

Chapter Four

Be Intentional

Johnny Lingo understood the power of intentionality. Johnny lived on the island Nurabandi, near the island of Kiniwata in the South Pacific. The people of Kiniwata all spoke highly of him. Yet when they spoke, they smiled, and the smiles were slightly mocking. Patricia McGerr in the early sixties kept a notebook of flora, fauna and tribal customs she encountered as she sailed through the islands. The one unforgettable entry in her notebook was about Johnny Lingo and his eight-cow wife.

One of Patricia's entries describes the islander's mocking yet respectful view of Johnny.

"Johnny Lingo can help you get anything" advised Shenkin. "Johnny Lingo!" A boy nearby hooted.

Patricia asked to be let in on the joke. "What so funny about Johnny Lingo?" Shenkin smirked. "Johnny's famous. He's the smartest, the strongest young man in the islands, he's also, for his age, the richest." "So if Johnny's all that, why are all of you laughing?" "Five months ago, at fall festival, Johnny came to Kiniwata and found himself a wife. He paid her father eight cows!"

Patricia knew a little of the customs, enough to be impressed. If you were in the market for a wife, two or three cows usually would do. If your heart was set on a particularly gorgeous wife, you might end up paying four or five cows. But eight cows? It was unheard of...pure lunacy. No one had ever paid so much. Johnny's wife Sarita, was shy, stooped shouldered, not likely to win any beauty contests. The

common thought around the island was that Jonny's father in law had tricked him. But that wasn't the case at all.

Patricia McGeer sailed over to Nurabandi to meet Johnny Lingo. She wanted some fish and some pearls, and she particularly wanted to lay eyes on Johnny Lingo's eight cow wife. Expecting to see a timid woman afraid of her own shadow, Patricia was surprised to meet a woman full of grace and charm, a perfectly glorious creature.

"You think eight cows were too many?" Johnny asked. A smile slid over his lips.

"Do you ever think," he asked, "what it must mean to a woman to know that her husband has settled on the lowest price for which she can be bought? And then later, when the women talk, they boast of what their husbands paid for them. One says four cows, another maybe six. How does she feel, the woman who was sold for one or two?" This could not happen to my Sarita."

"Then you did this just to make your wife happy?"

"I wanted Sarita to be happy, yes. But I wanted more than that. You say she is different This is true. Many things can change a woman. Things that happen inside, things that happen outside. But the thing that matters most is what she thinks about herself. In Kiniwata, Sarita believed she was worth nothing. Now she knows she is worth more than any other woman in the islands." "I wanted to marry Sarita. I loved her and no other woman."

"But —" I was close to understanding.

"But," he finished softly, "I wanted an eight-cow wife."

Johnny, you see, paid eight cows on purpose. *Johnny knew the power of intentionality.*

Unfortunately, we live in a one cow culture. Whatever the minimum requires, is often good enough for us. Imagine the difference if we intentionally sought eight cow friendships, eight cow spouses, eight cow families.

We don't expect extravagance. We take life as it comes, and don't expect too much. That's just how it happened we say. But people who know the power of intentionality, seize not what is, but what could be. They never settle for normal expectations. Intentionality is at war with normality. If you want to live a life that outlives you, learn to loathe the mediocre.

You've probably seen the movie. Many thousands of years ago, there was a slave couple in Egypt who had a baby boy. You met them in the first chapter. Boys born to slaves in that day, were not allowed to live, only girls. But Amram and *Jochebed refused to believe the prevailing fate of children in their time, would be the prevailing fate of their child.* They hid their baby boy for 3 months, and then fashioned a little covered boat and put him in the Nile.

Pharaoh's daughter found him, and the baby was raised in the courts of Pharaoh and grew up to be the deliverer of the Jews. I love Amram and Jochebed! May their tribe increase! May you dear reader become a part of their tribe.

I challenge you to refuse to believe the prevailing fate of youth in our time, will be the prevailing fate of the youth you can influence.

I knew a mother who while waiting for a plane, took out a small postcard and spontaneously wrote atop of it;

Mothering Goals for Samuel from Age 12-16.

She wrote it in tiny handwriting;

"I want him to go to Africa, I want him to see the worst blight of American inner cities, and the jaw-dropping beauty of our premiere National Parks. I want him to have a heart for the poor, a heart for justice. I wrote on and on. I want him to play an instrument, read through the Bible once, I want him to go to Europe. She wrote in tinier and tinier font as my intentionality overflowed. Then she promptly lost the postcard.

She found it years later forlorn and upside down on the floor of her garage. Samuel was now 16. She was amused as she picked it up. She could barely remember what she had written. To her amazement almost everything she'd written, Samuel had experienced. He'd gone to Uganda when he was 13. He played guitar and some piano. He'd read through the Bible twice. He'd spent a summer in Spain. He had a growing heart for justice and the poor.

Did almost all the scribbling on that postcard just *happen* to come to pass? Was it fate? Samuel's karma? No, no, no. Samuel's experience was the result of intentionality. Even though the mother lost the postcard, she'd never lost those desires in her heart.

Samuel had accompanied her when she'd spoken for a Justice conference. Samuel sat multiple times at dinner in Israel and California with a dear friend who does child sex trafficking prosecution around the world. Samuel wrote close friends asking if they'd help him get to Spain. They responded immediately. Intentionality fuels action that leads to desires fulfilled.

That mother wanted her son to enter the wild seas of life with a ship freighted with experience, treasure and wisdom. She was determined to not launch his boat with whatever flotsam and jetsam culture floated by.

The worst enemy of intentionality is ignorance of what is possible.

Why are so many things the way they are? Because no one has been intentional about changing them. Why is the present so similar to the past? Because there are few dreamers who will take the time to dream a preferred future and be intentional about seeing that dream realized.

Last night I confessed to our son, "Sweetheart, I just realized I've been imaging everything possible that could go wrong once you leave the house. Instead of concentrating on everything that could go right. From now on, I am going to nourish a vision of a preferred future for you. I am going to

picture you, making great decisions, surrounding by stellar lifelong friendships, and when the time is right, a wife that you will bring lifetime joy. I am going to cultivate a vision of you, finding your destiny, bringing justice and compassion to the world. I am so sorry I've been so consumed with all that could go wrong. I've felt the clock ticking. I know I only have a year left with you. My vision has been driven by fear, not joy. Please forgive me."

A friend of mine once said; "A lot of prayer is simply trying to get God to worry with you." Every parent gets it.

Nourish intentionality in your life. Let your heart engage purposely in embracing a generation into greatness. Be an eight-cow person who is willing to invest beyond the expected.

Ponderings

1. So, what is possible for the youth you will embrace into greatness?
2. What are the normal expectations that may need to be turned on their head?
3. Are there some counter cultural expectations you might want to embrace?
4. Where can you apply today the power of intentionality?

