A companion guide to the First Things First podcast, Episode 27

How to Stop Overthinking Decisions as a Christian

A companion guide you can use on your own, with a friend, with your small group, or around the dinner table.

THE BIG IDEA

Overthinking loses its grip when you take a decision one part at a time, in order, and invite God into every part.

This guide is for anyone stuck on a decision. Who to date or marry. Which school. Which job. Which house. Which friends. What to do next. You don't need to have watched the episode to use it.

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Find more at firstthingsfirstministries.com

START HERE

Maybe you have said this

> “I can't stop thinking about this”

> “I don't even know where to start.”

> “I have so many different solutions and I don't know which one is a good solution.”

> “I just can't take the next step.”

If that's you, you're not alone. Those questions are real and they matter.

“I would actually argue against the idea that people just overthink. I think people think irresponsibly.”

Grant Todd, the First Things First podcast

That can sound hard at first. It's actually good news. “Overthinking is not something that happens to you.” It is a way of thinking we have learned. So it can be unlearned, with God's help.

“If you can get it going that direction, overthinking is actually really, really hard to do.”

Grant Todd

How to use this guide

- **On your own:** walk through the six parts, write in the spaces, and pray the prayer.
- **For a week:** follow the seven day reading plan, one short passage a day.
- **With others:** use the small group page and the family page.

THE TOOL

The six parts of a decision

Every decision is made of six parts. Overthinking is what happens when we bounce between them, or jump from the first part straight to the last.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Wonder	**Invention**	**Discernment**	**Galvanizing**	**Enablement**	**Tenacity**
What is the problem?	What are the options?	Which fits best?	Who needs to be involved?	What do I need?	Do the thing.

Go in order. Grant says it plainly: “you gotta go in order.”

“You might be thinking, I want to take the next step. That… is the last part.” If you only know the problem and want the next step, the two don't add up. That is why your mind goes back and forth.

Even simpler

Grant also sums it up in three pieces: thinking about it, discernment in the middle, and doing it.

God's Word is the measuring stick

Your options get measured against Scripture. And the story that shows all six parts is Acts 6:1-7, when the early church had good news and a real problem at the same time.

The names of the six parts come from a book by Patrick Lencioni. See Sources.

1 WONDER

Name the real problem.

What is the problem in the first place?

- Grant puts it simply: noticing what could be better. Before you look for answers, say what is actually wrong.
- Be honest about both sides. In Acts 6 the church was growing and people were hungry. Both were true. If you are an overthinker, you are likely focusing on the bad. Some people only look at the good.

> **“You don't want to be just a hyper-positive person that is not aware of the real complaints.”**
>
> Grant Todd

Acts 6:1 NASB

1 Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint developed *on the part of* the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.

Look how clearly they named it: the widows were being overlooked.

PRAY If you can't even name the problem, start with Psalm 139:23: Search me, God, and know my heart.

YOUR TURN

What is the real problem, in one sentence? What good is also true?

2 INVENTION

List the real options.

What are the potential solutions?

- Some people are just not natural idea people. That is okay. This step is only about getting the options on the table.
- Once the problem is clear, the answer often gets simpler. The apostles' answer was short: choose seven people to serve.

> **"If you break down your problem the solution piece seems really, really simple."**
> Grant Todd

Acts 6:3 NASB

3 Instead, brothers *and sisters*, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

It is that simple. There are not enough people to feed them, so get enough people.

PRAY "What are the real options? What are the two or three real options?"

YOUR TURN

What are two or three real options?

3 DISCERNMENT

Measure your options by God's Word.

Which option will work, and which fits best?

- Ask God for wisdom. He gives it generously, without reproach.
- Don't do it alone. Bring in wise counsel.
- Use a real measuring stick. A cushion is a bad way to measure a couch. Feet and inches tell the truth. Your choices need a real measuring stick too. The apostles measured people this way: good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.

> **“God's Word has to be your measuring stick.”**
> Grant Todd

James 1:5 NASB

5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Grant: “God in his word and his loving kindness gives you permission at this point in your life to not have wisdom.”

PRAY “God, I don't know which options fit my calling, my existence, the person you want me to be. Lord help me not to be wise in my own eyes. Help me to be wise your way.”

YOUR TURN

What does God's Word say? What does wise counsel say?

4 GALVANIZING

Bring in the right people.

Who needs to be involved in this next step?

- Every decision has people in it. Some help you choose. Some go with you.
- In Acts 6 it went from general to specific: from hungry people to seven real names. Ask what God's Word says about the people you walk with.

> **“What does God's word say about the people that I should be spending time with?”**
> Grant Todd

Acts 6:5 NASB

5 The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

Out of thousands, they named seven who fit the measure: good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.

PRAY “What is my first step and who goes with me?”

YOUR TURN

Who needs to be involved? Who goes with me?

5 ENABLEMENT

Gather what you need.

Who and what will help me carry this out?

- Once you have decided, ask what pieces are involved. It could be anything: starting a Bible study, finding a church, finding a job.
- The apostles prayed and laid their hands on the seven.

> **“They were united and unified and they laid hands on them.”**
> Grant Todd

Acts 6:6 NASB

6 And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Prayer and the laying on of hands were the pieces these men needed to do the job.

PRAY “Who can help me? God, what are the things I need?”

YOUR TURN

What people, prayer, or pieces do I need?

6 TENACITY

Do the thing.

What is the one step I will take?

- This is the last part, not the first. If you jump straight here, your mind bounces back and forth.
- It is easy to overthink when you treat this one piece as the whole decision. Remember, God is the one who finishes it.

> **“God wants to help you take a next step. He wants to finish the good work that's in you.”**
> Grant Todd

Acts 6:7 NASB

7 The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

The word of God kept spreading. That is what they wanted in the first place.

PRAY “God, would you help me finish strong? Would you complete the good work?”

YOUR TURN

What is my one next step, and when?

If you don't know, you don't have to. “Your job… is not that you should know all things, your job is to follow and seek the God who knows all things.”

PRAY

A prayer for when your thoughts keep cycling

Built on Psalm 139:23-24, James 1:5, Philippians 2:13 and 1:6, and the prayers Grant prays in the episode. Pray it slowly. Stop wherever God meets you.

INVITE HIM IN

Search me, God, and know my heart.
Put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts.
You know me better than I know myself. I give you the thoughts that keep cycling.

NAME IT

Show me the real problem. When you show me, I will write it down.

SEARCH ME

See if there is any hurtful way in me.
A hurtful thought. A hurtful action.
A hurtful measurement. A hurtful standard I live by.

ASK FOR WISDOM

I lack wisdom, and your Word says I can ask.
Help me not to be wise in my own eyes. Help me to be wise your way.

PEOPLE AND NEXT STEP

What is my first step, and who goes with me?
Show me the people you want me to walk with.

TRUST HIM TO FINISH

You are at work in me, both to desire and to work for your good pleasure.
You began a good work in me. Help me finish strong.
Lead me in the everlasting way. Amen.

READING PLAN

Seven days in God's Word

One short passage a day. Read it, answer one question, pray one line. Check the box when you are done.

☐ Day 1 See the whole picture

Acts 6:1 NASB

1 Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint developed *on the part of* the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.

Notice both things that are true. The church is growing. Widows are going hungry.

Ask: What good is God doing in your life right now? And what is the real problem? Write both down.

Pray: God, help me see what is true, the good and the hard.

▢ Day 2 Know what is yours to carry

Acts 6:2-4 NASB

2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

3 Instead, brothers *and sisters*, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

The apostles knew what God had given them to do, and what he had not.

Ask: In the decision you are facing, what is your responsibility? What is not?

Pray: God, give me clarity about what is mine to do, and what is not.

▢ Day 3 People, prayer, and the next step

Acts 6:5-7 NASB

5 The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

6 And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

7 The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

They chose people, prayed over them, and the word of God kept spreading.

Ask: Who should be part of your decision? Have you asked them yet?

Pray: God, show me the people you want me to take this step with.

▢ Day 4 Invite God to search you

Psalm 139:23-24 NASB

23 Search me, God, and know my heart;
Put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts;
24 And see if there is *any* hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.

Grant calls this one of the best prayers you can pray. Pray it slowly, out loud if you can.

Ask: What anxious thought keeps coming back? Is there a hurtful way in you that God wants to deal with?

Pray: Search me, God, and know my heart.

▢ Day 5 Ask for wisdom

James 1:5 NASB

5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

God does not scold you for not knowing. He gives to all generously.

Ask: Have you actually asked God for wisdom about this, or only thought about it?

Pray: God, I lack wisdom here. I am asking. Help me be wise your way.

▢ Day 6 Who goes with you

Acts 16:9-10 NASB

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and pleading with him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

10 When he had seen the vision, we immediately sought to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul and the people with him came to one clear conclusion together: God had called them.

Ask: Who are the people God has put around you for this next step?

Pray: God, who are the people you want me to be talking to?

▢ Day 7 God finishes what he starts

Philippians 2:13 NASB

13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Philippians 1:6 NASB

6 *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus.

You are not grinding this out alone. God works in you, even making you want what is good.

Ask: What is one step you can take today, trusting God to complete it?

Pray: God, you began a good work in me. Would you complete it?

REFLECT

Questions to sit with

Be honest. Nobody else has to read this.

1 What decision keeps you up at night right now? Write it in one sentence.

2 Where do you usually get stuck: naming the problem, finding options, choosing, the people, what you need, or doing it?

3 Do you tend to see only the bad, or only the good? What are the facts on both sides?

4 Have you asked God for wisdom about this, or only thought about it?

REFLECT, CONTINUED

5 What does God's Word say that you can measure your options against?

6 What is yours to carry here, and what is not?

7 Is there a hurtful thought, action, or standard that you need God to search?

Write your own prayer

Use Psalm 139:23-24 or James 1:5 in your own words.

THIS WEEK

One thing to do this week

Take 10 minutes. Pray Psalm 139:23-24. Then write down the real problem in one sentence.

That's it. Grant shares a saying he loves: “A problem very clearly defined is 50 percent solved.”

My 10 minutes will be on (day and time):

The real problem, in one sentence:

Want to go further? Grant's four do-outs

- [ ] **Take 10 minutes and pray Psalm 139:23-24.**
  Grant: “It's one of the best prayers you can pray.”
- [ ] **Name the real problem.**
  When God shows you, write it down specifically.
- [ ] **Ask for wisdom.**
  Use James 1:5 in the area of the thought that keeps cycling.
- [ ] **Take one step.**
  God has good works planned in you.

TOGETHER

For small groups

About 45 minutes. One person reads, everyone talks, everyone prays.

Open

What is something small you have overthought? A couch, a menu, a text message, an outfit. How long did it take?

Read

Read Acts 6:1-7 out loud (Days 1 to 3 of the reading plan).

Talk

1. Grant says overthinking is not something that happens to you. Do you agree? Why does that matter?
2. In Acts 6:1, what was good and what was hard? Why do we tend to see only one side?
3. Look at Acts 6:2-4. How did knowing their responsibility help the apostles decide?
4. In Acts 6:3, how did they measure who was right for the job? What would it look like to measure your options that way?
5. Which of the six parts is hardest for you? Which comes easiest?
6. Who has been wise counsel in your life? What made them trustworthy?
7. What is one decision you are facing, and what is the next part you need to work on?

Pray

Pray Psalm 139:23-24 together. Then pray James 1:5 over each person's decision by name.

AT HOME

For families

Simple ways to bring this to the dinner table, the car, or bedtime.

For younger kids

Grab a tape measure. Measure the couch, then try measuring it in cushions. Which one tells the truth? Talk about how God's Word is like a tape measure for our choices.

Around the table

Ask: What is a choice you have to make this week? Then walk it through the six parts together. Let each person pray one line.

For teenagers

Ask: Which friends, school, or plan are you thinking about? What does God's Word say that could help you measure it? Who would you want in on it?

Sources

Scripture

All Scripture in this guide is quoted from the New American Standard Bible (NASB 2020), checked word for word against the NASB text on Bible Gateway.

Acts 6:1-7 · Psalm 139:23-24 · James 1:5 · Acts 16:9-10 · Philippians 2:13 · Philippians 1:6

Each reference above opens that passage at www.biblegateway.com in the NASB.

Named in the episode

Patrick Lencioni, The 6 Types of Working Genius: A Better Way to Understand Your Gifts, Your Frustrations, and Your Team (Matt Holt Books, 2022).

In the episode Grant says the names of the six parts come from a book by Patrick Lencioni. The six names match this book.

Working Genius: www.workinggenius.com/book

“A problem very clearly defined is 50 percent solved.”

Grant shares this saying and says he does not remember who said it. Its origin is not known. An early printed form is in John Dewey, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (1938), chapter 6, where Dewey calls it “a familiar and significant saying.”

Dewey quotation (Wikiquote): en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Dewey

Austin Georgas (@austingeorgas), TikTok clip on overthinking.

The episode plays a TikTok clip by Austin Georgas. The original post could not be found, so this link goes to his TikTok profile.

TikTok profile: www.tiktok.com/@austingeorgas

John 14:12

In the episode Grant says, “Jesus said that you will do greater works than these.” He does not name the reference. This is the verse that contains those words.

John 14:12 (NASB 2020): www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14%3A12&version=NASB

A passage from Deuteronomy.

In the episode Grant says there is a passage from Deuteronomy that they are arguably pulling from. He does not name the verse.

How this guide was shaped

The format of this guide draws on these teaching podcast and Bible study guides.

Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast leader guides (Life.Church): episode summary, discussion questions, and resource links.

www.craiggroeschel.com/connect

BibleProject reading plans: a daily passage with reflection questions.

www.bible.com/reading-plans/55424-bibleproject-sermon-on-the-mount

Timothy Keller, Gospel in Life Study Guide (Zondervan): Bible study, discussion questions, and prayer in each session.

www.everand.com/book/170464254/Gospel-in-Life-Study-Guide-Grace-Changes-Everything

Lynn Pryor, “4 Traits of an Effective Small Group Discussion Question,” Lifeway Research, Feb 4, 2019.

research.lifeway.com/2019/02/04/4-traits-of-an-effective-small-group-discussion-question/

Jennie Allen, Get Out of Your Head Study Guide: personal study during the week, then group conversation.

www.studygateway.com/download/8936/

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