“Drinking beer is easy.  Trashing your hotel room is easy.  But being a Christian, that’s a tough call.  That’s rebellion.”

– Alice Cooper

Choosing to live the way Jesus calls us to live IS tough.

Jesus calls us not only to follow the basic 10 commandments laid down at Mount Sinai, but to go even further by keeping our internal thoughts pure. Jesus calls us not only to follow society’s rules for how to be good people, but to follow His own example – that of loving us and all people even though that love ultimately sent him to the cross.

In society, we tend to think of ourselves as good if we don’t actually do anything bad to someone – for example, if we don’t murder or don’t actually have an affair. But Jesus tells us that we are committing a sin if we let our anger or our thoughts get out of hand. For example, someone does something bad to us and we think to ourselves, “I hope you get what you deserve. I hope you fall on your face or I hope you lose your job, or rot in someplace bad.” That’s a sin just likes murder because we are devaluing that person before God – we are thinking of them as if they are nothing and, in that way, devaluing their life. Likewise, if we fantasize about being with another person that isn’t our spouse, we are devaluing both that person and our spouse before God. We are thinking of them as if they are nothing – devaluing their lives. That’s a sin.

What we might think of as small sins actually are sins just as any other sin because in them our mind is focused on something other than God. God calls us to keep our focus always on Him. That’s tough. We tend to keep our focus on what’s happening in our world – and what’s happening to us. Basically we think as if the world revolved around us. That’s why we get angry when we feel we’ve been slighted or see and want things and people we shouldn’t have. But God is the center of the universe. We are called to focus on Him. Yes, that’s countercultural. But Christianity is countercultural. We are called to choose the ways of God even as we live in a world where most people put themselves first.

Now, I can’t speak for you, but I know that, no matter how hard I try and no matter how much I know that I should be focusing on God, I still focus on myself most of the time. I still feel put out when someone does something bad to me. Christianity is hard work and, in fact, it is impossible for us alone to live as Christians, especially as all the rest of the world seems to live for themselves. We need God’s help every day to help us choose to follow Him and to live into that choice. We need God’s forgiveness every day because we often miss the mark. Fortunately, God provides that for us. God forgives us when we ask. God provides strength as we resolve to do better the next time.

I opened with a quote from Alice Cooper. There’s a story behind that quote. For those who are unfamiliar, Alice Cooper is a Baby Boomer and heavy metal rock star. His acts are designed to shock people and feature macabre props.

Cooper, in fact, was born Vincent Damon Furnier, the son of a Christian evangelist. During his young adult years, he chose a path of self-destruction, rebelling against that faith and abusing drugs and alcohol. He rebelled so much that his wife, who also was the daughter of a preacher, left him. Cooper had been singing all his life about evil – and about not choosing evil. He realized he needed to make a choice and he chose to serve God. He got clean and returned to the faith into which he was raised.

Cooper is still a heavy metal, Shock Rock artist, but now he regularly attends church and Bible study. He talks about his struggles to live into the choice he made to follow Jesus – how difficult it is but also about how much grace there is – how God forgives mistakes and how God helps us to do better.

We are also called to choose to follow Jesus, knowing that that choice will be difficult, knowing that living as Jesus does involves not only our actions but also our entire focus. We can’t live the Christian life alone. God gives us help in the form of a Christian community to surround us and in the form of His Spirit with us. God also forgives us when we don’t quite meet the mark. Every day we start anew and choose again to follow Jesus, to seek to focus on Him with our whole heart.