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The God Who Initiates

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Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Want to talk to you today about the God who initiates, the God who initiates. To initiate means to start or to begin, to be the cause of a process or action that launches something into existence or brings something about. At this point in our Bible overview, we're at that point where we measure our actual calendar from. We are highlighting AD one; we're in 2025 AD, but basically, roughly around the time of Jesus' birth is known as AD one. And this is where we divide our calendar by. And if you've been following along at all, we're about two-thirds of the way through the scriptures, and we've covered the entire sort of an overview of the Old Testament. And as we look through this overview of the Bible, I want you to keep something in mind, very important, if you don't already. And that is this: The Bible is the story of human history in very practical ways, and very much in the scene history of humanity. Very true. We see this in geology time and time again, but it is also the story of the unseen, the behind the scenes. There are both narratives going on in the scriptures: what is true in the unseen world and what is true in the seen world. And God molds them together for us in the scriptures, in his revelation, so we can understand what he's like and its effect in our world. And when we think about God, I want you to think about him being an initiator because he is the initiator of all that is good.

In his sovereignty and his divine stance of where he is, he chooses what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. This is the God who initiates things. He is the genesis of all things. Let's review a little bit of what we've covered already. At the very beginning, the Bible says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." It was him who was there doing the initial work to bring all that is into existence. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. I don't know if you've ever pictured this in your mind, but it has a sense of nothingness, with some sense of water there and a spirit hovering over the deep

darkness that existed. And there is this divine being that existed from whenever to whenever, always has been and always will be. And then he initiated the heavens and the earth. The Spirit of God was hovering there. We learn at the very beginning of the Bible about the nature of God. And he said something. Now we understand that his spoken word is living from the rest of the Bible, and that actually the word became flesh and made its dwelling among us, full of hope and glory. So you have, in a sense, three beings here, yet one: there is God who is doing the speaking, God the Father, God the Son, who is the Word, and the Spirit hovering over the surface of the deep. They're doing this together in harmony, in oneness. And this is where we see at the beginning the triune mystery of God. And he is the source of all things, the genesis of all things. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Why do we have light? Because he initiated it and created it so we can see things. And God saw that the light was good. And he went on to separate the land from the sky, from the waters, and create earth. And then he grew plants on the earth, and he then formed animals on the earth. And we see in Genesis two, "Before any bush of the field was yet in the land, and there was no small plant of the field springing up yet, because God had not initiated rain." Now, when you study the Bible, it's likely that it didn't rain until the time of Noah. God just simply watered the earth with a mist as he planted the garden and caused things to grow. And "there was a mist going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground." And then the Lord God initiated or started or formed man from the dust of the ground. And he breathed into that man, into his nostrils, the breath of life, and man became a living being. I want you to think about the fact that there was no one else there.

This was not a democracy. We did not vote. We did not decide when this happened. It was not our will. It was not our plan. It was the sovereign God who initiated all things. And then after he initiated man and created man and breathed into man the very breath of life, he saw that it was not good that the man was alone. And so he caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. He initiated all of this. This was his design. This was his plan. He caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. And while the man was sleeping, God initiated a surgery and pulled some flesh from the side of the man and fashioned together another being, and brought this being to the man, and he did this. He was the first matchmaker, creating the first match. And then he initiated for us what marriage is. We weren't there. We didn't get a vote. He just told us what it was. He said, "For this reason, now a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh." It is hubris for us to think that we know better. This is the God who is the initiator of all things, the designer of all things. He is the one who created it all. We weren't there.

After he did this, Adam and Eve disobeyed him. He gave them free opportunity, free choice. He only gave them one instruction, and that was not to eat from one tree that he had planted in the Garden of Eden. And they ate of this tree. And then the Scripture says, after they ate of it, they changed, and they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, the man and his wife. And what did they do? They went and hid themselves from the presence of God. Because we're in a state in the world now where we like darkness more than light. We have a sense of a little bit of shame because we fall short of God's expectations. And so being brought out into the light is unnerving for us. And when Adam and Eve first experienced this, they went into hiding from God, and they hid in the trees in the garden. But I want you to notice something about God. The Lord God called to the man—he initiated towards the man—and said to him, "Where are you?" It's not because God didn't know where

he was. It's because he wanted Adam to take stock of where he was now in a new state, separated in a way from God, hiding from God. But God moved toward him and came to him and asked him where he was. And as we study the Old Testament, we see this time and time again in this world that now exists in a sense of rebellion against God, in a sense of distance from God, in a sense of not knowing God, not understanding God.

God keeps reaching out to us. As a matter of fact, what he did first for Adam and Eve was he shed the blood of an animal because the Scripture tells us when we break God's laws or we violate his standards for us, there's a punishment due us, and that punishment is death. He basically said to him, "If you disobey me and you eat from the tree, you will surely die." And so death was the penalty. And when he came to Adam and Eve and called to them, he initiated towards them. And then it says he somehow caused a death to cover them with the skin of an animal, so he shed some blood for the forgiveness of their sins, to cover their bodies and their nakedness. And then we see that evil promulgated on the earth. And Mike did this history last week, but God in his grace initiated towards Noah and saved the human race through Noah. And then after Noah, he called forth a man named Abraham to bring forth a family for which he could reveal himself to. And you have Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Caleb, Joshua, the judges, the kings, King David, King Solomon. Then you have the prophets, and then you come to the end of the Old Testament. And you have in all of this God reaching, initiating, sending people to us in the world to reveal himself to us, to call us back to himself.

And then you have the whole Old Testament pointing towards this time that we're looking at in the timeline in our history today, after Malachi, for some 400 years, there's a sense of quiet and waiting and anticipation and looking forward for God's people. And their longing grows, and somehow Rome overtakes them. And they live in the Promised Land in Jerusalem, and they're allowed to practice their walk with God there. But Rome is ruling them, and they just want freedom. And they're awaiting God's promise of the Old Testament. And Paul writes to those in Galatia; in hindsight, he says this: "When the time had fully come," God's decision, God's sovereign will by his own perfect movement at this time in history. I don't know why this was his time, but it says, "When the time had fully come, God sent his son." It's hard to even comprehend. Friends, we shouldn't get over this.

John says this: "The Word that was there in the beginning became flesh and made its dwelling among us." Part of that triune God that existed for all eternity all of a sudden became a part of creation. God sent his son. John continues and says, "For God so loved the world." Love initiates. Love moves toward. "For God so loved the world that he sent his only son into the world." It had been prophesied. It had been spoken of hundreds of times through the prophets of old. Reading through the Old Testament, it's constantly pointing to this consummate time when the time would fully come and God would become flesh and come among us.

The prophet Isaiah would speak of it this way: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end." The prophet Isaiah said, "And the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. He will do it." So when the time had fully come, God sent his son. Now I want you to understand something here about Christianity.

It is technically not a religion. When we define a religion in our world, we define it as attempts to connect with God, reaching out to God. But Christianity is first and foremost about God coming to us. And we only reach to him because he comes to us. No one comes to God unless God first draws them. It is the kindness of God that leads us back to him. All of our human effort to reach to God will avail nothing unless God himself, by his Spirit, draws us to him into a relationship, not a religion, but into a personal, dynamic, living relationship with him based on our faith. So when the time had fully come, God sent his son. And Paul continues, "born of a woman, born under the law." Why? So that he could accomplish the very purpose for which he came. See, God didn't send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

For the world stands condemned already. Why does Paul mention that Jesus came under the law? Now this is the law of God. He came under the law to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves, to pay the penalty for our lawbreaking. God has standards that he set. Our world doesn't like this. We love a moving standard, a moving morality. But God does not have a moving morality. He gave us clearly standards in his law: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not take my name in vain. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not lie." And the Bible says, every one of us has broken God's law. We are under his law, and we are under the judgment of his law. And we all fall short. And the wage of our failing, the wage of our sins, is death. And if we pay that penalty ourselves, we have no more life. But God created us for life, and he loves us, and he wants us to live with him forever. So when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to do what? To redeem those of us that are under the law so that we might have life through him. Praise him and honor him and thank him for this. This is the way that God has made available for you and I, and for anyone in the world, to have eternal life with him forever and ever.

Let's give him praise, friends. Let's give him thanks. Let's honor him. We are celebrating him this morning. This is Almighty God. He has come among us to redeem us, to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. I don't care how important you think things are that are going on in the world. You think the economy is important. You think what's happening politically, and it is important. Friends, we want to pay attention to make our world the best we can. But, friends, what's at stake in this world is far more than just making this world a better place. What's at stake in this world and hanging in the balance is the eternal destiny of human souls. I want, I want you to just let this settle in on you. We're just passing through for a short time. And eternity is a long time. And to be separated from God forever is a travesty. And no one needs do it. But how can they know unless we tell them? It's not about us getting comforted and feeling good. Those of us that know, we already know; others need to know. We want to encourage each other in our faith, stir each other up in our faith. But friends, then we want to turn outward and say, "Lord, what would you have for us? As you've initiated to us, now initiate in us to be your hands and feet reaching to the world," and we each ought to be asking him, "God, what is my role? What is my role in advancing your eternal kingdom? As long as you give me breath, let's keep asking him what he has for us."

His divine power has freely given us everything we need for a life of godliness through him, the power of Christ. I want you to know that he came to invite you into a relationship with him, and you can at any time. If he's drawing you, open your heart to him and receive him into your life and invite him to

become not just your Savior, but your Lord, your King, your Shepherd, and your leader. And he will not lead you astray because he loves you. He's trustworthy. He can be trusted. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word, which teaches us so clearly about what you have done in our history. We thank you for creating this world and sustaining it for so many centuries. We thank you for your patience and your kindness with the human race. And Father, we thank you that your spirit is still reaching to the world, calling people to repentance, drawing people to turn back towards you. And then we bear fruit. Father, I pray, maybe for some, that you are drawing for the first time, that you would help them open their hearts to you and allow you to come in to be their shepherd, their leader, and their guide. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.