

This is the book Craig Groeschel was born to write. I felt like I was being let behind the curtain of a life lived at full throttle. Is it a roadmap to getting unstuck? Is it a manual for the kind of life you know you were designed to live? Is it an invitation to an adventure with God? Yes, a thousand times, yes!

—**Jon Acuff**, *New York Times* bestselling author, *Soundtracks: The Surprising Solution to Overthinking*

Craig Groeschel makes change feel possible. It isn't easy to stop what we shouldn't do and start what we should, but Craig serves as a compassionate guide and makes change feel accessible with simple exercises and introspective questions.

—**Jennie Allen**, *New York Times* bestselling author; founder and visionary, IF: Gathering

If you've struggled to change your habits, this book is an immense help. I've read more than a few habit books, but this one made the power to change even clearer and easier to do than ever before. Read this book!

—**Carey Nieuwhof**, bestselling author, *At Your Best*; host, *The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast*

I often think that when people want to change, they look to remedies and a wide range of self-help solutions. But this book points you to supernatural lasting change by pointing you to the love of our heavenly Father and power in his name. Pastor Craig does it again, writing in such a clear way how change is possible because of God's power in us, not our own.

—**Sadie Robertson Huff**, author; speaker; founder, Live Original

Newton's first law of motion says that an object at rest will stay at rest, and an object in motion will stay in motion unless acted upon by a greater external force. Change will happen only when something greater compels it to happen. In *The Power to Change*, Craig Groeschel provides the blueprint for harnessing the power of biblical truth to change situations we may have long given up on out of hopelessness. This book will truly change your life.

—**Nona Jones**, business executive; speaker; author, *Killing Comparison*

How frustrating it is to want to change some things in our lives and not be able to. Even more frustrating is not knowing why we can't. Here in this book, Pastor Craig brings to light, in a practical and simple way, step by step how to make the changes we want. The best of everything? Based on the power and Word of God.

—**Kaká**, Brazilian soccer player (retired) and
FIFA World Player of the Year 2007

Once again, Craig has put together a deep, practical, and immediately applicable tool for all of us who want to become the people that God sees in us. I can't stop thinking about it.

—**Patrick Lencioni**, bestselling author, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*

The Power to Change is your guide to getting unstuck, gaining clarity on your calling, and stepping into the person you were born to be.

—**Jamie Kern Lima**, *New York Times* bestselling
author, *Believe It!*; founder, IT Cosmetics

When I read this book, my first thought was "Craig truly gets it!" He sees the importance of how we think, feel, and choose, and how this can impact how we function in our day-to-day lives and our ability to change. His book is a natural outpouring of his genuine love for people and his faith.

—**Dr. Caroline Leaf**, clinical neuroscientist and bestselling author

For the last several decades, Pastor Craig has been such an encouraging voice in helping people become the best version of who God created them to be. In *The Power to Change*, he offers practical advice and biblical wisdom so every person can have great impact.

—**Tim Tebow**, former professional athlete; five-time *New York Times* bestselling author; founder, Tim Tebow Foundation

**THE
POWER
TO
CHANGE**





THE
POWER
TO
CHANGE

Mastering the Habits That Matter Most

CRAIG GROESCHEL

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Introduction

Wanting to Change

There are few things in life more frustrating than knowing you need to change, wanting to change, and trying to change, but not actually changing.

How do I know?

Because I have tried so hard so many times to change, only to hit the same brick wall of failure time and time again.

Before I started learning to master the habits I'm sharing with you in this book, that was my life.

One example: Knowing my eating patterns weren't healthy and wanting to do better, I repeatedly tried to change my diet. I made commitments to eat only healthy food. I would succeed all day, but by evening my motivation withered and my willpower weakened.

I would end my successful day of eating right with a little bedtime reward snack of brownies. And something salty. Maybe chips and salsa. And a little ice cream.

The next morning, I'd wake up feeling guilty and do the walk of shame to the kitchen to see the evidence in the sink and in the trash.

Determined to do better, I would eat a healthy breakfast, followed by a nutritious lunch and dinner. But then a bedtime snack of cookies. And chips. And cheesecake.

Finally, I would feel defeated and quit trying. It seemed I had the desire to change, but not the power to change.

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You've been there, right?

You've tried to change too. It hasn't worked for you either.

But why?

We want change.

We want to change.

We want life to be different.

We long for more.

Sound familiar?

But honestly, we get tired. Exhausted. Whether physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or all of the above. Change is hard. Trying to change is draining. Our problem is a deficit of power.

Add to the exhaustion our sense of shame because we keep settling for less. We feel frustrated, like I would during my morning-after walks into the kitchen. We begin to despise our desire to change and our apparent inability to do so.

Here are some common behaviors so many of us desire to change. First, there are the "starts." As in, "I'm *going* to":

- Grow in contentment
- Lose twenty pounds
- Feel closer to God
- Breathe new life into my marriage
- Get out of debt
- Be consistent in my Bible reading
- Escape a toxic relationship
- Exercise

Then there are the "stops." As in, "That's it! I am done with":

- Stressing out
- Showing frustration

- Being impatient
- Being late
- Overeating
- Drinking to excess
- Procrastinating
- Thinking negatively

Whether or not I listed any of your starts and stops, you know your problem. You've wanted that "something" to change for years, but you can't seem to find the silver bullet.

If you journal, maybe you've looked back on what you wrote years ago and realized you are still writing the same thing today. Or maybe you've been going to a counselor for quite a while but feel you aren't progressing like you hoped when you began the visits. You're struggling with the same old issues, still hoping for that elusive change to come.

What makes all this so much worse is that you've tried. Like, tried really hard. You haven't just sat around doing nothing. Over the years, you've made a bunch of decisions and commitments and New Year's resolutions and attempts to set goals. Actually, the same decisions and commitments and resolutions and goals. Because, again, you know what needs to change. You have decided to finally do something about the issue—over and over and over. Yet, so far, nothing has worked.

There's a good chance you hate that about yourself. It's embarrassing and creates regret. Each time you try again to change and fail, you feel worse. You look in the mirror and say, "You suck." But you manage to shake it off and go back to your uncomfortably comfortable same old life. Then you get fed up with your problem *again* and decide to change *again*. Eventually, you fail *again*. This time you're not just mad at yourself. You feel ashamed and internalize the failure. Rather than thinking, *I failed at changing*, you

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think, *I am a failure. I have failed at life.* You have mixed an emotional cocktail of self-hatred and shame.

Here's a question that's hard to hear: What if you're in this same place years from now? Wanting to change but still doing the same things, living the same life?

I know this sounds depressing, but if you haven't seen the transformation you've wanted in recent years, why assume you will in the future? How will something change if nothing changes?

Tragically, this is where many give up. They say to themselves, "I can't change, so I'll stop trying. I guess this is just who I am and how I am."

Does all this mean you're incapable of change?

Does it mean God doesn't answer your prayers?

Does it mean you're trapped with the same annoying problems for the rest of your life?

Not at all.

You can change. I promise. More important, God has promised that change is possible for you. Just as I learned it was for me.

But there's a reason change doesn't come. Scratch that. There are reasons, as in plural, with an s.

Bad news: we don't experience lasting change because we try to change in the wrong way.

Good news: we can learn how to change.

Great news: we're going to learn how, together, in this book. We're going to access the power to change by mastering the habits that matter most.

Here's the plan I've laid out for you to accomplish change. Each chapter contains:

- A foundational concept to bring about and build upon change, supported by personal experiences, stories, examples, teaching, and Scripture

Introduction

- A practical exercise for you to engage with and apply the truths I've given you
- A guiding principle to encourage and inspire you toward change
- A Bible verse from the Father's heart

In part 1 you'll evaluate how you think of yourself, your view of God, and the future you.

In part 2 you'll learn the value of training over just trying harder.

In part 3 you'll discover how hope doesn't change our lives but habits do.

In part 4 you'll see how the reap-sow principle can change the trajectory of your future.

In part 5 you'll grasp how God's power can become the catalyst for lasting change in your life.

For you to master the habits that matter most, I am offering you a clear path to get where you have always wanted to go, the same one I have followed for many years.

If you're ready to start living the life you've been hoping for and dreaming about, let's uncover the first mistake we make in trying to change. Then I'll offer our first solution.

Ready?

To experience change that lasts, focus on who, not do.

Exercise 1

For our first exercise, let's lay some groundwork by personalizing this introduction.

I'm going to ask you to write down the behaviors you want to change. But first, I want you to forget the times you have attempted to initiate a change—any start or stop. To wipe the slate clean, allow

THE POWER TO CHANGE

yourself some grace and agree to make a new beginning. You may have the same goals, but you'll have a fresh approach. Consider any change you desire, even one you may have given up on a long time ago, and let this be a reset, a refresh, a revival for you.

Write down your “starts”—behaviors you want to change:

Write down your “stops”—behaviors you want to get out of your life:

Finally, if God told you that he would miraculously change one thing in you, right now in this moment, what would you want it to be?

Principle 1

To experience change that lasts, focus on who, not do.

For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

—Isaiah 43:19 NLT



Part 1

Who. Not Do.





1.1 Why You Do What You Do

Here's a truth you need to embrace if you're ever going to change: you do what you do because of what you think of you.

Don't confuse this with why you think you do what you do. You may think you make decisions based solely on:

- Weighing the pros and cons
- What makes you happy
- What's best for you and your family

Nope.

You do what you do because of what you think of you.

Let me explain, starting with a story.

Exhibit A: The (Church) Parking Lot Fight

I was a relatively young pastor, our church was still fairly new, and we had just become the proud renters of a small office building. Perhaps we shouldn't have been proud; it was only just big enough to provide space for our staff's offices and for meetings. The condition of the building was somewhere between the sets of *The Office* and *Bates Motel*. The neighborhood was, well, questionable. But we'd started our

You do what you do because of what you think of you.

PART 1: WHO. NOT DO.

church in a garage and had services in a rented space, and so yes, we were proud to finally have a real office building, even if everything about it was unimpressive.

Until the day we heard, “Fight! Fight!”

Pastor Robert and I were working one weekday afternoon (yes, pastors work on days other than Sunday) when we noticed cars suddenly streaming into our parking lot. Our first thought was maybe it was a surprise pastor-appreciation party. Second thought was there’s no way this was a surprise pastor-appreciation party.

The people who were pouring out of a couple dozen cars were all teenagers. Who were making a circle. With two guys in the middle. And those two guys started to take their shirts off.

Ohhhhh. Fight!

Turns out our parking lot was the designated spot for high schoolers to gather off campus when someone said, “We’re meeting after school, and it is on!” This was our first fight since we took over the building, and it was about to go down.

I don’t remember what I was working on (probably parsing Greek verbs because that’s all pastors do on weekdays). I’m not sure what Robert had been doing (probably parsing Greek verbs too). But the idea of getting to watch a fight felt more exciting than whatever we were doing, so we ran out the front door yelling, “Fight! Fight!”

Even though we were pastors, we were still young males, so I’m not going to lie, we wanted to watch the fight. But when we got to the parking lot, we looked at each other and both knew we couldn’t. We couldn’t watch the fight because of who we were. We were Christians. Pastors. Peacemakers. No matter what we wanted to do, we had to be true to who we were. So we went from, “Fight! Fight!” to, “Break it up! Break it up!”

You do what you do because of what you think of you.

Exhibit B: The Bible

In Proverbs 23:7, God says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (NASB).

What does “for as he thinks within himself” mean? We choose the story we believe.

Two people who have experienced nearly identical circumstances can come to very different self-identities. For instance, if they’ve been through a lot, the story one might tell herself is, *I’m a victim. Bad things always happen to me.* The other might live with a different identity: *I’m an overcomer. No matter what life throws at me, I kick it in the tail and keep moving forward.*

The Bible says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.”

What does “so he is” mean? Who we are—our character—shapes our thoughts about ourselves and others. What we think is a reflection of who we are. That then shapes our lives. We have no choice but to live out who we think we are. What we think within ourselves, we are. We make decisions based on our self-identification.

Who we are—our character—shapes our thoughts about ourselves and others. What we think is a reflection of who we are.

Exhibit C: Psychology

Psychologists and other social scientists have repeatedly confirmed what I experienced in the parking lot and what God told us all those years ago in Proverbs 23—that you do what you do because of what you think of you.

James March, a professor at Stanford University, called this the identity model of decision making.¹ Research shows that, when

PART 1: WHO. NOT DO.

making a choice, we essentially (and subconsciously) ask ourselves three questions:

1. “Who am I?”
2. “What kind of situation is this?”
3. “What would someone like me do in this situation?”

Your self-identity is a primary reason that you make decisions. For example, if you work more than is healthy, you might:

- Drink two glasses of wine when you come home stressed from work.
- Work out a couple of hours a day but not find time to read your Bible.
- Play video games for hours on end but not find time to work out.
- Yell at your kids for petty things.

You do what you do because of what you think of you.

Often, our identities are an undetected undercurrent pulling us into decisions and behaviors. Sometimes, though, we do sense the current influencing us and then even blame that influence for our poor choices.

Why does your friend keep going from loser boyfriend to loser boyfriend? Ask her. She’ll tell you she doesn’t want to. It’s just who she is. She has always been that way. She wants a guy but always seems to attract the wrong ones.

Why does your other friend always struggle with money? Ask him. He will explain he’s just not good with money. He doesn’t want to, but he has always spent too much, always been in debt. It’s just who he is.

No. That’s not the truth about your friends. But if they continue

Why You Do What You Do

to believe that to be true of them, it will impact their lives as if it were true. Their behavior is being driven not by their true God-given identities but by their self-identities.

You do what you do because of what you think of you.

Exercise 2

Using the “stop” behaviors you listed in exercise 1, think about the belief that is driving your behavior. What is the “what you think of you” motivating the “what you do”?

Get specific in your answers. The deeper you go, the more you can reveal what’s in your mind and heart and then the more you can increase your opportunity for change.

Use this exercise to help identify the self-perception that drives your repeated result. Identify the why behind the what. Identify the who behind the do.

When I (“stop” behavior from exercise 1), the underlying belief is that:

Examples:

When I (drink too much), my underlying belief is that (the only effective way to escape my stress and pain is to medicate myself).

When I (choose not to read my Bible), my underlying belief is that (I don’t really believe God will fulfill his promises for me).

When I (continue in that toxic relationship), my underlying belief is that (this is all I really deserve).

PART 1: WHO. NOT DO.

Duplicate the sentences for each behavior in the blank space provided:

When I:

My underlying belief is that:

Principle 2

You do what you do because of what you think of you.

Jesus looked at them intently and said,
“Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with
God. Everything is possible with God.”

—Mark 10:27 NLT

1.2 Stagnation through Behavior Modification



- “I’m going to start reading my Bible every day!”
- “I’m going to stop watching so much TV.”
- “I am breaking up with my boyfriend—for real this time!”
- “I will not yell at my kids anymore.”
- “I’m going to quit smoking.”
- “I’m going to stop hitting snooze so I can start getting to work five minutes early instead of five minutes late.”

Why do we make these declarations—and then fail to follow through? Could it be we’ve tried to change what we do and haven’t changed what we think of ourselves?

If so, that is a formula for failure. We cannot put do before who, but we do.² We do it all the time. We decide to change what we do.

The problem is trying to change our “do” is behavior modification. And behavior modification never works.

Why?

Because behaviors never exist in a vacuum. There’s a reason you do what you do. Attacking behavior makes sense because that’s what you see and find so frustrating. But if you target the behavior, you are going after the wrong thing.

If you try to change your behavior without changing your identity, you’re pulling up a weed without getting to the root.

We’ve all done that, right? Seen some huge, annoying weed towering over our grass, gone over, and ripped it out with the fury

PART 1: WHO. NOT DO.

If you try to change your behavior without changing your identity, you're pulling up a weed without getting to the root.

of a Marvel villain. It feels great to get rid of the handful of nasty vegetation. Except we didn't get rid of it. Not unless we dug down and got all of the root out of the ground.

To ensure a weed doesn't come back, you have to reach down and pull out what is not visible on the surface.

It's like treating an illness—you can't deal with the symptom and ignore the real problem causing the symptom.

In a similar way, someone who promises to never watch pornography again may avoid looking at it for a few days. But will they get caught up in pornography again? Yes. Why? They dealt with the symptom and ignored the real problem causing them to look at pornography.

Or let's say you decide you're going to get up early and pray every morning. You do, for a couple of weeks, and then you don't. What happened? Did you stop wanting to pray daily? No. Did you decide to end your commitment? No. So why didn't you continue living out the change you wanted? Because you did not reach down deep and pull out the root. You grabbed what you could see, but not the real problem under the surface. You didn't address the reason you weren't praying more.

Motivation and willpower are both limited resources that you will deplete quickly. Behavior modification does not equip you with the power to change.

Are you beginning to see it now? The reason you haven't experienced lasting change is because you've tried to alter what you do and haven't changed what you think of you.

James Clear, a guru on change and the author of *Atomic Habits*, says, "It's hard to change your habits if you never change

Stagnation through Behavior Modification

the underlying belief that led you to your past behavior. You have a new goal and a new plan, but you haven't changed who you are."³

Scientists who use cybernetics theory say there are two ways we can try to change.⁴ First, there's what they call first-order change, which is behavior modification. We commit to starting or stopping a specific action. First-order change can have some instant results, but the change will never last.

The second approach, according to cybernetics theory, is second-order change, which is conceptual. The focus is not on acting different but on thinking different, especially about yourself. A cybernetics researcher will tell you that second-order change is the only kind that lasts.

Romans 12:1–2 is one of the most popular passages from Paul's letters because the "living sacrifice" reference gets a lot of attention. But in verse 2, the apostle shares the key to transformation—real, lasting, eternal change. "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (NLT). Paul says you'll experience transformation not by changing what you do but "by changing the way you think." *Boom!*

Why would cybernetics theory researchers agree with the apostle Paul? Because you do what you do because of what you think of you.

So to change what you do, you need to first change what you think of you.

To change what you do, you need to first change what you think of you.

Exercise 3

Taking your "start" and "stop" behaviors from exercise 1, list them again here and then write down the failed ways you have attempted behavior modification.

PART 1: WHO. NOT DO.

When you're done, take a look at your list to consider how your efforts were like pulling up the weed without getting to the root. Did you try to treat the symptom while ignoring the real issue? Focus on *doing* without addressing your thinking?

Behaviors:

Modification Attempts:

Thoughts:

Principle 3

**To change what you do, you need to first
change what you think of you.**

Let God transform you into a new person by
changing the way you think.

—Romans 12:2 NLT