

I would love to say that I came up with the title of this sermon "Buying Vegetables Does Not Make You Healthy". But I did not. Several years ago I was at the Lifespan Faith Development conference on Star Island where Meg Barnhouse was the theme speaker. She said those words in one of her talks. They stuck with me all these years. In fact they have become a bit of a saying between my husband and I as we maneuver our way through life, setting goals and making and keeping to resolutions with varying amount of success.

It is not surprising that our theme for this month is intention. January is the month where many of us set goals for the year. I took a week of study leave between Christmas and New Years to do just that - planning for the second half of this program year, evaluating how I use my time, looking seriously at my spiritual practice, pondering how it could be done better. Perhaps you did something like that too - or maybe not.

Me I like to set goals - even if I don't make them. On the Myers Briggs scale I am an INFJ - if you don't know what the Myers Briggs scale is that is OK. What is important to know about my personality type is that we like to make plans, and plans about plans, and backup plans to the plans about plans. So I like setting goals because that means I have a plan. I would rather set a goal and only get to 75% of it than not set a goal at all, or set a goal that is "too small" at least by my standards. I have a close friend who much more prefers to set smaller goals and exceed the goal. Neither of those is better than the other.

Making plans, setting goals, being intentional - much of it has to do with who you are and what kind of a personality you have and how you function in the world. I don't think there is only one good way to set intentions. But I do think that for most of us buying vegetables does not make one healthy.

And in case you think that this idea of improving oneself and setting goals is some kind of 20th century postindustrial thing let me lift up for you Benjamin Franklin. In 1726, at the age of 20, Benjamin Franklin created a system to develop his character. It even had a chart attached to it - habit tracking before a bullet journal was invented. My heart sang when I saw his chart - because a chart it is all the good things of a plan rolled into one. His 13 virtues were

1. **Temperance.** Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. **Silence.** ~~Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.~~
3. **Order.** ~~Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.~~
4. **Resolution.** ~~Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.~~
5. **Frugality.** ~~Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.~~
6. **Industry.** ~~Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.~~
7. **Sincerity.** ~~Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.~~
8. **Justice.** ~~Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.~~
9. **Moderation.** ~~Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.~~

10. **Cleanliness.** ~~Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.~~
11. **Tranquillity.** ~~Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.~~
12. **Chastity.** ~~Rarely use venery[or sexual indulgence] but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.~~
13. **Humility.** ~~Imitate Jesus and Socrates.~~ <http://www.thirteenvirtues.com>

So this being intentional is nothing new. And the idea of improving ourselves, self-help is not new either. And yet the self-help industry has not transformed human nature. I know I have said this before but it seems to me like if the self help books were successful there would be so many fewer of them. It is seemingly human nature to set out intentions and then seemingly not do them.

Even with that I am an optimist. I believe in the human spirit. I believe in humanity. I know we can behave badly but I also know that there is a really strong desire in us to behave better and make the world better. I am the mother to three adult children all of whom fall somewhere in the millennial group. I see them working hard to make a life for themselves and to make the world a better place. Whether that is through political action, choosing careers that help others. None of them expect a handout, and all are trying to be contributive even in the face of some really difficult economics. Millennials get a lot of bad press but what I see with my kids and their friends is that they are trying hard. It gives me hope.

It is human nature to strive to better us. It is in our DNA to set intentions. And if we want to be healthy we have to do a bit more than simply buy the vegetables.

Intention Coming from the Latin word, *intentionem*, intention literally means a stretching out, a stretching out of mind, of heart, of body, of spirit. When we set an intention, we are turning our attention toward something, or someone, or some idea, and stretching out to meet it. Which is a good thing and intention needs a little help to get to reality

Carrie Nieuwhof (new hoff) is a motivational writer whose blog I follow. Recently he wrote on moving from intention to action. <https://careynieuwhof.com/5-reasons-your-new-year-resolutions-usually-fail-and-how-to-crush-them-instead/>

1. Intentions need a plan (you can see why I like this guy). I can buy the vegetables but without an idea or a plan on how I will cook them and eat them they are likely to sit in my fridge until they are thrown away. Strategies help.
2. My Priorities get hijacked. It is all well and good for me to buy the vegetables, and find a recipe for them and set a time to cook them. But then my kid comes home and needs a ride to the store to get the supplies for the project that should have been finished 5 days ago but now is critically due tomorrow. My priority was to cook the vegetables and eat them and now if I say yes to my child my priority has been hijacked. I like Carey's writing because he is mostly speaking to ministers but his thought are applicable to others as well. He wrote "If you're a preacher, nobody emails or texts you to ask you to write a killer message. Nobody cancels their meeting with you and says, "Just thought you should have more prep time." Too true I am we each are responsible for juggling our own priorities and protecting them.
3. I add intentions but never subtract. It is so easy to add and add and add to the to-do list and the yearly goals. And yet it is true that one can only do so much in one day, in one week in one year. I still want to eat those vegetables, but what if I simply add that intention to others, I want to exercise more, spend more time

with family, see friends, read more books, travel more, you can see how it starts to be overwhelming and then we might shut down or give up. This I think is what happens to my friend who would rather have a more modest set of goals - they know they get overwhelmed too easily.

4. I don't address my patterns. I want to eat more vegetables and so I buy them - that is one pattern addressed. But I don't think about what patterns I have around food. If all I ever do is grab food without thinking or planning and simply eat what is in front of me then probably I won't eat the vegetables that take more prep. But if I take some time and maybe slice up some broccoli or make a salad, or slice up carrots - I might grab them first instead of the hard cheese.
5. This kind of leads into his last point. I don't pay attention to my time. I use it without thinking I don't plan (there is that word again) I don't create time for this new intention and its new pattern.

I guess what I am trying to get at here is that living with intentionality is a little bit different than having an intention. I am at the grocery store - without a list a plan as it were - I buy the vegetables on a whim. Suddenly I have the intention of eating them, and of becoming healthier. I think to move from intention to intentionality takes practice, and repetition and failure. And we need to break it down into doable bits.

I've been talking about vegetables but really it applies to anything doesn't it? People I talk to recently many of them are feeling a bit overwhelmed. There seems to be so much pain so much violence so much injustices. Here we are at the anniversary of Trump's inauguration. How can we live out our principles and change the world. I struggle with this all the time. I want the world to be better I want to be part of the solution and my perfectionism leads me to believe that I must be the catalyst for world peace and justice. But that is just my ego getting in the way. Because really if this

world is to get better it starts with me and you and each of us making a small change and practicing that change over and over again.

So much as I like big goals I am going to suggest that you don't set your intention to create world peace or an end to racial injustice - you will just burn out and give up. There is a rather low key and highly satirical YouTube video that has been around for a while entitled "The Man Who Ate a Car". In this video he says, "This is a long term activity, "Look, it took five years. I ate my first two lug nuts on Dec 30, 1990 — finished the last piece of the clutch housing on Feb 14 1995." He also says about 75% of the pieces of a car are no bigger than an Oreo. The secret is to get the piece you want to eat to be as small or smaller than an Oreo. Obviously this is a parody of self-help videos. Obviously eating a car is not good advice but breaking your goals or intentions down in to doable bits is. Say your goal is to make the world better. That is hard - what does it mean how do you measure it how do you know when you have done it? What about instead - Set your intention to be that the first 5 people you meet in each day you will be respectful and kind to. Do that everyday and see how it changes you and how you change the world around you. Think about what that takes to do that? Do you need to get more sleep? Do you need to say OK the first person won't count because I have not had my coffee yet? Do you need to plan your morning out the day before so that you are not so harried? You must make room for the intention, change some behavior, expect that you won't achieve 100% and affirm any and all forward and positive movement to make your intention into action.

This is how change happens, always has - always will.

In a world without end may this be so.

