

Five Hard Truths That Will Set You Free

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Some years ago I read an essay by the Franciscan Theologian Richard Rohr. I will say, (honestly) that I do not share a lot of agreement with Richard Rohr (no need to detail that here), but I found this particular essay compelling. I do not recall the exact title of that essay but in my mind the title “Five Hard Truths that Will Set You Free” seems the best title. The following five truths from that essay are indeed hard truths. They tend to rock our world and stab at the heart of some of our most cherished modern notions. But if they can be accepted for the truth they convey they bring great peace. We live in a rather self-absorbed, self-focused time and these five truths are not only good medicine for that but they also help us to have more realistic expectations as we live in an imperfect and limited world. Study these truths well. If they irritate you a bit, good, they’re supposed to. They are meant to provoke thought and reassessment. The principles are Richard Rohr’s the comments are mine.



1. Life is hard -We live in rather comfortable times. These are times of convenience and central air conditioning. Medicine has removed a lot of pain and suffering, and consumer goods are in abundance and variety. Entertainment comes in many varieties and is often inexpensive. Hard labor is something few of us know, obesity is common due to over abundance.

Because of all these creature comforts we have tended to expect that life should always be peachy. We are rather outraged at suffering, inconvenience and delay.

Our ancestors lived lives that were far more brutal and short, and they often spoke of life as a “vale of tears,” and understood that suffering was just a part of life. But when we suffer we start to think in terms of lawsuits. Suffering seems obnoxious to us, hard work, unreasonable! We are often easily angered and flung into anxiety at the mere threat of suffering.

This principle reminds us that suffering and difficulty are part of life, something that should be expected. Accepting suffering does not mean we have to like it. But acceptance of the fact that life can be hard at times means we get less angry and anxious when it does come. We do not

lose serenity. Accepting that suffering is inevitable, brings a strange sort of peace. We are freed from unrealistic expectations that merely breed resentments. We also become more grateful for the joys we do experience. Accepting that life can be hard is a truth that sets us free.

2. Your life is not about you- If you want to make God laugh tell Him your plans. If you really want to give him a belly laugh, tell Him, His plans! We often like to think that we should just be able to do whatever pleases us and maximizes our “self-actualization.” However, we do not decide alone what course our life will take.

In this age of “nobody tells me what to do” it is important to be reminded that our true happiness comes not from getting what we want, but what God wants. Our destiny isn’t to follow our star but to follow God. True peace comes from careful discernment of God’s will for us.

It is sad how few people today ever really speak with God about important things like careers, entering into a marriage, pondering a large project. We just go off and do what we please, and expect God to bail us out if it doesn’t go well. You and I do not exist merely for our own whims, we have a place in God’s plan. Our serenity is greater when we prayerfully discern that place and humbly seek God’s will. Accepting the fact that we are not merely masters of our own destiny, and captains of our own ship, gives us greater peace and usually saves us a lot of mileage.

Humbly accepting the truth that my life is not simply about me and what I want is a truth that sets me free. This is true because we often *don’t* get what we want. If we can allow life to unfold more and not demand that everything be simply what I want I am more serene and free.

3. You are not in control- Control is something of an illusion. You and I may have plans for tomorrow but there are many things between now and tomorrow over which I have no control. For example, I cannot even control or guarantee the next beat of my heart. Hence I may think I have tomorrow under control, but tomorrow is not promised and may never come.

Because we think we control a few things, we think we can control many things. Not really. Our attempts to control and manipulate outcomes are comical, if not hurtful.

Thinking that we can control many things leads us to think that we *must* control them. This in turn leads to great anxiety, and often anger.

We usually think that if we are in control we will be less anxious. This is not true, we are more anxious. The more we think we can control, the more we *try* to control, and thus, the greater our burdens and anxiety. In the end we get angry because we discover that there many things and people we cannot control after all. This causes frustration and fear.

We would be freer and less anxious if we would simply accept the fact that there are many things, most things, over which I have no control. Our expectation of everything being under control is unrealistic. Life comes at you fast and brooding over unpredictable things and uncontrollable matters is bondage. Simply accepting that I am often not in control is freeing.

4. You are not that important- Uh Oh! Now this one hurts. I thought the whole world should revolve around me. I thought it was only my feelings that mattered, and my well- being that was important. Truth be told, we *are* loved by God in a very particular way, but that does not over rule the fact that I must often yield to others who are *also* loved by God in a very special way.

The truth is sometimes that other people are more important than me. I might even be called on to give my life so that others may live. I must often yield to others whose needs are more crucial than mine. The world doesn't exist just for me, and what I want.

There is great peace and freedom in coming to accept this. We are often made so anxious if we are not recognized, and others are, or if our feelings and preferences are not everyone's priority. Accepting the truth that I am not *that* important allows us to relax and enjoy caring about other people and celebrating their importance too.

5. You are going to die. - Yes, it is a hard truth but it is very freeing. We get all worked up about what this world dishes out. But take a walk in a cemetery. Those folks were all worked up too. Now their struggles are over and, if they were faithful they are with God, they now experience that "trouble don't last always."

This truth also helps us to do the most important thing: get ready to meet God. So many people spend their lives clowning around and goofing off. Yet our most urgent priority is to prepare to meet God. In the end, this is freeing because we are loosed from the many, excessive and contrary demands of the world and we concentrate on doing the one thing necessary. Our life simplifies and we don't take this world too seriously, it is passing away. There is peace and freedom in coming to accept this.

So there you have them. Five hard truths that will set you free. Think about them. Memorize them too and pull them out when life comes at you fast and hard with its agenda of control, self-importance and empty promises of perfect comfort here on earth. A simple, sober, humble and focused life brings great serenity.

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