

THE CROOKED PATH OF GOOD INTENTIONS

By Robert J. Tamasy

Have you ever spent a lot of time thinking about doing something significant for your life – pursuing additional training, furthering your education, or taking steps to hone your professional skills – but somehow you have never gotten around to it?

Or maybe you have considered doing something that would benefit someone else: sending a note or email to offer encouragement; inviting someone to lunch or for coffee, just to get better acquainted; making a call to an old friend or colleague you have not talked with for a long time?

If you can say yes to any of the above, you are not alone. We all, at one time or another, have good intentions on which we never follow through – worthwhile ideas we never convert into action. Sometimes consequences of such failure are negligible. One day we will say, “I wish I had done...,” and simply shrug our shoulders, knowing the opportunity has passed.

Other times, however, missed opportunities can leave us with great regret. We took the wrong turn at a key juncture in our life, and now it is too late to turn around. Good intentions can lead us on a very crooked path. To paraphrase an old saying, the road to destruction is paved with good intentions. Author Aldous Huxley said it “isn't merely paved with good intentions; it is walled and roofed with them. Yes, and furnished too.”

Even writers of the Bible acknowledged this kind of struggle. The apostle Paul probably expressed it best when he wrote, *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.... So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me”* (Romans 7:15, 21).

If that is the case – if even the most determined, most highly motivated people we can think of have wrestled with not being able to carry out their best intentions – what can we do? Should we just concede to failure, admitting futility in being able to fulfill our lofty desires?

While there is no simple answer to this question, perhaps the best approach is to redefine good intentions in terms of tangible goals, complete with action plan for bringing them to reality.

Margaret Thatcher, who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, made this observation: “No one would remember the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions; he had money as well.” She was right. After spotting the wounded victim of highway robbers and thinking, “Someone ought to do something!” the Good Samaritan in Jesus Christ’s New Testament parable decided he needed to be that “someone” and took action to help (Luke 10:25-37).

It would also help to count the cost of failure to carry out good intentions. Jesus referred to this in telling His followers, *"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?"* (Luke 14:28).

The Bible also offers a stern, sobering warning. Failure to act upon good intentions, it says, is more serious than simply missing out on opportunities. It actually defines this as sinful behavior: *"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17).

Robert J. Tamasy is vice president of communications for Leaders Legacy, Inc., a non-profit based in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. He has written Tufting Legacies; Business At Its Best; and coauthored with David A. Stoddard, The Heart of Mentoring.

CBMC INTERNATIONAL: Jim Firnstahl, President

2850 N. Swan Road, Suite 160 ▪ Tucson, Arizona 85712 ▪ U.S.A.

TEL.: 520-334-1114 ▪ E-MAIL: mmanna@cbmcint.org

Web site: www.cbmcint.org

Please direct any requests or change of address to: enquiry@cbmc.org.hk

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How often do you find yourself with good intentions that for whatever reason never seem to get put into action? Why do you think this is the case for you?
2. Can you think of a time when you failed to act upon something you seriously intended to do, and to this day carry regret for not having pursued this intention to its fulfillment? Or maybe you know of someone else that has experienced this. Explain the impact this has had.
3. Sometimes good intentions are not fulfilled because they are not important – they are merely the products of wishful thinking. But what about when good intentions are important? No matter how difficult or how many obstacles must be overcome, what can you do to make certain you do not, as Huxley wrote, build a roof and wall of good intentions around them – and even add furnishings?
4. The Bible's statement that knowing the right thing to do and then failing to do it is sinful. That might seem harsh. Do you agree with that assessment? Why or why not?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Proverbs 10:5, 12:11, 13:4, 14:23, 15:19, 20:4; Romans 6:1-4,8-11, 7:14-25, 8:5-14