

HARD THINGS—PART 2

SO YOU THINK IT'S EASY TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

The purpose of this handout is to help you believe the hard promises, apply the hard principles, and obey the hard commands in God's Word.

2 of 2

28. *deny yourself daily, when you'd really like to indulge:* "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself daily, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Lk 9:23=Mt 16:24; cf. "deny ungodliness and worldly desires" Tit 2:12).
29. *die to self, when you'd rather have your own way:* "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). "The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14; cf. 5:24; Rom 6:2, 6).
30. *give up our rights, when we usually demand them loudly:* "We did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel" (1 Cor 9:12; cf. 6:7; 8:13; 9:4–6, 14–15, "not make full use of my right" 18).
31. *God's promises (unseen, future) are better than worldly possessions (seen, present):* future treasure is better than present treasure (Mt 6:19–20; "unfailing treasure" Lk 12:33) and heavenly rewards are better than earthly rewards ("a better possession" Heb 10:34; "a better country" 11:13–16, "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" 11:24–26). It's better to give up the present for the future, the seen for the unseen, the possessed for the promised (Lk 12:16–21).
32. *pray always and don't lose heart (do not give up' Lk 18:1 RCL), when we'd rather have immediate answers and "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17), when it's hard to concentrate for any length of time (staying awake in it' Col 4:2 RCL).*
33. *wait for the Lord, when we want it right now:* "Wait for the LORD; Be strong, and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD" (Psa 27:14). Wait for answers to prayer (40:1) and be blessed (Prov 20:22; Isa 30:18; Lam 3:25).
34. *"love your enemies" (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27, 35), when it's natural to hate them:* "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK" (Rom 12:20; cf. Prov 25:21–22).
35. *"love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Mt 22:39=Mk 12:31; Gal 5:14), when most of us love ourselves more than anyone else.* The ultimate love for your neighbor is to "sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Mt 19:16–22).
36. *regard others as more important than yourself (Phil 2:3), when you think you're more important; "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil 2:4), when most of us are totally wrapped up in our own interests; please your neighbor and not just yourself (Rom 15:1–3); "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16) when we'd rather look out for number one.*
37. *humble yourself in order to be exalted, when you'd rather exalt yourself without the humbling:* "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pet 5:6; cf. Lk 14:11; 18:14).
38. *turn the other cheek, when you really want to slap or hit back:* "Whoever slaps (rapizo) you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Mt 5:39). And "whoever hits (tupto) you on the cheek, offer him the other also" (Lk 6:29).
39. *don't resist those who are evil, when you'd like to do much more than resist:* "Do not resist him who is evil" (Mt 5:39). "You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you" (Jas 5:6).
40. *"if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also" (Mt 5:40); when most countersue to keep their possessions.* Also "whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either" (Lk 6:29).
41. *"whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back" (Lk 6:30), when you're itching to fight to get it back.* The verb *apaiteo* means "to ask for something to be returned" (Louw & Nida) or "to demand *some*th. back" (BAGD).
42. *"whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two" (Mt 5:41), when you'd rather sit down and be dragged the extra mile.* *aggareuo* is used of military impressment: "they pressed him into service to carry the cross" (Mt 27:32).
43. *"overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:20–21), when it's much more satisfying to overcome evil with more evil:* "I have killed . . . a boy for striking me; If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen 4:23–24).
44. *don't judge others, when it's awfully hard not to:* "Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you" (Mt 7:1–2). "Let not him who does not eat judge him who eats" (Rom 14:3). "Who are you to judge the servant of another?" (14:4). "But you, why do you judge your brother?" (14:10). "Let us not judge one another any more" (14:13).
45. *don't complain about one another, when we complain about everything:* "Do not sigh [metonymy for complaining], brothers, against one another, lest you be judged; behold, the Judge is standing in front of the door" (Jas 5:9 RCL).
46. *"do all things without grumbling or disputing" (Phil 2:14) when complaining and arguing come so naturally.* Impositions on our time often evoke complaints: "Be hospitable to one another without complaint" (1 Pet 4:9).
47. *be holy, when it's so hard to be unique, different, one of a kind:* "Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior" (1 Pet 1:15–16); "you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).
48. *desire to seek, know, and follow God's will, but not always certain what it is:* "forbidden. . . to speak the word in Asia . . . trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit . . . did not permit them. . . . Come over to Macedonia" (Acts 16:6–10).
49. *submit to God's will and plan for your life, even when it's not pleasant, desirable, or comfortable:* "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Lk 22:42; cf. Acts 2:23; Heb 11:36–38; Rev 2:10).
50. *"fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12; cf. 1:18), when you prefer peace and harmony and would like to leave spiritual warfare to others:* "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).
51. *a sex drive with restraints:* God creates us with powerful hormones and then tells us not to even look "on a woman to lust for her" (Mt 5:28). "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14; cf. Lev 20:10; Prov 6:32; Rom 13:8–10).
52. *"wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22), when you'd rather have your own way:* "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (Eph 5:24). "Wives, be subject to your husbands" (Col 3:18). "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives" (1 Pet 3:1).
53. *give glory to God, when we'd like a little glory and honor for ourselves:* "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father" (Mt 6:1; cf. 6:2–6, 16–18; Jn 8:54).

LESSONS FOR LIVING

1. Applying Scripture to life is not natural: it flies in the face of human nature. Ever noticed that if you do the opposite of what you think, feel, or want to do you'll probably do the right thing? Isn't this implied in Lk 16:15b?
2. Believers who hear but don't apply the hard commands, principles, and promises in God's Word see little change taking place in their lives. They continue doing what comes naturally, such as obeying the desires of the flesh.
3. Why do these hard things? To be like our heavenly Father (Mt 5:45; Lk 6:35–36)! The hard things are nothing more than treating people as God treats them. To be godly is to think as God thinks, love as He loves, and give as He gives.
4. Doing these hard things makes us different from the rest of the world: "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit it that to you? For even sinners do the same thing" (Lk 6:32–34; cf. Mt 5:46–47; Lk 14:12–14).
5. Hard things were required in Old Testament times: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge" (Lev 19:18). "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (Prov 25:21).
6. Easy and hard things must be implemented (Lk 6:27–38, 46). Hard things are hard because they require faith, self-denial, sacrifice, patience, hardship, suffering, endurance, and personal loss—things we are loath to experience.
7. They're hard because you're worldly and haven't died to self (Gal 2:20), to sin (Rom 6:2, 11), to the flesh (Gal 5:24), and to the world (6:14). "We are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash" (1 Cor 4:11–13 NLT).
8. A period of protest and struggle is normal. David prayed, "Teach me to do Your will" (Psa 143:10). It takes time to reach the point where you can say with David, "I delight to do Your will, O my God" (40:8; cf. Acts 13:22; Mt 21:28–31).
9. It's impossible to do all these hard things in our own power—in the flesh; nay, we don't even desire to do them! But self-control, a fruit of the Spirit, is God's supernatural provision to help us accomplish the hard things (Gal 5:23).
10. You'll never conquer the hard things if you love God only because he blesses you (cf. Job 1:8–12, 20–22; 2:3–6, 9–10). Doing the hard things teaches us how totally unselfish God is in his dealings with his creatures (cf. Mt 5:43–48).
11. Doing the hard things is foolishness to unbelievers: "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor 2:14).
12. Success in doing the hard things is rewarded: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great" (Lk 6:35; cf. 6:22–23; 2 Tim 2:12; Heb 11:24–26; 1 Pet 2:20; Rev 2:10; 20:4).
13. Hard things are part of the Angelic Conflict: e.g., overcoming the desires of the flesh to stay in fellowship with God condemns Satan by showing how far we're willing to go to serve a God we love but have never seen (1 Pet 1:8).