

## Initiate

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Jonathan Rue  
Matthew 25:14-30  
*Living On Purpose Series*  
01.03.10

Happy New Year to you all! I hope you had a fun New Year's Eve celebration, but more than that I hope you had a thoughtful New Year's Eve celebration. I hope that you gave thanks to God for the year behind you and you put some thought into the year ahead of you. And what God might be up to in your life this year.

We're starting a new series tonight that will be a short series only two weeks, that we've called *Living on Purpose*.

And so we're going to take just these first two weeks in this new year to take some time and be thoughtful about how we're living our lives and, specifically, what we're aiming our lives toward. What are the purposes that God is calling us into—not just what are the sins that he's calling us out of—and how do we start moving into those good purposes so that we're living the lives that God created us to live.

There's a great book by Erwin McManus in our bookstore called "Seizing Your Divine Moment." And in it, Erwin McManus says this,

### **SLIDE:**

"We have put so much emphasis on avoiding evil that we have become virtually blind to the endless opportunities for doing good. We have defined holiness through what we separate ourselves from rather than what we give ourselves to. I am convinced the great tragedy is not the sins we commit, but the life we fail to live. You cannot follow God in neutral. God has created you to do something. It is not enough to stop the wrong and then be paralyzed when it comes to the right. God created you to do good. And doing this requires initiative. There is a subtle danger in hiding apathy behind piety. Getting rid of the sin in your life? Great. Now it's time to do something." –Erwin Mcmanus

So as we start this series tonight we're going to look at how to start doing what God wants us to do, not just stop doing what God doesn't want us to do. We're going to set our sights higher than simply the elimination of sin in our lives, we're going to lift our heads toward the good purposes of God for our lives. And to do that, we've got to *initiate*. I've called tonight's talk *Initiate*, let's pray.

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Well a great question to ask yourself at the beginning of a new year is: “Am I living a passive life?”

**SLIDE:**  
**Are you living a passive life?**

And what I mean by a passive life is that other people are making choices and decisions for you. And other people are acting on you. That you are not directing your life toward the things that you feel God is calling you into, your allowing life to act upon you. You're like a pinball in a pinball machine. You're bounced between this bumper and that wall—between this situation and that relationship—you're going in random directions, ricocheting around until you smack something hard enough to finally ask yourself, how in the world did I get here.

Do you let other people make decisions about what direction you're going in life? Trying to please your parents, or your siblings or someone else?

Do you let other people make decisions about how passionately you're going to live for God and get involved with the church? If you're friends are into it then great, but if it's not cool anymore to worship God, and read His word and be involved in serving people, then you stop doing those things.

Do you let other people make decisions about how you're going to live your life ethically? Your housemates download pirated music so you do too. Your friends watch the worst R-rated movies that are full of nudity and filth, so you do too. Your classmates cheat on their tests and plagiarize papers, and so you do too. Your boss cut corners on his taxes, and so you do too. Whatever environment you find yourself in you just adapt and go right along with what other people are doing.

Do you allow yourself to be acted upon by other people that have hurt you. So, instead of talking with the people that have hurt you in your life, instead of forgiving them, you hold on to the wounds. You hold on to the pain that others have caused you and you nurse that bitterness, blaming them for the continuing pain that you find yourself inflicted with.

Nobody sets out wanting to live a passive life but as we get into the rough and tumble of life, somehow it gets harder and harder to initiate change in our life. And there are reasons why we don't initiate, but let others choose and act for us.

**SLIDE:**  
**Why we don't *initiate***

There are obstacles that keep us in passivity, keep us in neutral, keep us allowing other people to choose for us. The first reason is that we have a great *fear of choice*.

**SLIDE:**  
**Fear of choice**

We have so many options in our lives there are so many choices we can make. That it's almost paralyzing because we have so much fear of making the wrong choice. So take your career for instance, now this is such a modern phenomenon that we even get to choose a career. But not only do we get to choose a career, there are hundreds and hundreds of different career paths that we can choose. Ohio State alone offers over 160 different academic programs. With each program having a range of emphases that you can specialize in. And if you're still not satisfied with those options, you can design your own personalized study program and custom design your own major. There are too many choices in life and as a result we are trapped in fear of making the wrong choice.

The second thing that keeps us from initiating in life is a *fear of failure*.

**SLIDE:**  
**Fear of failure**

If I initiate, if I put myself out there I might fail at something. This is why so many guys in Joshua House can not initiate a first date with a girl. Fear of failure. It just doesn't feel good to get shut down when you initiate and you put yourself out there and somebody says, "No."

We're afraid to initiate big dreams and goals in our lives because we're afraid we won't make them and our failure will be public—other people will know that we failed. So even though you really wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer, you wanted to go into politics, you wanted to go into pastoral ministry...you were afraid to fail and so you chose an easier path. A path that took less education, a path that took less discipline and effort and diligence.

Thirdly, we don't initiate because we have a fear of losing what we already have.

**SLIDE:**  
**Fear of losing what we have**

See as we go on in life and things become more comfortable, we get a car that we like, we get a house that we like, we get a family that we love. All of the sudden there is a growing fear that we could lose what we have already attained. So we don't want to step out and initiate new things in life we want to step into a posture of maintaining and preserving what we have.

And lastly, we have a fear of hard work

**SLIDE:**  
**Fear of hard work**

There's always the fear that we have that we will initiate something that we can't finish. That it will be too big of a project, too big of a change to make in our lives and we're just not up to the challenge. Have you ever wanted to learn something like the guitar, but you never did because you knew how much practice learning the guitar was going to take?

You might have the desire to learn more about the Bible, church history, theology, but you are afraid of the hard work that it would take to go to Vineyard Leadership Institute. And give up on night a week and give up a weekend occasionally to sit in a class and learn about theology in the Bible and church history.

So we have these desires for good things in our lives, but we are afraid of the hard work it's going to take to pursue them. Well those are the reasons why we don't initiate and if we can push through those fears, we've got to look at what it takes to initiate.

**SLIDE:**  
**What it takes to *initiate***

The first thing about initiative is that you have got to choose. It begins with a choice.

**SLIDE:**  
**You've got to choose**

Choice is one of the greatest gifts that God has given to us. It is part of what it means when the Bible tells us that we are created in God's image. And Erwin McManus suggests that it is the most spiritual act that you will ever do. He said this...

**SLIDE:**  
"The most spiritual activity you will engage in today is making choices."  
—Erwin McManus

Choice is the most spiritual act you can do because it precedes every other act. Most of us, when we think of spiritual activities we think of praying, reading the Bible, worshipping God. But you can't do any of those things unless you first choose that you're going to do it. Choice precedes all of those activities.

Moses tells the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 30.

**SLIDE:**

**Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (TNIV)**

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life.

I've set before you life and death, now choose life. Choice is part of what makes us human, and is never something that we can delegate to someone else to do for us. Each and every one of us will have to make our own choice to follow God, or to reject him. And God won't listen to the excuse that somebody else made the wrong choice for you.

And the second part of initiative, of course, is the action.

**SLIDE:**

**You've got to act**

It's not enough to simply have a nice thought about doing something, it's not enough to simply choose that one day I should do that, but choice followed by action is what it means to initiate something. This is what is missing in 99% of New Year's resolutions. People have great intentions of going to the gym, and of eating better, and making changes in there life, but then they don't follow their choice through with action. And it remains a harmless intention. For you to actually initiate something, *you have to choose and act.*

But we've got to be careful here, because initiative by itself is not necessarily a good thing. Initiative can be a really good thing, but initiative can also be a bad thing if we initiate the wrong things. So we have to be careful about what we initiate.

**SLIDE:**

**What to *initiate***

Because, the worst thing that you can do in life is to initiate sin.

**SLIDE:**

## **The worst thing you can do: initiate sin**

That is using initiative in the wrong direction—a direction that is destructive to you and offensive to God.

James the brother of Jesus shows us the progression of sin in the book that he wrote in the Bible. He says this...

### **SLIDE:**

#### **James 1:14-15 (TNIV)**

Each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Notice the progression here? You see, most of us wouldn't sit back and think,

"I want to initiate a drug addiction today. I want to initiate the total destruction of my marriage by having an affair. I want to initiate cutting off all of my relationships with my friends and family because of my all-consuming desire for more money and success. That's what I want to do."

Most of us don't initiate that large scale of sin, but what James tells us is that sin begins as an evil desire. And then once we initiate, once we choose and act on an evil desire it gives birth to sin and sin, he says, gives birth to death.

So the worst thing that we could do is initiate sin in our lives, but here's where I want to spend some time. The second worst thing that you can do is *to not initiate anything at all.*

### **SLIDE:**

#### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> worst thing you can do: not initiate anything**

See it's not enough to just avoid initiating sin in our lives. What I'm suggesting to you here is by simply trying to be neutral, by trying to be like Switzerland and not to get involved in any of the problems of the world we actually miss God's purposes for our lives and we waste all of the things that God wanted to do in us and through us. Remember that quote from Erwin McManus when he "I am convinced the great tragedy is not the sins we commit, but the life we fail to live."

Well, I want to read to you a parable of Jesus, when Jesus said something similar when talking about what the kingdom of heaven is like. Jesus says this in Matthew 25...

### **SLIDE:**

#### **Matthew 25:14-30 (TNIV)**

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

“‘Take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For those who have will be given more, and they will have an abundance. As for those who do not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Now this is a difficult parable, this is one of those parables that makes you say, “Wait a minute Jesus what do you mean by this?” There’s parts of this that sound different than some of your other teachings. And I’m not going to unpack the full parable, but one piece of the context is that Jesus is talking about the Jewish

religious establishment that had received so much from God and cared nothing for giving it away to others that didn't have it.

Part of the point of this story is that we cannot receive from God and hoard that for ourselves and that's what we're doing if we receive all of the grace of God and the forgiveness of Jesus Christ for our sins and if all we do with that rich abundance of life that Jesus gives to us. If all we do with that is try not to sin, we are burying what God has given us into the ground, because of fear. And that is not what God is calling us into.

He calls us to initiate new things and to step out into the purposes of God. And James tells us that if we know that God has asked us to do something if we know that there is something good that we are supposed to do and we refuse to do it. James tells us that that is sin. He says this in chapter 4 verse 17.

**SLIDE:**

**James 4:17 (TNIV)**

So then, if you know the good you ought to do and don't do it, you sin.

That there aren't just sins of commission but there are also sins of omission, when we do not do those things that God has called us and asked us to do.

So what I'd like you to consider tonight is as you are thinking through this next year, and what resolutions you're making, how many pounds you're going to lose, how many books you're going to read, etc. Also think about how God wants to use your life to extend his kingdom. Because it is absolutely the case that if you are a follower of Jesus, if you have given your life to God and become a Christian, that *God has purpose for your life*. God wants to use your life to spill over the blessings that he's given to you so that others might share in the riches of the mercy and grace of God.

And if all that you're aiming at this year is weight loss, your sights are too low. You aren't lifting your head to see what God has in mind for you.

So if the worst thing we can do is initiate sin and the second worst is not to initiate anything, the best thing we can do is to initiate with God.

**SLIDE:**

**The best thing you can do: initiate with God**

Now let me tell you what I'm not saying, for those of you that have studied theology at all, the red light is going off in your head. You're probably saying, "Wait a minute, God is the one that initiates. The Holy Spirit is the one that initiates change in us, he's the one that draws us to himself." And that is absolutely true.

Paul tells us in Philippians 1:4 and 6. He says this...

**SLIDE:**

**Philippians 1:4,6 (TNIV)**

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

That is absolutely true that God is the one who began a good work in us. But what I'm talking about with initiating with God is the partnership between our choice and our will and God's will. The partnership between our action and God's action, because there is a cooperation between God and us. There is the part of God initiating inside of us, then we have to initiate with God.

This happens with the little decisions in life as we grow in God, but this also happens in the big decisions, like the decision to choose life over death. In those big decisions in life, we need to choose God, we need to initiate to choose and to act towards God. One of my favorite passages in all of scripture, one I've come back to again and again and again in my life when things are hard, when God is far off and I can't feel his presence, I read James 4:8.

**SLIDE:**

**James 4:8 (NRSV)**

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

So many people are sitting back with the attitude that God can come to me. They are saying, "Come on God, do something spectacular to erase every shroud of doubt in my mind. Make this easy for me. It's up to you to move first." And James is telling us to try the other way. You try making the first move, even though what's really happening beneath the surface is that it is God drawing you toward himself. But you make the first move and see if God meets you.

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**Are you living a passive life?**

**Why we don't *initiate***

**Fear of choice**

**Fear of failure**

**Fear of losing what we have**

**Fear of hard work**

**What it takes to *initiate***

**You've got to choose**

**You've got to act**

**What to *initiate***

**The worst thing you can do: initiate sin**

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> worst thing you can do: not initiate anything**

**The best thing you can do: initiate with God**