

“This is a great book, filled with moving and practical meditations on the person and work of Jesus. Grounded in Scripture (and the author’s own testimony), it helps us think through how and why we try to escape—and what gospel change looks like.”

Emma Scrivener, author of *A New Name* and *A New Day*

“This book is easy to read, and full of self-deprecating humour, with plenty of practical examples of people like you and me. Reading a book on escaping escapism is the easy bit, but Dave explores the wisdom contained in Scripture and a relationship with God that truly helps us in our daily lives. This is a hopeful and encouraging book.”

Michael Harvey, co-founder of *Back to Church Sunday*; author of *Unlocking the Growth*

“As someone who struggles with passivity in leadership, I needed this book. Dave Griffith-Jones not only coins an important new term for our struggles—for the disobedience that masks itself as risk-avoidance—but gives a gospel-saturated, compassionate call to repent of our inaction and courageously live out the life of Christ.”

Daniel Darling, Vice-President for Communications, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“We’re a distracted generation. And moralism is as useless a solution as it’s always been. Dave has served us with insight, stimulus and encouragement from the Scriptures and church history, helping us not just to replace one escapism with another, but to engage our wavering, hungering hearts. Recommended—an excellent book.”

Ben Virgo, Director of Christian Heritage London

“At heart, I’m an escapologist. I run from things that are hard because I don’t like failure, unpopularity or pain. If you’re anything like me, you’ll find this book is a fantastic place from which to start a journey of change. It is short, accessible and full of hope. Don’t find an excuse to put off reading it!”

Helen Thorne, Training Director, London City Mission; author of *Purity is Possible*

“What a fine and useful book! It is a really helpful combination of contemporary perception, biblical insight, practical advice, and an attractive and compelling style. I had not realised my own brilliant escapist ability until I read this book; and it also gave me biblical and Christ-centred hope!”

Peter Adam, Vicar-Emeritus of St Jude’s Carlton, Melbourne, Australia

“Refreshingly honest and frequently funny, Dave’s book helps us to develop Christ-like everyday courage by exposing our escapist hearts to who Jesus really is. However you might be seeking to escape from reality, this wonderful book will help you return with real joy to the Good News that we so often fail to let determine every part of our lives.”

Ed Shaw, Author of *The Plausibility Problem*

Foreword by
RICO TICE



Escaping
escapism

DAVE GRIFFITH-JONES

the**goodbook**
COMPANY

*For Helen,
living proof that Proverbs 18 v 22 is true*

Escaping Escapism *Stop putting things off. Start taking things on.*

© Dave Griffith-Jones/The Good Book Company, 2018.

Published by

The Good Book Company

Tel (UK): 0333 123 0880

International: +44 (0) 208 942 0880

Email: info@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites:

North America: www.thegoodbook.com

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



Unless indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 2011 Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission.

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

ISBN: 9781784981808 | Printed in the UK

Cover design by ninefootone creative

Contents

	Foreword <i>by Rico Tice</i>	7
1	The best things we do	11
2	A divided heart	17
3	How can you mend a broken heart?	31
4	Refuge	43
5	Shepherd	57
6	Light	71
7	Portion	85
8	Rock	99
9	Strength	111
10	Salvation	125
11	The hardest things we <i>do</i>	137
	Thank you...	143

Foreword

By Rico Tice

It was a Sunday night at All Souls Langham Place in London, the church at which I serve. It was 20th November 1994, and Alec Motyer, the theologian and preacher from Ireland, was speaking on the 500th anniversary of William Tyndale, the man who translated the Bible into English so that a plough boy might read God's word, and who was martyred for his work.

I remember that Sunday night because of one question Alec Motyer asked, which seared itself onto my heart. As he lamented the absence of a reformation in the southern part of Ireland, he wondered why his homeland never had one. Why did the ploughboy in Wicklow not get a Bible in his own language? It was because, he thundered, there was no Irish Tyndale.

And, he said, perhaps God had called such a man to do that work—and *he turned away*.

I was cut to the heart. Alec Motyer, of course, was talking about the subject of this book: the sin of omission. Not so much the sins I have done, but the things that, in my laziness and self-centredness, I have left undone. And it is this point, so profoundly explored and illustrated in this book that you are holding right now, that causes me to make a confession about my confession, whether when leading public worship or in personal prayer.

It's this: I hardly ever touch on what I fail to do.

I have been a Christian for over 30 years now, but I've been challenged by this book all over again, just as I was back in 1994 in that sermon and by that question. I've been struck by what I should do but don't—what I turn away from. And that's a good thing, because those sins of omission are what prevent me from doing and being all that God calls me to do and be, and what those around me need me to do and be.

What makes this book compelling is that it touches on a profound danger for us. We are so very good at seeing the foolishness of the sins others commit by what they do. So on the whole we know that adultery destroys families, and alcohol destroys livers, and tempers destroy relationships. We are far less good at seeing the foolishness of the sins we commit by what we do not do. The great danger for committed Christians is to avoid those sins of commission, and feel good about doing so, even as we commit the great sin of omission in simply never serving and living for Jesus wholeheartedly.

Francis Schaeffer, the Christian apologist and founder of L'Abri, said in his book *How Should We Then Live?* (first published in 1976) that the temptation for Christians during the following 60 years would be personal peace and affluence. He was not wrong. To put it another way, our greatest danger is that we avoid doing what Paul called Timothy (and through him the Spirit calls us) to do: to suffer for the gospel, to live as a soldier, an athlete, a farmer (2 Timothy 2 v 3-7). In other words, to take on the hard things that the Lord calls us to do, and say, and be, in order to love the gospel and love people.

So, as you read this book, hold onto your seat, because the way in which we have let ourselves fall into the sin of omission is brutally revealed, even as the way of knowing Christ better is wonderfully shown to be what we truly need. After all,

surely the most helpful books are not the ones that are easiest to read, but those that reveal to us what sin, the world and the devil have been doing in our lives without us even noticing. This book will do that for you, and then it will show you what a renewed vision of Christ would do in those areas of our lives where we've been failing, so that you might become more and more like him.

The call of the gospel is the call to a hard life, rather than a comfortable one—the life that, for example, Dave took his family into when he chose to pastor in the inner city of Liverpool. It's a life of hard choices made for the sake of the gospel. It's not a life of ease or escapism.

So this book is a profoundly important contribution to our evangelical Christian culture. It is a brilliant antidote to the sins of omission that are such a danger and so hard to spot, and it is a wonderful portrait of the Lord Jesus as our refuge, shepherd, light, portion, rock, strength and salvation. It will lead you away from self-confidence, and inspire you to have the Christ-confidence which alone will enable you to stop escaping and start loving and truly living, until the glorious day when we see the Lord Jesus face to face.

Rico Tice,

Senior Minister at All Souls Langham Place, London

Founder of Christianity Explored Ministries

1. The best things we do

The best things we do are usually the hardest.

Like climbing mountains. I love climbing mountains—especially Scottish mountains. Yet it's always a battle to put my boots on and set out. My legs ache, the weather looks unpleasant (Scottish mountain weather has its own type of “forbidding grey”) and I know the midges will be fierce (if you haven't experienced Scottish midges, think vicious squadrons of miniature airborne piranhas).

It's less risky and more comfortable to stay on the sofa watching daytime TV. It's easier not to bother.

But by packing my rucksack and heading out and climbing hard, I've seen the sun setting over the Western Isles, come face to face with a golden eagle, and ascended through the clouds to sun-drenched mountaintop worlds. The path is steep but the view from the top is worth it.

The best things we do are usually the hardest.

Like the day I proposed to Helen. It was terrifying. (Just to be clear, it's not Helen that's terrifying; just the thought that she might say no). We were at a beautiful waterfall, the

moment was perfect... but my tongue and my stomach had both tied themselves into Gordian knots. The nerves made me so quiet that Helen thought I was in a bad mood with her, so she got in a bad mood with me. By the time I finally blurted out the question, she was cold, hungry and thoroughly fed up. I considered putting it off to another day. But eventually out came the words, she said yes, and now the girl of my dreams has been my wife for twelve years.

The best things we do are usually the hardest.

Then there's my job. Five years ago our family moved to Toxteth, Liverpool—renowned as one of the most deprived inner-city communities in England—and I started working at a church there. In some difficult moments it did live down to its reputation—not being able to take the kids to the playground because someone was selling crack on the swings, the gang of youths who aimed a firework at my one-year-old daughter, the odd shooting, the eye-watering car insurance premiums. But mostly it was brilliant. We've met some wonderful people, enjoyed the great Liverpool parks and museums and docks and humour, and seen Jesus at work in and through the people in our church. There is nowhere else we'd rather have been.

What's really worth it

Leaving home and making new friends, speaking in public for the first time, being a dad, learning to pray, opening my home and cooking a meal for people, telling friends about Jesus—the things I most dreaded doing have been the things I most delighted in doing. Even when I've failed, I've been glad that I gave it a go.

It's probably been the same for you: learning a language, training for a triathlon, starting a new business... the most daunting tasks are also the most rewarding. Whether it's

committing to a relationship or confronting a problem that you've avoided for too long, the most fulfilling experiences come from tackling the most frightening challenges. It's the only way to be free from selfishness and boredom. As the spy, inventor, fighter pilot and children's author Roald Dahl said, "Most of the really exciting things we do in our lives scare us to death; they wouldn't be exciting if they didn't".

Almost anything that is worth doing is a struggle. Almost anything that benefits other people is tough to do. Almost anything that makes a difference in this world is hard to see through to the end.

Which is why, we'll often do almost anything to escape doing it.

I guess you've picked up this book because you want to love difficult people, tackle difficult challenges and keep moving forwards through difficult times. You want to get on with doing hard things, fix what needs fixing and change what needs changing. But you know that those things don't come naturally. You know they require lots of commitment, courage and integrity. You'd need to stop taking the easy way out, ducking awkward conversations, and putting off anything inconvenient until tomorrow. You'd have to start rising to the challenges of life, and being resilient when relationships and jobs are demanding.

I would love to be this kind of person—wouldn't you? Wouldn't it be good to be someone who isn't put off by the size or scale or cost of a worthwhile task? Wouldn't it be great to be fearless, to embrace responsibility, and to live with integrity? Wouldn't you love to see a diet or exercise plan through to the finish, just for once?

That's the person I want to be. That's the person I've sometimes been (when the weather forecast has been good).

But often it's not the person I choose to be. I find myself putting off unpleasant tasks. I'm addicted to live text commentaries of sporting events when I should be talking to my children. I feel sick at the thought of giving an honest answer to a personal question. I follow the advice of that renowned life coach, Homer Simpson:

“If something's hard to do, then it's not worth doing.”

This book started out as a quest to discover why I'm not the strong and courageous person I want to be (and which the people I love need me to be), and how I could become that person. The good news is I've found the answers—they're in the Bible. The Bible has shown me why I act this way. It's told me how I can be changed and made committed and fearless. And it's shown me the one person in history who has lived the life we all long to live—Jesus.

Jesus always loved difficult people. He compassionately taught and fed the crowds when they interrupted his plans. He courageously spoke the truth to groups who had the power to kill him. He persevered with friends who misunderstood him, criticised him and deserted him. He looked out for others when his life was at his hardest.

Jesus always tackled difficult challenges. He made unpopular decisions. He did what God wanted even when his own family disapproved. He broke social conventions around women, immigrants and lepers. He challenged human injustice and demonic evil. He didn't shy away from the glare of publicity or the gloom of obscurity.

Jesus always persevered through difficult times. He resolutely walked towards a city where he knew that he must suffer and die. He was resilient when falsely accused, beaten, spat on, mocked, stripped naked and nailed to a cross. He

endured the pain of being separated from his Father out of love for undeserving people like us. He took on the hardest path known to man, and reached its end. He never, ever ducked out.

The Bible doesn't just show us that this is what Jesus is like. It also shows us how we can become like him. How we can live with Jesus' courage, integrity and love. How you can.

Because the Bible promises that God can give us an undivided heart.

With an undivided heart...

... an unreliable young man can learn to commit—to a job, a church, a friend, a wife, a child.

... an employee who can't start work without checking her notifications can become the treasured colleague who attempts the hardest jobs first.

... a self-conscious introvert who is anxious about meeting new people can begin to look out for and welcome the outsider.

... a student who copies work off the internet can gain the integrity to do their own work.

... a girl who is scared to aim high and end up looking stupid can give things a go without being afraid of failure.

... a dad who hides in the shed because he feels out of his depth forming relationships can be the engaged, confident and vulnerable husband and father his family need.

The very best things we do are usually the very hardest. And an undivided heart is the spring from which a fearless life that does those things flows. It's the key to loving difficult people, tackling difficult challenges and persevering through difficult times. It's the secret to being strong and courageous.

My heart's desire for myself in the last few years has been for God to give me an undivided heart. My heart's desire for this book is that God will use it to do the same for you. Here's the God-given prayer that I've prayed for myself almost every day for the last few years, and that I'd encourage you to make your own as you read this book:

“Teach me your way, LORD,
that I may rely on your faithfulness;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.” (Psalm 86 v 11)

It's time to stop escaping and start advancing.