more than He does right now.

So that’s what we’re not doing. What we *are* doing is challenging you to grab hold of a more exciting option for your teen years than the one portrayed as normal in society today. This option has somehow gotten lost in our culture, and most

people don't even know it. In the pages ahead, you're going to meet young people just like you who have rediscovered this better way—a way to reach higher, dream bigger, grow stronger, love and honor God, live with more joy—and quit wasting their lives.

In *Do Hard Things*, we not only say there is a better way to do the teen years, we show you how we and thousands of other teens are doing it right now and how you can as well.