

A Young Man's Guide to Making Right Choices

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HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

George, Jim, 1943-

A young man's guide to making right choices / Jim George.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-3025-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-4227-0 (eBook)

1. Christian teenagers—Religious life. 2. Teenage boys—Religious life. I. Title.

BV4541.3.G467 2011

248.8'32—dc22

2010052975

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Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 / BP-NI / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Choice #1:

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Daylight's a Burning!

How long will you lie there, you sluggard?

When will you get up from your sleep?

—PROVERBS 6:9

Remember where we left Jason in the last chapter? In bed! Can you picture the scene—and the sound? (Maybe you've been there too.) Jason was dead asleep. Totally knocked out. And then there was a terrible noise. It took Jason a moment to realize who and where he was—and what that awful sound was. As consciousness arrived, he shuddered and realized, *Oh no! That's my alarm—already?* Then he thought, *Not another day—ugh!*

Poor Jason was so tired. As you remember, he had stayed up late playing on his DS. His solution? *Maybe I'll snooze for just a few more minutes.* With this lame thought, Jason rolled over and pressed the snooze button one more time.

A Simple but Hard Choice

Is your life getting more hectic and complicated? It usually does as you get older. You have important decisions to make. School work is getting harder and harder. Then there's driver's training and getting a license and all the responsibility that goes with that. And money becomes crucial—making it, saving it, and spending (or not spending) it carefully.

But there's one really simple yet hard choice you've got to make every day. In fact, it's the first choice you need to make every day, whether you realize it or not. That choice is, will you get up when you need to...or not?

Each morning, when your sleep is shattered like Jason's was, realize that it's right then and right there that you have the opportunity to make a choice that will have an impact on the rest of your day. It goes like this: If you get up when you are supposed to, you are more in control of yourself and your day. (Well, at least you're more in control of how it begins. You have to leave room for God's plans and for unexpected interruptions, surprises, and crises.) When you do make the choice to get up at the right time, you are calling the shots from Minute One. You are in the driver's seat of your day.

As we work our way through this book about making right choices, you'll see this one singular choice preparing the path for the rest of each day. You'll see how Choice #1 affects Choice #2...and #3...and #4. It's like the game of dominoes, which is usually played with 28 pieces that must be matched end-to-end. Maybe you've seen a set of dominoes. And maybe you've tried to stand all of the pieces in a line. If so, you probably also know that a shaky hand or bump to the table can cause one domino to topple, which, in turn, causes the others to fall in rapid succession. This is what's known as "the domino effect."

I hate to say it, but when you don't get out of bed on time—so that you can get everything done “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40)—the domino effect goes into action and everything you do for the rest of the day will suffer. It's amazing how that one first choice influences everything else you do.

So, what are you going to do? Will you or won't you commit to making the right choice at the beginning of each day?

Big Results Start with Small Steps

I like to do things in small steps. It's easier to accomplish goals that way, and I have a lot more success at finishing whatever I'm attempting. So instead of declaring, “I'm going to get up on time every day for the rest of my life,” I simply try to get up on time for just one day. You see, what you are today is what you are becoming. And what you are today is what you will be in the future, if nothing changes. Every act repeated—either good or bad—is creating the real you. Each choice—whether good or bad—made over and over again becomes a habit. And I'm guessing your goal is a lot like mine: to make the right choices over and over again until you established good, godly habits.

And what about your dreams? What do you want to be? What do you want to do? What kind of person do you want to become?

Well, as they said in the Wild West, “Daylight's a burning!” When you get up, you have the opportunity to make your dreams come true. You can get to work on becoming the man God created you to be. And you get to do the cool things He's planned for you. You have all day to make right choices that move you step by step toward something exciting, something excellent, something outstanding, something you can look at and measure as an accomplishment at the end of the day.

And when you don't get up? Well, you probably know the answer to this one all too well! You miss the opportunity to make your dreams happen or to make progress toward them today. I like the truth of this quote I found from a teen magazine: "Over-sleeping will never make dreams come true."¹

So, just for the record, getting up on time is the first right choice you get to make every day. And it's a huge choice!

Checking Out God's Word

God has a lot to say about people who are lazy. The Bible often refers to a lazy person as a " sluggard," as someone who has a bad habit of being lazy, slow, or idle. A sluggard is anyone who hates to get up and hates to work. If you've ever seen a slug move slowly across a sidewalk or driveway, then you get the picture. As you read these verses, remember to feel free to interact with them. (For instance, I'm eying the two question marks below... and a consequence.) Or just enjoy reading them.

How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty [ruin] will come on you like a bandit (Proverbs 6:9-10).

As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed (Proverbs 26:14).

Facts About a Sluggard

1. He will not begin things.
 2. He will not finish things.
 3. He will not face things.²
-

Meet Some People Who Got Up on Time... or Even Sooner!

As you go through this section, feel free to mark up the verses and make notes in the margins about what you are learning. Or just let their words sink into your heart and motivate you. Each of these people has a loud message for you.

Jesus—God's Son and our Savior got up early. What is one thing He did once He was awake?

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35).

Jesus talked to His heavenly Father first thing in the morning. He prayed to God. What happened when He prayed? He tapped into God's wisdom and power for doing His will for one more day—the day in front of Him. When Jesus finished praying, He was armed for facing and handling all kinds of temptation, as well as enjoying all the good things that would happen that day.

Abraham—This man was the father of the Jewish nation and “was called God's friend” (James 2:23). Believe me, Abraham was a man of prayer. Throughout the book of Genesis, you can see him talking with God again and again. On one occasion he invested a great deal of time begging God to spare his nephew, Lot, from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 18:23-33). Afterward Abraham followed up with God regarding his prayer request to see what the outcome would be. We read this about him:

Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD (Genesis 19:27).

David—This former shepherd became a powerful warrior and fearsome king. Yet he never thought it was unmanly to pray and talk to God. In fact, David delighted in worshiping the Lord and thought it was foolish not to seek God's strength and guidance and wisdom. What do you learn about David and prayer in this verse?

In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation (Psalm 5:3).

God's people have been getting up early for thousands of years. They took each day seriously. And they took their work seriously. And they took their worship seriously. Do you think they were tired? Of course. Yet they pressed on with their mission, with the work God had for them to do and with their responsibilities at work. What if they had turned on their hinges on their beds each morning? What if they had made excuses? What if they had slept in?

Hudson Taylor was a man who got up early. He is also the man many church historians point to as having a major influence in bringing Christianity to China. He faced many hardships there, living a life of great sacrifice as he labored to establish numerous mission stations and bring the people to Christ. It's been said of him that he reported that "the sun has never risen over China that I was not already praying for her." Now, that's early rising...and some serious praying!

Teens Who Get Up

I'm amazed every time I read about teens who have such a serious or intense passion for something that it gets them out of bed. For instance (and this is where your dreams come in!), every two years we get a chance to see the best of the best in the

Olympics. Many of the competitors are teens just like you. And there they are, on a world stage, accomplishing major feats of strength, agility, and speed. How did they get there? How did they grow to excel? By training. By practicing. By taking advice and following instructions. And, of course, by getting up early in the morning to do all of this plus go to school and do their homework. These teens did this because they were following a dream—a dream powerful enough to get them out of bed each day so they could do what was necessary to reach their goal.

Teens roll out of bed for all kinds of reasons. To train for sports, to meet with a prayer group, or to gather for prayer at the school flagpole. To work on their Bible study for youth group. To meet with a study group at school. To go over exam material one more time before a test.

What is it you are passionate about? What is it you like doing more than anything else? What would you like to be doing but never seem to have enough time for? If you get a chance, take a minute to jot down an answer or two.

A Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with a Single Step

This well-known saying tells us a lot! It's the perfect advice for making your dreams about the future come true, and it's a great way to fulfill the responsibilities that make up your present

daily life. To begin your journey of fulfilling your dreams and taking care of your responsibilities, you must begin with one single step—get up tomorrow. Which brings up the following questions:

What do you want to do tomorrow? This question has to do with your goals and dreams. One of my grandsons wants to have time to learn karate. He also wants to gain a better understanding of computers. Another grandson loves to play tennis and can't wait for his next lesson. What about you? To want something means to desire it strongly. What do you strongly desire to achieve tomorrow that is related to the future you dream of? You can answer this question here or in a notebook or journal. Just name your goal and write out why it's important to you.

What do you have to do tomorrow? This question has to do with taking care of your responsibilities, such as schoolwork, chores, a part-time job. What's on your must-do list? Finishing your English paper? Preparing a handout for a meeting? Taking out the trash for mom? Feeding the dog next door while your neighbors are on vacation? Take a stab at writing a list. **WARNING:** This list can

get quite long...and it should be! You may need to write it in two columns.

Making the Tough Choices

Here's one of my favorite quotes about living each day with passion. I'm hoping and praying it speaks to you too. It's from the book *Don't Waste Your Life*. (That's quite a title, isn't it?)

Most people slip by in life without a passion for God, spending their lives on trivial diversions, living for comfort and pleasure...[Don't] get caught up in a life that counts for nothing...Learn to live for Christ, and don't waste your life!³

Life is a precious gift from God. On top of the life He's given you, He also has incredible plans and purposes for you as well. Nothing could be worse than a life that counts for nothing! You have all the opportunities in the world to live with passion, to

make a difference, to contribute to others, and to bring honor and glory to God. God will take you as far as you want to go, as fast as you want to go. Now the tough choice you have to make each day is to get up so you can take the steps that lead you forward day by day on your journey of living—really living—for Christ. Don't waste your life! Get moving toward your goals and dreams.

Things to Do to Make Right Choices

As you think about living your life God's way, let the following choices pave the way for a better tomorrow. This exercise will help you follow through on your first step toward a better life—getting out of bed.

- Step 1: Decide when you need to get up.
- Step 2: Determine when you must get up to make your day go the way you'd like.
- Step 3. Set your alarm...a good loud one. An obnoxious one!
- Step 4: Get to bed at a reasonable time so you can get the rest you need before your wake-up time.
- Step 5: Pray. Ask for God's help in getting up. Tell Him why it's important for you to rise and shine tomorrow. Go over your plans, purpose, commitments, and dreams for tomorrow with Him. Go ahead. He cares, even more than you do!

- Step 6: Purpose to get up—no matter what. Don't give in. And don't worry about not getting enough sleep. It's only for one morning.
 - Step 7: Praise God when you hear the alarm. As the new dawn comes forth, cry out with the psalmist, "This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).
-

Guy to Guy

No one is a lost cause...including Jason, and including you. Jot down several things Jason failed to do that started his day down the road to chaos.

What could you tell Jason to do differently tomorrow to get out of bed and start his day right?

Of all the verses shared in this chapter, which one meant the most to you that you could pass on to Jason?

In what ways are you like Jason, and what do you need to do to get outta that bed tomorrow?

Would You Like to Know More?

Check It Out

Read Proverbs 6:6-8. “Go to the ant” now. What big lesson do you learn from this tiny insect that you can remember and copy?

—Verse 7

—Verse 8

If the sluggard follows the instructions of verse 6, what will happen?

Read these proverbs and note the results of being lazy.

—Proverbs 12:27

—Proverbs 26:15

In Proverbs 26:16, what else do you learn about a sluggard?

Read these proverbs that point out a number of lame excuses offered by the foolish and lazy sluggard. Also note the results of his excuses.

—Proverbs 20:4

—Proverbs 26:13

What do you learn about the lifestyle of a sluggard in these verses?

—Proverbs 13:4

—Proverbs 21:25-26

By contrast, what does Proverbs 13:4 say is the reward of a diligent lifestyle?

God's Guidelines for Making Right Choices

- *Your future starts as soon as you get up.* “Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare” (Proverbs 20:13).
- *Get up... and keep it going.* “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” (Proverbs 6:6). “How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?” (verse 9).
- *Remember the value of a day.* “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).
- *Have goals for each day.* “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Philippians 3:12).
- *Look to Jesus as your model.* “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35).