

Do Hard Things: The Ring Finger (Week 1)

HOOK

You've been lied to . . . and are being lied to.

What do you think of when you hear the word adolescence? There is a common belief that we, during teen years, experience a stage of development where we are irresponsible, lazy, immature, impulsive, entitled, make poor decisions, and are only concerned with ourselves.

Is there any part of you that reflects that image? If you take your hands off the steering wheel, you won't drift towards growth. You'll drift towards complacency. Every day you may be embracing and living the lie of adolescence, allowing yourself to perfectly fit that expectation. It's a CRAZY CYCLE. You're expected by adults to be immature and irresponsible, so you act that way because it's easy. You act that way, so it's expected.

The Elephant and the Twine

India: To this day in more remote areas, an entire village will pull their resources to buy a single elephant. The elephant will provide many crucial services for the village (ex. farming, construction, etc.) Each year they will have a festival glorifying the great brute. They'll have a parade where they paint it and decorate it with bright colors. But, the best part is the tug-of-war where up to a 100 men will pull against that single animal, and almost always lose. Ironically, that monster will be tied up every night with a simple piece of twine tied from the back leg to a stake in the ground, and the elephant will not move from that spot. Why?

When they purchase the elephant as an infant, they will, beginning the first night, chain the baby elephant's leg to a tree where it will pull and strain against it until it bleeds. This is done every night for weeks until the animal is convinced that it cannot break free. Once that concept is rooted in its mind, all they need to do is replace the chain and tree with twine and a stake. As soon as the elephant feels the tension on its leg, it believes that it cannot move. It's mentally broken.

**The idea of adolescence is a twine around our minds that has been passed down for several generations and has become accepted as truth.*

Adolescence on Trial

I challenge the idea of adolescence. I summon it to be put on trial, to be weighed and measured against Logic, History, and Anatomy, and I intend to prove that adolescence is a myth.

1) The Argument of Logic

What are critical things you had to learn as a child? We are expected as children to: Learn motor skills, speak, walk, develop social skills, grasp morality, adapt to new environments, and to process an enormous world. Simply stated: we are expected to **learn, develop, grow, and move forward.**

What are some critical things you must learn to do as an adult? We are expected as adults to: Succeed in a career, hold together a family, make wise financial decisions, wrestle with debt, support political entities, progress society, fight injustice, juggle responsibilities, to work, entertain, lead . . . to **learn, develop, grow, and move forward.**

- Your present expectations are, “don’t fail in school, don’t get pregnant, and clean your room,” and some of you don’t have a perfect score in that list.
 - That’s it?! Those are pretty low expectations!

Is it logical for a teen to take a 7-year vacation from development and responsibility? When will adult “you” learn adult skills? Will a certain number on your driver’s license transform you into an adult imbued with skills for a successful career and family? No! To reach your maximum potential, you MUST embrace these years of training to be a springboard into adulthood. You must never relax in **learning, developing, growing, and moving forward.**

Simple logic discredits adolescence.

2) The Argument of History

The term “teenager” is only 80 years old, coined by Reader’s Digest in 1941. The rest of human history had a much different outlook on people of 13-19 years old.

- Rome – 16 y/o – own land; serve in the military
- Prussia – 15 y/o – military service

- Jews – 12-14 y/o – get married; take over a business
- United States – 15 y/o – attend a university; get married; begin your occupation

How old were your great-grandparents when they entered the work force, began providing for their siblings, getting married, and standing on their own?

I could give examples of a teens who **led an armada**, who **opened hospitals**, and **ruled nations**, then inform you of what changed 100 years ago. Short on time.

History discredits adolescence.

3) The Argument of Anatomy

(*Show a line that peaks quickly and tapers slowly) The brain develops and wanes through our lives. Its peak volume, its greatest ability for development is between the ages of **13-15 years old!** That's you!

- That means your greatest capacity for learning, personal growth, mental development, and absorption of information is right now! (**Prov. 20:29** – “*glory of young people is their strength*”)
 - Want to learn a new language? Now is the time to do it.
 - Want to pick up mechanics, carpentry, or a new skill? Now is the time.

You have more potential for **learning, developing, growing, and moving forward** then you'll ever have again . . . right now. **Is this a season to take a vacation from personal progress?**

Your anatomy discredits adolescence.

POW! KO in the third! Adolescence - the idea we are supposed to spend 7 years coasting - is a myth.

PLUS, you live in an era and nation with more **knowledge**, access to **information, health, wealth, communication**, and **free time** than any country at any point in human history. You are standing on the juncture of peak capacity and peak opportunity together... and you spent ? hours on video games, Netflix, social media, YouTube, and dead-end relationships last week? What a waste of potential!

If that pricks you a little bit, then you're realizing that you may have bought into the lie of adolescence. **Why do you think "adolescence" is a comfortable lie to accept? Because it expects so little of you.** Maybe today you'll do some self-evaluation of your priorities and make some new changes.

You **can be** an adult in progress, a leader in development, a champion in training **OR** you can settle in for the purgatory of drifting in mediocrity. *Equip and prepare yourself now for who you hope to be in the future?*

Over the next 5 weeks, we will dive into the book DO HARD THINGS written by two teenagers, Alex and Brett Harris (on sale at the snack shop for \$10). It will offer 5 habits to cultivate which will be priceless tools to equip you in making your teen years a launching pad for the future. Are you ready for #1?

BOOK

Judges 6-8 – Gideon is called by God to give Him glory by defeating Israel's enemies. The Angel of the Lord speaks to him saying (**6:12**), "YHWH is with you" and calls him a "**mighty man of valor**." This is a guy who is hiding, sifting wheat in a wine press so as not to be seen by the bad guys.

- **God's task:** **6:14** – *Go in this might of yours and save Israel...*
- **Gideon's response,** **6:15** – *"Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."*
 - God had higher expectations of Gideon than he had for himself.

1 Timothy 4:11-12 – (Written to a teenager who Paul put in charge of a church) "*These things I command and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but **be an example** to the believers in **words**, in **conduct**, in **love**, in **spirit**, in **faith**, in **purity**."*

- Paul has high expectations of Timothy. He challenged Timothy to be an "**example**" = Don't just keep up with these virtues, but LEAD in them.

Society may have a low outlook of you. You may have a low outlook of yourself, but **God has higher expectations of you than you've been led to believe. He may expect more of you in character, in actions, and in purpose than what you're giving.**

5 Hard Things associated with fingers on your hand: **RING FINGER** – you must marry yourself to this challenge, to doing this Hard Thing or all of them will be useless.

LOOK - #1 - DO THINGS OUTSIDE OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Public speaking, developing a new skill, Spanish homework, being bold for Jesus, trying a new food, having a tough conversation with your dad, breaking up with that loser, etc.

- **Ex. 1.** High Ropes illustration – comfort zone, stretching zone, panic zone.
 - *We must take daily steps into our stretching zones to grow.*
- **Ex. 2.** 1510 Hunt-Lenox Globe - “HC SVNT DRACONES” (hic sunt dracones) = “Here are dragons” in unexplored China. It was common for cartographers to draw monsters in uncharted lands/seas reflecting the fear of explorers/sailors.
 - **Don’t we have a fear that outside our comfort zone is endless, unknown dangers?** Those empty fears are the twine holding us back, chaining us to the place we are right now. **What’s the twine holding you back?**

The stretching zone is marked by those things you avoid or put off as long as possible. Comfort zones are relaxed, familiar, and predictable. They don’t ask anything from us. But all that’s stopping us from being effective for the Lord is the twine of fear.

3 Keys to Leaving Our Comfort Zones

1. Take Courage

- “Courage is not the absence of fear but rather the judgement that something is more important than fear. The brave may not live forever but the cautious do not live at all.”
- **Ex. 1.** **Joshua 1:1-9** – “*I won’t leave you or forsake you . . . be strong and of good courage . . . do not be afraid.*”
- **Ex. 2.** Power Pole at camp story. Too often, **we try to wait until we’re not afraid anymore before we’ll jump, but courage never comes through procrastination.** **In your life right now, what circumstance are you waiting to change before you’ll jump?** If you always wait until you’re ready, you’ll always miss opportunities. But jumping before you’re ready runs the real risk of growth.
- **Take courage.**

2. Learn to Fail Forward

- **Proverbs 24:16** – “*the righteous falls seven times and rises again*”
- Ex. Joey – He hasn’t failed at anything; hasn’t done anything; hasn’t “lived at all.”
 - *We allow ourselves to be paralyzed by the fear of failing and hide in comfortable predictability. **Right now, what are you afraid of failing at?**
- Often, we are afraid to fail because of bad experiences and past failures, but the worst failure is quitting or not trying at all.

Henry Ford - "Failure provides the opportunity to begin again, more intelligently."

Thomas Edison's teachers said he was "too stupid to learn anything." He made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. When a reporter asked, "How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?" Edison replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps." **He began again each time more intelligently.**

Babe Ruth is famous for his home run record, but for decades he also held the record for strikeouts. He hit 714 home runs and struck out 1,330 times in his career.

There is a professor at MIT who offers a course on failure. An interviewer once asked him if anybody ever failed the course on failure. He replied, "No, but there were two incompletes." ~ **The worst failure is not trying.**

- Don't fear failure. Master it by growing from it. **Learn to fail forward**

3. Surrender to the Holy Spirit

2 Corinthians 12:9 – “*my power is made perfect in weakness.*”

- God works in our weaknesses to accomplish His big plans.

When we use self-depreciating statements like, “I’m not a math person. I have a bad memory. I’m shy. The teacher doesn’t like me. I can’t speak in public. I’m not smart enough,” we are forgetting who our God is. These statements are simply camouflage for “**I don’t want to do things which don’t come easy.**” We forget it is Christ who lives in us and is in control of our lives. With God’s help, **we can thrive outside of our comfort zones.**

- **Ex. 1.** Oral Roberts had a terrible stutter. It was hard for him to surrender to the Holy Spirit when God called him to be a preacher, but when he preached, he wouldn't stumble over a single word. **Why? He was surrendered to the H.S.**
- **Ex. 2. Horizontal Log at Kings Camp** – 30ft up and sloped without any hand-holds = sheer balance. The head instructor, Jeremy, painted a cross on the pole at the far end and would say, “Don't look down. Look at the cross.” Everyone who followed that instruction succeeded. Why? It gave them a focal point. We need to begin taking our eyes off our fear and failures - “Don't look down!” – and place them on Jesus only.
 - **Matthew 14:22-33** - Peter walks on water – Extraordinary miracle. Notice who initiated this crazy stunt. It was Peter! He dared to leave his comfort zone! Something clicked for him.
 - Peter - “If I'm going to follow Jesus, I have to be willing to attempt things I've never done before, things that seem terrifying.”
 - Jesus – “I accept your proposal! Come on! Keep your eyes on me.”
 - We must take our eyes off the wave and put them on Him.

Our life focus MUST change from self to Jesus. His plan is bigger than yours and it will be scary. Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. Do you know Him?

What area of your life are you holding back from the Holy Spirit? In what situation are you paralyzed in your comfort zone because you won't surrender it to Him?

Sir John Franklin Legend: He was a British navy officer who took three voyages exploring and mapping out the Canadian Arctic coastlines searching for the northwest passage. There's a legend he owned a map of the western coast of N. America where the cartographer included notations in unexplored areas such as “Here are dragons,” “Here are giants,” “Here are fiery scorpions.” According to the legend, as Franklin would explore each of these areas, he would scratch out the notations and replace them with “**Here is God.**”

- **Is God in our comfort zones with us?** Absolutely. **Do you know where else He is?** He's also waiting for us in the unknown = the stretching zones and maybe even the panic zones.
- What if we started seeing the uncharted, the unpredictable, and uncomfortable as places God is already at . . . waiting for us? Wasn't that true for Peter? Wasn't Jesus waiting for him to take the risk to meet Him there . . . waiting to catch him if he fell?
- Gideon – How could God call a self-depreciating fraidy-cat a “mighty man of valor.” God told him, “**The Lord is with you**, you mighty man of valor!”
- Scratch out fear and filling in the scary places of your life with the truth, “Here is God” & **you'll discover the chain of your comfort zone was twine after all.**

RECAP

- The One who made you has high expectations of you right now at your age.
- You're to be an example to others in your words, actions, love, and faith.
- Your first step in being effective is getting out of your comfort zone daily.
- Keys for leaving your comfort zone: Take Courage, Fail Forward, and Surrender to the Holy Spirit.

TOOK

Challenge: Start in something small by reading through this list.

- Set alarm 30 minutes early. Pray, Read, Journal for the next 7 mornings.
- Begin a conversation with a stranger.
- Replace an hour of free time with studying for your hardest class.
- Give a friendly call to a relative you don't like and simply catch up.
- Give 10% of your income this month to a ministry/missionary.

Note to yourself the one that you want to do least. Did you use the process of elimination? Do that one this week.

Get out of your comfort zone and DO SOMETHING HARD.