The modern child is a largely disappointing creature. He is often gifted but unmotivated, well-educated but shallow, occupied but not going anywhere. Sociologists and child development experts are scratching their heads as our children reach the threshold of adulthood, but won’t go through the door. Living on their own, paying their own bills, getting married, having children—all of these traditional adult mile-markers are being pushed further into the twenties and even thirties as many simply refuse to grow up.

It’s a disturbing trend and yet many parents make the mistake of accepting this and other unique facets of modern parenting as par for the course. The end result? Cultural expectations for young people get lower and lower. Parenting experts writing for respected publications like Psychology Today encourage us to expect disaster—and many of us do. Consider the following parenting roadmap proffered by a prominent child psychologist:

**Early Adolescence (ages 9-13):** Parents can anticipate a negative attitude, arguing with rules, and letting homework and chores slide. Also expect your child to test limits by engaging in activities such as shoplifting, vandalizing, and early experimentation with drugs.

**Mid-Adolescence (ages 13-15):** Expect more intense conflict, more lying to avoid consequences for wrongdoing, more risk-tak-
ing, and more pressure to use illegal substances. At this stage your child has become ruled by the need for immediate gratification and pleasing his or her peers.

**Late Adolescence (ages 15-18):** Expect significant emotional and sexual involvement in dating relationships, recreational substance use at parties, and a lack of readiness to take on worldly independence and responsibility.

**Trial Independence (ages 18-23):** You can expect low self-esteem from being unable to meet the demands of adult responsibility, as well as increased anxiety from not having clear direction in life or the self-discipline to consistently pursue it. You can also anticipate that your child will be highly distracted by peers who are equally aimless, which will lead to more partying to escape responsibility, as well as experimenting with hard drugs.

The author concludes this dismal overview with the remark, “Of course, this … is only an approximation; but better a rough road map than none at all.” And surely, the author meant well. What’s more, his roadmap does describe the experience of many parents around the world. But parenting hasn’t always been so difficult, so rocky.


As parents, we sometimes mistakenly assume that things were always this way. They weren’t. The modern family is just that—modern—and all of our places in it are quite new. Unless we keep in mind how new our lives as parents are, and how unusual and ahistorical, we won’t see that the world we live in, as mothers and fathers, is still un-
der construction. Modern childhood was invented less than seventy years ago—the length of a catnap, in historical terms.

Fortunately, some children are rebelling against this historical aberration—this culturally imposed aimlessness. From New York to Los Angeles, from Geneva to São Paulo, Christian boys and girls are rejecting apathy and mediocrity, and tackling difficult tasks both big and small for the glory of God. This movement of youngsters “rebelling against low expectations” has earned the praise of some of the most prominent Christian leaders in America and been covered by major media outlets both Christian and secular.

It just so happens that my twin sons, Alex and Brett, have been key voices in this promising generational shift. Seven years ago Alex and Brett published a book called *Do Hard Things*, which has served as a manifesto for this movement and been translated into over a dozen languages. In it, they challenged their generation to conquer complacency and step outside their comfort zones for the glory of God and the good of others. They looked at biblical, historical, and contemporary examples of God using ordinary young people, even small children, in extraordinary ways.

God has used *Do Hard Things* to light a fire in the hearts of teens and tweens around the world. These young people have been energized by the truth that life starts now, that growing up into godly maturity and practical competence is cool, and that being used by God, even at a young age, should be the norm not the exception. Most importantly, they have learned that doing hard things, rather than avoiding them, is the key to real success and lasting happiness.

In the same spirit, this book invites parents to explore some radical questions:
• Is it possible that the right kinds of hardship are actually key to all our highest aspirations for our kids—and so much more?
• Is it possible that by shielding our kids from these hard things, we’re actually sabotaging the mechanism by which they grow up and become great?
• Is it possible that our children, if given the chance, would actually prefer being useful to society over being entertained and sheltered?
• And finally, is it possible that even our highest expectations for our children aren’t really high enough?

In *Raising Kids to Do Hard Things*, I’ll teach you how to raise your expectations and successfully re-incorporate the right kinds of hardship into your parenting arsenal—the kind of hard things that have produced men and women of character and competence for thousands of years. You’ll learn why loving and protecting your kids isn’t enough, why boredom is your best friend, and why the old rich designed rigorous “ordeal”s for their sons and daughters. You’ll discover how to wield the power of companionship to motivate your kids, how to make learning a delight rather than a drudgery, and how to raise producers, rather than consumers. I’ve been practicing these principles in my own family for decades and have taught them to thousands of other parents through my seminars and years in pastoral ministry.

The ideas I share in this book are not theoretical. They are biblical. And they are the backbone of how I’ve raised my seven children these last forty years. You may have noticed that this book is co-authored with my 27-year-old son, Brett. Though you’ll be hearing my voice as you read, you are also benefitting
from Brett’s unique perspective on how he was raised—as well as his gift for writing, organization, and research. Our aim has been to blend our experiences as father and son (one raising kids to do hard things, the other being raised to do hard things) into a parenting book that serves parents and children better than if I had worked alone. At the same time, the principles in this book do not rest on our experience only. They have been implemented successfully by tens-of-thousands of families worldwide and throughout history. They are not new. We didn’t invent them. Raising kids to do hard things is an old path, tried and true. And it leads somewhere good.

Children raised this way are more likely to be:

- Prepared for life in the real world and possess the character and competence to blossom wherever God plants them.
- Willing to embrace hardship on the way to important accomplishments in their personal and professional lives.
- Focused on impacting the world for the glory of God and the good of others, rather than living a self-centered, individualistic life.
- Discontent with simply avoiding bad behaviors and instead actively seeking out good, hard, worthwhile things to do.

Significantly, attaining these results does not make your life as a parent harder—it actually makes it easier. What raising kids to do hard things accomplishes is to place half the responsibility for success on our children’s shoulders, where it belongs. And it re-imagines parenting, not as the filling of buckets, but as the lighting of fires.
Viewing our children as buckets, where we are responsible to pour in as much investment as possible and keep their schedules filled to the brim, is exhausting and often ineffective. Viewing them as fires, that need to be tended and fed, but possess their own animation and hunger for new material, takes a huge burden off of our shoulders and gives us a more realistic gauge for how our children are actually doing.

The number one question I receive from parents is, “How do I motivate my kids?” This book is my answer to that question. Raising kids to do hard things is about raising self-motivated kids with the drive and internal fire necessary to succeed on their own initiative. And here’s what that can look like:

• A son who steps outside his comfort zones willingly, for the sake of personal growth or to help someone in need—not because he is being pushed and prodded.
• A daughter who goes above and beyond what is expected or required of her—even beyond what you, her parents, are asking for.
• A teenager who takes the time and makes the effort to be faithful in the small things, from family chores to personal devotions to what he does when no one is watching.
• A college student who stands up for what she believes in, even when she encounters opposition and ridicule—because she truly believes it for herself.
• A twenty-something who tackles big problems in his world, with youthful optimism and dogged determination.
It can be a huge challenge to make our kids do hard things. But when we raise kids to do hard things, we end up with young men and women who will do the right thing, even when we’re not around to make them. And our job as parents gets a whole lot easier.

In the end, our satisfaction as fathers and mothers comes, not by how well we can make our children behave under constant supervision and direction, but by what they choose to do when no one else is around to make them do anything. Is a child truly industrious if he only works when someone cracks a whip? Or is he truly well-behaved if he is polite in front of adults, but bullies other kids when no one is watching?

Raising kids to do hard things is not about appearances. It gets down to the heart. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for being white-washed tombs—pearly white on the outside, but full of dead bones on the inside (Matt. 23:27). His point was spiritual, but has broad application. What really counts is not how well we can get our children to appear, but how thoroughly they buy into what truly matters in life.

In this book, I focus my attention, not on how to make your kids behave better, but on how to help them buy into the wisdom and goodness of doing hard things and making an important mark for God in the world, a mark only they can make. This is not a comprehensive manual on parenting (otherwise it would be a much thicker book). Rather it is a guide for raising self-motivated kids who take the initiative at home, at school, and in their community. This is where I have the most to offer.

In the next chapter we’ll go over five reasons to raise kids to do hard things, drawing from God’s Word, history, cutting edge science, nationwide polling, and
the field of sociology. Then we’ll transition into seven parenting principles that will help you raise kids who are personally motivated to do the right hard things for the right reasons. We’ll talk about fundamentals, such as:

- How to encourage creativity and deeper thinking by allowing boredom and limiting mental junk food.
- How to recognize and cultivate delight in your children so that their education and advancement become self-motivated rather than drudgery.
- How to better include your children in the life you’re already living so that your wisdom and experience can rub off on them.
- How to expose them to the best influences in terms of friends and mentors.
- And how to inculcate generosity and avoid an entitlement complex.

The common thread will be raising kids to do hard things—or as we’ll see in the coming chapters, how to light a fire in the hearts of our children that not only prepares them for the real world, but launches them into productive and meaningful adult lives. If we can succeed in this sacred task, the benefits to our children, our families, and our world will be enormous.
Dear Parent,

Last September we launched the *Raising Kids to Do Hard Things* online course and had 124 families walk through the entire manuscript with us. It was awesome!

Here’s how one mother described the experience:

*When I heard about the new course the Harris family was offering, I knew it would bless us. Even though our children now range in age from 15 to 28, and are all walking with the Lord, I learned so much from this course! The profound truths that are shared, and the wonderfully interactive format of the course, blessed my heart richly. When the book comes out, it will not only be my new favorite baby shower gift, but we plan to also make copies available at our church. The vision cast through these teachings for who our children are supposed to be in the Lord is empowering and exciting. Hope will be renewed, even as the culture around us tries to deaden our understanding of who God created our children to be. I strongly and urgently encourage all parents to take the “Raising Kids to Do Hard Things” online course. The world desperately needs our families to be salt and light, and this course is a wonderful tool to help parents fulfill that responsibility.* — Anne Conder

In a few weeks, Lord-willing, we will re-open enrollment for the *Raising Kids Online Course*. We want to give more families the opportunity to engage directly with us and with the pre-release manuscript.

Our goal is to work with 500 families before the book’s official release in 2017. If you’d like to be one of them, there are two things you need to do:

1. **Sign-up for the Raising Kids online course waiting list.**

2. Enroll in the course when we open registration in a few weeks.

I hope you can join us.

In Christ Alone,
Brett Harris