



Malvern Mashal 116

Defining our Intentions The Struggle

Defining our Intentions



The modern dart board places the high value numbers right next to lower ones so that good marksmen earn their high scores by throwing accurately. Perhaps it is not so different with spiritual things: as the old saying goes: "Those who aim at nothing hit it every time!"

We are still near enough to the New Year to make it worth while reviewing our intentions for this coming year in the Lord's presence. Why not take this opportunity to write down at least a few of them?

If ideas come to mind that are "less than mega or massive" don't fall for the trap of supposing that they do not count in God's eyes. What Mother Teresa wrote of her work is another way of saying 'Don't despise the day of small beginnings!'

We feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop. The big way of doing things is not always the most important . . . Now let us do something beautiful for God.

A Gift for God. Mother Teresa. 1975

Put another way, one of the easiest traps it is to fall into is to think that we are not in a senior enough position / charismatic / good enough to make a real influence for the Lord. I'm sure 'balderdash' ought to be a biblical word! *Disposition* is ultimately usually more important than official *position*! *Whatever*

position we are in brings with it unique and God-given opportunities for effective service. If we sit around waiting for a so called better chance, we will miss out on all that God intended for us.

Beyond good Intentions



To define our intentions is good, therefore, – but in itself not enough. As Sonya Levien pointed out, "*Good intentions have never yet put an onion in the soup*" (!) "*A garden requires patient labour and attention. Plants do not grow merely to satisfy ambitions or to fulfill good intentions. They thrive because someone expended effort on them.*" (Liberty Hyde Bailey)

Margaret Thatcher herself reminds us that the Good Samaritan isn't remembered today because he only had good intentions. We need strategy and perseverance to fulfil them.

The first thing to check out is that our will is aligned with the Lord's. Decades ago Aldous Huxley made the challenging claim that "*The Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer ("Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven") is repeated daily by millions who have not the slightest intention of letting anyone's will be done but their own*"!

Most of us do not fall into this category, but it is still right to look deeper to investigate whether the intentions of our heart really do line up with God's goals for our life.

For example, you can ask "What are my dominant waking thoughts?"

"Are there areas of inflexibility in my heart that hinder me from attempting new things?"

"What steps am I taking to be able to recognise blind spots in my life?"

Are you alert to the discreet ways the Lord has to bring certain character faults and foibles to your attention?

Would you have the courage to undertake a 360 degree review, inviting friends, family and colleagues to help us pinpoint and deal with their answers to these questions?

The clearer we are that we are seeking to do God's will in *everything*, the easier it is to ask the question, "How am I seeking to *achieve* these intentions?"

As a writer, I know what CS Lewis meant when he said, "I am pregnant with book"! He often had no idea as he set out how the pregnancy would turn out, just as many an artist starts out with a rough draught that turns into a sketch, and finally into a glorious canvass.

Lord, give me patience to persevere through the times when progress is slow or appears to have stalled altogether, and to craft these intentions from first ideas through serious sketches to the final glorious canvass You have in mind – however different that may look from my original intentions.

*I give you now the matter of . . . and of . . .
Let your release come deeper into these things this year.*

Most importantly, are you setting enough time and resources aside to attempt the thing you identify as being God's top intention for your life at this time? We truly are a pilgrim people. As John Bunyan reminds us, in the one and only hymn accredited to him.

*He who would valiant be
let him come hither;
one here will constant be,
and follow the Master.
Come wind, come weather,
there's no discouragement shall make him once
relent*

*His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.
Who so beset him round with dismal stories
do but themselves confound –
his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might;*

*though he with giants fight,
he will make good his right to be a pilgrim.*

*Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
can daunt his spirit;
we know we at the end, shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away!
I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labour night and day to be a pilgrim.*

It's great to have goals – but why limit these to purely external matters? The Lord is looking for lovers as well as workers, and workers as well as lovers. There are more than enough Alpha males around – of both sexes. One admires their energy and their achievements, but they are often so inwardly driven that they are not always the most comfortable people to spend time with.

People usually catch what is in our spirits more than what we actually say. If I talk about having mumps but am actually suffering from measles what are they going to catch? It's fine to pray for our intentions to be realised, but let's also pray to be all the Lord would have us be so that we can also be full of boldness, love and wisdom.

Lord, stir up true devotion and intense seeking of You – but keep us from false intensity that is the by product of striving.

Ponder for a moment people you know who reflect Christ's likeness. Praise God for them, and pray for some of their grace to rub off on us.

Here's one possible way of going beyond the surface reading of 1 Corinthians 13. Try taking Paul's words "Love is . . ." and asking the question "Am I?"

Then we can pray for the ability we need to fulfil the intentions God has placed in our hearts.

May the Lord Himself draw close as you pray and ponder in this coming week,

with our love ,

**Robert & Rosalind
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