

*NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
**CRAIG GROESCHEL**

*with* DUDLEY J. DELFFS

# THINK AHEAD

## WORKBOOK

7 DECISIONS YOU CAN MAKE TODAY FOR THE  
GOD-HONORING LIFE YOU WANT TOMORROW

# THINK AHEAD

THE POWER OF PRE-DECIDING FOR A BETTER LIFE

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WORKBOOK | 15 LESSONS

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CRAIG GROESCHEL

WITH DUDLEY DELFFS

 HarperChristian  
Resources

*Think Ahead Workbook*

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## LESSON 14

# VOTING ON YOUR FUTURE

*Today's decisions are votes on what kind of person you will be tomorrow. . . . Every time you are strong in the Lord and persevere, you cast a vote that you will be a finisher.<sup>43</sup>*

CRAIG GROESCHEL

The term “bucket list” became popular again thanks to the 2007 film by the same name starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. They portray two terminally ill men who decide to fulfill their list of goals and destinations before they “kick the bucket,” thus explaining why they call it their bucket list. As the term’s usage has grown in popularity, so has compiling and completing a list of experiences, events, and extraordinary places one wants to check off the list before dying.

Many people, often those entering what they perceive to be the second half of their lives, keep written lists describing the remaining goals they hope to accomplish before they die. Some goals are doable while others may seem more unlikely or improbable. But keeping a bucket list begins the process of naming something important to them, something in some way significant and worth pursuing. For

the characters in the film, a bucket list provides focus and incentive to help them make the most of their remaining time alive and enjoy a quality of life they have previously been too busy to pursue.

Whether you have a bucket list or not, you have a choice about how you live the rest of your life and what you accomplish. You can continue doing what you're doing and living like you're living. Or, you can commit that you will never quit.

- Do you keep a bucket list of things you want to do and places you want to visit before you die? How many items have you checked off your bucket list?
- What's one bucket list item you are already planning to pursue? Why does it appeal to you as something you want to do before you die?
- Do you tend to be someone who finishes most things they start? Or have you generally struggled to follow through and complete what you began?
- Considering your present age and stage of life, what does it mean for you to finish strong? What does it mean for you to commit to being a finisher?



## EXPLORING GOD'S WORD

Most people have at least a few decisions they regret in their lives. Perhaps you have regrets about things you've quit on in the past or struggle to complete right now. You wish you could be more willing to finish what you start, but you struggle to know how to do this. Like our other pre-decisions, however, before you focus on your how, you must focus on your why.

Whether or not you decide to be a finisher determines the kind of person you are and how you will live the rest of your life. Basically, every decision you make is a vote on your future. Today's decisions are votes on what kind of person you will be tomorrow. Any time you quit, you vote on becoming a person who doesn't have what it takes and doesn't finish what they started.

But every time you are strong in the Lord and choose to persevere, you cast a vote that you will be a finisher.

<sup>5</sup> But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you. <sup>6</sup> As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. <sup>8</sup> And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return.

2 TIMOTHY 4:5–8 NLT

- Why do you suppose Paul emphasized keeping a clear mind in every situation? How does keeping a clear mind relate to a fear of suffering?

- What does Paul's valediction to his protégé Timothy reveal about what it means to finish well? What's required to fight the good fight and finish the race of faith?
- What word or phrase here speaks to your heart or resonates with what you need to commit to finishing well?
- What does it mean for your life to be poured out as an offering to God? How does pre-deciding that you will never quit honor God and what he has called you to do?

## EMBRACING THE TRUTH

Facing his imminent death, Paul shared his final words of wisdom in his letters to the man he had mentored and trained in sharing the gospel, Timothy. Paul made it clear that he was finishing his life with peace because he had been faithful in completing his commitments to honor God in all that he did. Without boasting in his own efforts, Paul celebrated the way God had allowed him to do all that he pre-decided to do after dramatically encountering Christ while on the road to Damascus.

Years earlier, he had written about the pre-decision he had made: "I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24). Now at the end of his race, Paul tells Timothy, "I did it. I did what God gave me to do. I am a finisher."

Paul encourages us in the same way he encouraged Timothy. Yes, you will face difficult times. Unexpected losses and devastating disappointments will likely occur. You will suffer along the way and may feel like giving up. But no matter what, you must never give up. You are a finisher. When you commit, you don't quit: "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up" (Galatians 6:9 NLT).

- Why do you suppose Paul said that he considered his life worth nothing to him? What was Paul's basis for considering his life valuable?
- What do you want to be able to say with confidence when you are at the end of your life? What would you pass on to the next generation of believers?
- When have you been tempted to quit something recently—a relationship, job, project, goal? Do you regret quitting, or was it a necessary, constructive choice?
- What are you suffering right now that makes it hard for you to keep going in your faith? In your daily life?

## CHOOSING HOW YOU CHOOSE

Paul went from being a relentless persecutor of Christians—basically a zealous bounty hunter capable of violence—to one of the most impactful followers of Jesus who ever lived. After his encounter with Jesus, Paul created a kind of spiritual bucket list—places he wanted to visit in order to spread the good news of Christ, fellow believers he wanted to mentor, letters he wished to write in order to instruct, advise, and encourage. He fulfilled all of those objectives and more.

But they didn't happen accidentally. Once he was a believer, Paul pre-decided that he would finish the good work God had started in him. Without hesitation, he was all in when it came to pursuing the Lord and telling others about Jesus. Because of his faithfulness, Paul could then celebrate the impact his life had and use his remaining time to write and encourage Timothy.

When you consider the life of Paul, or any of the giants of the Christian faith, you may be tempted to view them as incomparable—people of faith who did things that you could never do. But with all due respect to their accomplishments and the amazing lives they led to the end, the saints of God relied on his power to do what they knew they could not do themselves. They simply trusted him and remained consistent in their obedience. They followed God's guidance and plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit.

You have access to the same Spirit of God who empowered Paul and every other believer. What will determine the difference between the impact your life will have and their spiritual legacy is what you decide right now. The goals you set and pursue today determine the impact your faith will have on those around you—now as well as later.

- Think for a moment about what your spiritual bucket list might look like. What goals would you put on your faith bucket list? Why?

- When you think about the kind of prayer warrior and intercessor you want to be, what can you put on your bucket list to do consistently in order to be that person of prayer?
- What about your relationship with God's Word? What bucket list goal do you want to set for yourself that will keep you engaged and actively learning and growing in the Word?
- Where do you want to go in order to stretch your faith? A missions trip? Seminary? Your small group retreat?

## DETERMINING YOUR DECISIONS

Professional athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists rely on visualization as a key tool for improving performance. Through a variety of methods, they focus on who they want to become, the games they want to win, the kind of team they want to be part of, and the impact they can have both on and off the playing field. From those goals, they work backward to think about what's required to make that vision come to life. Then they dedicate themselves to the process and commit to fulfilling their potential.

If you want to be a finisher, the vision you have for yourself is just as important as that of any Olympic medalist or pro player. Knowing what you care about most, knowing how God has made you, knowing where you are in your life—what do you want to make sure you finish? Who will you be at this time

next year? How will you be closer to God and more mature in your faith? Those won't happen by accident but by pre-deciding now to finish becoming all that God has made you to be.

At some prior time you may have completed an exercise in which you write your own eulogy or consider the kind of legacy you want to leave. Now is a good time to revisit where you want to finish and how you will live to get there. It doesn't need to be larger than life or what others expect—only who you believe God created you to be and what he has called you to do. Whatever you want to call it—your eulogy, spiritual legacy statement, or personal visualization, use the space below to write a paragraph describing how your life looks now that you are pre-deciding to finish strong.