

The Gardener's Choice

A Story About Intentional Living



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Intentional Living or Living With Intention

Living with intention means making conscious, deliberate choices about how you spend your time, energy, and attention rather than simply reacting to whatever comes your way or following autopilot patterns.

It's about aligning your daily actions with your deeper values, goals, and sense of purpose.

At its core, intentional living involves regularly pausing to ask yourself: ***"Is what I'm doing right now serving who I want to become and what matters most to me?"*** It's the difference between drifting through life and actively steering it.

Why it matters

Intentional living tends to create more fulfillment and less regret.

When your actions align with your values, you experience greater satisfaction and meaning.

It also helps reduce decision fatigue because you develop clearer criteria for choices.

Many people find it leads to better relationships, improved focus, and a stronger sense of personal agency.

Ways to start Living With Intention

Begin by clarifying what actually matters to you.

Spend time identifying your core values and what you want your life to stand for. This becomes your compass for decisions.

Create small rituals of reflection, like a brief morning intention-setting or evening review of how your day aligned with your priorities.

Even five minutes can make a difference.

Practice saying no to things that don't serve your intentions, which naturally creates more space for what does. This might mean declining certain social obligations or reducing time spent on activities that feel empty.

Start with one area of your life, like how you spend your mornings or how you engage with technology.

Small, consistent changes often create more lasting transformation than trying to overhaul everything at once.

The key is starting small and building gradually. Intentional living is a practice, not a destination.

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The Gardener's Choice - A Parable

In a bustling city lived Sarah, a 30-year-old woman whose days blurred together in a whirlwind of deadlines, social media scrolling, and Netflix binges. She felt adrift, wondering if this was all life had to offer.

Sarah found herself caught in the relentless current of modern life—a life that, despite its constant motion, felt strangely stagnant.

Each day blended into the next in a blur of alarm clocks, rushed commutes, and endless meetings. Evenings disappeared into a haze of social media scrolling and Netflix binges, leaving Sarah with a nagging sense of emptiness.

She had a good job, a nice apartment, and a wide circle of acquaintances, yet something vital seemed to be missing.

On her 30th birthday, as Sarah blew out the candles on a cake shared with colleagues who barely knew her, she made a silent wish: to find meaning in the mundane, to discover purpose in her days that stretched endlessly before her.

The next morning, feeling no different despite crossing the threshold into a new decade, Sarah decided to take a different route to work. Her usual path led her through crowded streets and past familiar storefronts, but today, she found herself drawn to a small park she had always ignored.

As she walked along the winding path, the sounds of the city seemed to fade, replaced by the gentle rustle of leaves and the distant trill of

birdsong. The air felt different here, cleaner somehow, infused with the scent of earth and growing things. Sarah found herself slowing her pace, her usual rush forgotten as she took in her surroundings.

It was then that she noticed a gap in the hedges lining the path. Curiosity piqued, Sarah squeezed through the opening and gasped at what she saw. Before her lay a hidden garden, a riot of colors and textures that seemed impossible in the heart of the concrete jungle.

Roses climbed trellises in shades of crimson and gold, their perfume hanging heavy in the air. Delicate ferns unfurled their fronds beneath the dappled shade of a gnarled old oak. A small pond reflected the sky, its surface broken only by the occasional leap of a fish or the gentle bob of water lilies.

In the center of this oasis stood an elderly woman, her silver hair catching the morning light as she carefully tended to a bed of vibrant zinnias. She looked up as Sarah approached, a warm smile crinkling the corners of her eyes.

"Welcome, child," the old woman said, her voice as rich and nurturing as the soil she cultivated. "It's not often we get visitors here."

Sarah, still in awe of her surroundings, could barely find her voice. "I... I'm sorry for intruding. I had no idea this was here. It's incredible! How did you create such beauty in the middle of the city?"

The gardener's smile deepened as she straightened, brushing soil from her weathered hands.

"My dear, this garden is like life itself. **It flourishes not by chance, but by choice.** Each day, I decide which seeds to plant, which flowers to water, and which weeds to pull. This is the art of living with intention."

Sarah frowned, her gaze drifting from the lush garden back to the glimpse of gray cityscape visible through the gap in the hedge.

"But how can I apply that to my life? It seems so... ordinary compared to this."

"Ah," the gardener replied, gesturing for Sarah to follow her to a small bench nestled beneath a fragrant jasmine bower. "But ordinary moments are where the magic happens. Tell me, what brings you to my garden today?"

As they sat, Sarah found herself pouring out her frustrations—**the feeling of being stuck, of watching life pass her by, of wanting more but not knowing how to achieve it.** The old woman listened patiently, nodding in understanding.

"You know," the gardener began when Sarah had finished, "many years ago, I was much like you. I had a successful career, a beautiful home, all the trappings of what society told me was a good life. But I felt hollow, unfulfilled. It wasn't until I learned to approach life as I do this garden that I found true contentment."

"How did you do it?" Sarah asked, leaning forward eagerly.

The old woman's eyes twinkled. "It starts with a simple question: **What truly matters to you?** What kind of person do you want to be?"

Once you know that, you can begin to nurture those aspects of your life as you would tend to the most delicate flower."

Over the next hours the gardener shared her wisdom with Sarah. She spoke of the **importance of identifying core values, of setting clear intentions each day, of being mindful and present in each moment.** She taught Sarah about the power of saying no to things that didn't align with her purpose, creating space for what truly mattered.

As the afternoon waned, Sarah realized with a start that she had missed an entire day of work. Strangely, she felt no panic, only a sense of calm purpose she hadn't experienced in years.

"I have to go," she said, rising reluctantly from the bench. "But may I come back?"

The old woman nodded, her smile gentle. "The garden is always here for those who seek it. But remember, the real work begins in your own life. **Are you ready to become the gardener of your own existence?**"

Sarah nodded firmly, a spark of determination in her eyes. As she made her way home that evening, her mind buzzed with possibilities.

Over the following weeks, Sarah visited the hidden garden regularly, soaking in the old woman's wisdom and applying it to her own life. She began by taking stock of her values and priorities, realizing that she had been neglecting her passion for writing and her desire for deeper, more meaningful relationships.

Each morning, Sarah **started her day by setting clear intentions**, focusing on actions that aligned with her newly defined goals. She dusted off her neglected journal, committing to writing for at least thirty minutes each day. She reached out to old friends she had lost touch with, scheduling coffee dates and long walks to reconnect.

At work, Sarah approached her tasks with renewed focus and purpose. She volunteered for projects that challenged her and aligned with her values, declining those that didn't serve her growth. Her colleagues noticed the change, commenting on her increased engagement and creativity.

Sarah practiced mindfulness throughout her days, **savoring simple moments instead of rushing through them**. She took time to appreciate her morning coffee, to really listen when friends spoke, to notice the play of light on buildings during her commute. These small acts of presence added richness to her days that she had never experienced before.

In the evenings, Sarah reflected on her progress, adjusting her approach as needed. **She celebrated small victories and learned from setbacks**, always keeping in mind the gardener's wisdom that growth takes time and patience.

As months passed, Sarah's life transformed in ways both subtle and profound. Her relationships deepened, nourished by genuine attention and care. Her writing flourished, and she even submitted a short story to a local literary magazine. The anxiety that had once plagued her gave way to a calm sense of direction and purpose.

One sunny Saturday, nearly a year after her first visit to the hidden garden, Sarah brought her closest friend, Mei, to see the magical place that had sparked her transformation.

As they approached the gap in the hedge, Sarah felt a flutter of excitement. "You're going to love this," she told Mei. "The flowers are incredible, and wait until you meet the gardener. She's amazing."

But as they stepped into the garden, Sarah stopped short. The flowers were as beautiful as ever, the trees as majestic, but something was different. The old woman was nowhere to be seen.

"It's beautiful," Mei remarked, taking in the vibrant scenery. "But I don't see the gardener you mentioned."

Sarah walked slowly through the garden, her eyes searching for any sign of the wise old woman. As they neared the jasmine bower where she had spent so many hours in deep conversation, Sarah noticed something new—a small plaque affixed to the bench. She leaned in to read the engraved words:

"To all who find this place: You are the gardener of your own life. Tend it with love, patience, and intention. – Margaret"

Tears pricked Sarah's eyes as she ran her fingers over the cool metal. She felt a profound sense of loss, but also an overwhelming gratitude for the gifts Margaret had given her.

"Sarah?" Mei's voice was gentle. "Are you okay?"

Sarah turned to her friend, a bittersweet smile on her face. "She taught me that we are all gardeners of our own lives. I guess now it's my turn to tend to this space – and to show others how to cultivate their own gardens."

Mei looked puzzled. "But why is it so important to live with intention? You've changed so much this past year, but I never really understood why."

Sarah gestured to the thriving garden around them. "Living with intention means we shape our lives instead of letting life shape us. **It brings clarity, purpose, and fulfillment.** We become active participants in our own stories, creating a life that reflects our deepest values and aspirations."

She led Mei to a patch of soil where new seedlings were just beginning to emerge. "Look at these new plants. They're small now, but with care and attention, they'll grow into something beautiful. **That's what intentional living does for us. It helps us nurture the parts of ourselves and our lives that truly matter, allowing us to grow in meaningful ways.**"

As they walked through the garden, Sarah shared more of what she had learned over the past year:

1. The power of mindfulness in appreciating life's simple joys.
2. The importance of aligning actions with values to create a sense of purpose.
3. The need for regular reflection and adjustment in personal growth.

4. The value of saying no to make space for what truly matters.
5. The impact that living intentionally can have not just on oneself, but on others around us.

As they neared the exit, Mei noticed a small sign by the gate that Sarah had never seen before: **"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."**

Sarah nodded, feeling a renewed sense of purpose. **"And to live with intention is to create a future worth believing in – one choice at a time."**

In the days that followed, Sarah found herself returning to the garden often. Sometimes she came to tend to the flowers, carrying on Margaret's legacy. Other times, she brought friends or even strangers she met who seemed to be searching for something more in life.

She began to write about her experiences, sharing the wisdom she had gained through a blog that slowly gained a following. People from all walks of life reached out to her, inspired by her journey and seeking guidance on how to live more intentionally.

Sarah realized that by transforming her own life, she had gained the power to positively impact others. The garden had become more than just a place of personal refuge—it was a symbol of the potential for growth and change that existed within every person.

As she celebrated her 31st birthday, surrounded by true friends and with a heart full of purpose, Sarah reflected on the incredible journey of the past year. She thought of Margaret, the wise gardener who had

planted the seeds of change in her life, and felt a deep sense of gratitude.

Sarah knew that the journey of intentional living was ongoing, that there would always be new challenges to face and new areas for growth. But now, she faced the future not with anxiety, but with hope and determination. She was the gardener of her own life, and the possibilities were as endless as the cycles of nature itself.

With a smile, Sarah picked up her journal and began to write, setting her intentions for the year ahead. **The story of her life, she knew, was still unfolding—and she was ready to shape it with purpose, one intentional choice at a time.**

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