

Restoring Initiative: Utter Dependence on God – Dan Hitz

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Many of us who have grown up with abuse have done our best to become invisible and blend into the background. We've learned to avoid stepping on anyone's toes, even if they're hurting us. We've convince ourselves it's safer that way. We've learned the hard way that admitting needs and having desires is a sure way to have our abusers use them against us. Unfortunately, problems still seem to find us.

Initiative is the ability to get an idea about something, set a goal, and take the steps necessary to accomplish that goal. Hiding in the background destroys initiative.

Initiative follows trust and autonomy in Erik Erikson's stages of development. Although this is a secular theory, it describes the stages of development that the Lord uses to mature us. In healthy development, an infant learns from his mother that he is cared for and protected as she lovingly feeds and nurtures him. He develops a **basic trust** in his caregivers and the world around him. Having learned basic trust from the mother, the influence of the father now becomes more important. God calls the father to encourage the child to grow beyond primary dependence upon the mother and take some bold steps into the world. The child learns to do things for himself, such as potty training and getting dressed. He learns that he is capable of figuring some things out and doing a good job. He can be separated from mommy for a while and explore life with dad. He is learning **autonomy**. Next, the child learns to take **initiative**. He graduates from getting dressed because mommy told him to and playing with cars with daddy, to getting an idea of his own and trying it out. Of course, he will make many mistakes. Healthy parents will teach him that it is okay to make mistakes and that he can eventually learn to do a good job. He won't be too shaken by those mistakes. Mom and dad still love me. I am still a good boy. I just have to try this again. Through trial and error, the child learns how to get an idea and take the steps to accomplish his goal. Playtime is important work for kids who learn how to think for themselves and develop their own ideas. Effective parents know how to help a child filter their ideas and figure out how to make the good ones happen.

People who grow up with trauma and abuse learn the opposite lessons. Instead of trust they learn **mistrust**. An infant not nurtured by his mother learns that the world is a scary place and that it's not safe to trust anyone. Walls go up around his heart. Instead of autonomy he learns **shame and doubt** – the message that he is inherently bad and can't do anything right. It's not safe to make a mistake. No matter how hard he tries, the angry parent is scolding him and telling him he messed up again. Doubting our every move is crippling. If we believe that everything we do is wrong and that there is a price to pay for being wrong, we eventually stop trying. We don't learn how to pick an idea, set a goal, and make it happen. Instead of autonomy, we've learned the message of paralyzing **guilt**.

Although not the classic story of abuse, we can see some familiar symptoms of trauma in the life of Moses after he fled Egypt and spent 40 years in the wilderness. Acts 7:22 says that Moses was taught in all the ways of Pharaoh's house and was eloquent in word and deed. How could anyone who grew up with such prosperity struggle with mistrust, shame, doubt, and guilt? Remember Moses' early years? He was born at a time of great persecution when Pharaoh gave the order to kill all the male Hebrew babies. Moses' mother hid him for three months and then put him in a basket and floated

him down the Nile River. He was found by Pharaoh's daughter who made arrangements to have Moses' birth mother nurse him. He stayed with his mother for a while longer, but there did come a day when his mother brought him to Pharaoh's house. **Scripture makes no mention of the issues of abandonment, rejection, mother or father wounds; but imagine if you were a toddler torn from the arms of the only family you knew and taken into a strange culture with people you didn't know.** Moses was just as human as we are. Imagine the challenge you would have trusting a new set of people when the only group of people you had ever known "gave you up". Yes, Moses was taught all the ways of the Egyptians and he was powerful in both speech and action, but is it possible that in the back of his mind he feared it could all be taken away from him in a heartbeat, just like the family that raised him? How many people do you know that look very successful on the outside, but are racked with anxiety and insecurity on the inside?

Moses did end up losing everything for a second time when he was 40 years old. He killed an Egyptian who was beating a fellow Hebrew and hid his body in the sand. The next day he tried to break up a fight between two Hebrews. The one who caused the problem exposed Moses' secret. Pharaoh found out about it and tried to kill him. For the second time Moses was torn from the family that he knew. Instead of returning to a palace, Moses fled to the wilderness.

We see the effects of this rejection and abandonment 40 years later when God calls Moses to be His prophet to confront Pharaoh. By this time Moses had even lost his trust in God. His sense of autonomy is gone as he fears God's instructions to go in His authority and confront Pharaoh. Moses struggles to take the clearly defined steps God gave him to initiate the plan. The years of emotional trauma had taken a toll. The man who at one time was great in word and deed was now slow of speech and begging God to send someone else. Rather than trusting God to lead, Moses was living in mistrust, shame, doubt, and guilt. Fortunately, God was more persistent at working in Moses' life than Moses was at providing objections. God worked through Moses regardless of his human frailties. He went back to Egypt, confronted Pharaoh, and led the Israelites out of slavery and into the Promised Land.

What is the Lord calling you to do right now? Is it hard for you to believe that the Lord could actually do anything positive through you? Maybe you've sensed a deep calling in your heart for something more in God. Maybe you sense God calling you to step out in faith and take some appropriate risks, but the mistrust, fear, doubt and shame keep screaming at you to run and hide. You've spent a lot of years learning to become invisible – maybe even perfecting the art. Now, God is calling you to come out of hiding, stand in the identity that He has given you before the foundation of the world, and begin walking towards the goal that He has set before you.

But how? **How do we overcome those familiar voices in our heads that say things will never work?** Those voices that keep telling us that we're stupid for even thinking that you'll ever be able to figure this out? Those voices that keep telling you that God's never going to keep His part of the bargain?

The first thing we need to do is stop running and admit where we're at. If you haven't surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you need to settle that issue once and for all. We have to admit that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves and accept His offer to help. We have to take a risk to open our hearts to Him, and ask Him to lead our lives. You don't have to figure this all out at once. You just have to start with a basic understanding that Jesus Christ loves you and wants to give you eternal life. He'll show you what to do step by step.

I understand that for some of us who have been abused, trusting God in general is a huge challenge in itself. Some of us who have been Christians for a while still don't trust Him fully. Maybe we've come a very long way, but we started this journey with a lot of emotional baggage. After all... He picked our parents... He didn't stop our abuser... **These are some legitimate things that we have to work out as we begin to build a basic trust in our hearts between God and us.** This is where we need the Body of Christ. Talk to people who have walked a similar road to yours and have found some

healing. If you don't know who to talk to, call Reconciliation Ministries or talk to someone in the pastoral care department of your church. If the first person you talk to looks at you like you're a space alien, find someone else. **There really are safe people who understand. They can help you sort out the questions, fears and doubts you might have about God.** He isn't insecure, and He isn't going to be shocked when He hears you admit that you don't trust Him in certain things. He isn't going to be scared or vengeful when you tell somebody that you're actually angry with Him about some of the things you've gone through. He already knows and He wants to help you work through those areas in your heart. Remember, He understands what it is like to be abused. He allowed evil, wicked men to torture and murder Him so He could pay the penalty for your sin and make a way to heal your emotional wounds. He wants to restore your heart to His original design. He wants to give you a future and a hope.

As your trust in the Lord grows, it's time to sort through all those voices in your heart that scream about how you never do anything right. That you'll never amount to anything. That you deserve to be abused. Those are the wounds that steal your confidence in God. Where did those voices come from? Did you hear that from your parent or step-parent? Did you hear those words from the kids in the neighborhood or the teachers at school? Did your abuser blame you for the abuse? God isn't saying those words to you.

Sometimes well-meaning parents just don't understand a kid that is wired differently from them.

Maybe you were a creative, sensitive kid being raised by a tough, analytical parent who didn't understand the value of creativity or sensitivity. Mom or dad didn't realize you would grow up to be a music teacher. Maybe you were the analytical kid with a strong sense of right and wrong who was raised by a set of parents who were laid back and didn't realize that you were destined to get a job in law enforcement. They didn't know how to nurture your black and white personality. Either way, **God knows the skill sets that you have. He knows what he created you to be. He can help you accept the gifts He has given you and shine with the skills sets that you have.**



It is time to get healing for the doubts and fears that stop you from taking the initiative to walk towards the goals and dreams the Lord put in your heart. I have to wonder what Moses thought when the Lord told him to go back to Egypt and talk to Pharaoh. "Well, Lord, the last time I tried to take action in Egypt didn't go so well. That's why I'm here in the wilderness tending sheep. This is all I'm good for." God believed otherwise. Maybe you've tried to take some steps in the past and things went from bad to worse. Sometimes that can happen. Sometimes we've tried to take the steps before we were ready and things fell apart. Sometimes we've tried to take our own steps into an area that would make us feel better about ourselves rather than an area God was telling us to step into. Trying to fill the voids in our hearts on our own never works. We either set ourselves up for failure, or accomplish what we set out to do only to find ourselves even emptier than when we began. Talk to the Lord about these things too. Let the Holy Spirit heal the wounds in your heart that you've tried to fix with everything else. As He heals your heart, you will begin to embrace His motives and goals.

The Lord was very gracious with Moses. **Even though Moses had a lot of doubt and begged God to send someone else, He still equipped Moses to accomplish His goal for his life.** Where Moses couldn't get past his human limitations such as fear and poor speech, God sent his brother, Aaron, to go with him and be his mouth piece. Pharaoh wasn't too keen on granting Moses' requests, but God gave Moses the strength to be persistent and continue to confront him. Eventually, Moses' faithfulness paid off and Pharaoh let the people go. The Lord was merciful to Moses and the Israelites. He knew they would fail if they had to fight the Philistines right away, so he led them through the wilderness

towards the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17-18). **God knows what you can handle and He will lead you at a pace that you're ready for.** Just like He did for the Israelites, the Lord will use the supernatural in our lives to help us see that He is leading the way with whatever pillar of fire and cloud of smoke we need Him to provide in our lives. He does these things to show us that He can do whatever it takes for us to be successful and what He is calling us to do.

Even though they had the supernatural signs and wonders, it didn't take the Israelites long to turn against Moses and accuse him of leading them into the wilderness to get slaughtered by the Egyptians. Something amazing happens here. Moses, the man who cowered and fled 40 years ago when one angry Hebrew pointed out that he killed an Egyptian – the same man who begged God to send someone else to confront Pharaoh and deliver the people – now confronts all of the Hebrews, directs them to stand and trust the Lord to defend them against the Egyptian army, holds up his staff, trusts God, and walks into the Red Sea. God parts the Red Sea making a way of escape for the Israelites, drowning the Egyptians, and confirming Moses' supernatural authority as the leader of Israel. **God changed Moses' heart. God can change your heart too.**

The next forty years didn't exactly go as smoothly as Moses would have liked. The nation fell into idolatry and had to be rebuked (Exodus 32). The Israelites grumbled against him time and time again. Moses relied on God for help, and the Lord supernaturally took care of the problems. **Moses didn't always do everything right.** He wore himself out trying to counsel the people himself (Exodus 18). He struck the rock twice (Numbers 20). **Nevertheless, the Lord had mercy on him.** God sent his father in law to help teach him how to delegate authority and govern the people more effectively (Exodus 18). God sent him Aaron and Hur to hold up his hands in battle when his human strength gave out (Exodus 17). Best of all, Moses had the wonderful privilege of knowing the Lord more deeply than the rest of the Israelites when he spoke with Him in the tent of meeting face to face as a man speaks to a friend (Exodus 33:11).

Moses certainly wasn't perfect and neither are you. **We could erroneously look at the fact that he wasn't allowed to enter the Promised Land and conclude that his life ended in failure, yet God was very merciful to Moses.** He used him greatly even after death when Moses appeared with Elijah to minister to Jesus about his crucifixion (Luke 9). God will be very merciful to you too.

What is the Kingdom vision, or goal, that God has given you? **What would you do if you could do anything for Him and you weren't afraid to fail? You can get closer to that goal as you learn to develop a deep, basic trust in God.** I know you already trust God in many areas of your heart or you wouldn't bother being a Christian. Are you ready to learn to trust God in every area of your life? Even those areas you've been afraid to acknowledge? As you do, you'll continue to develop a healthy sense of autonomy and initiative – a sense that God is equipping you with all of the tools that you need to do whatever He is calling you to do, and the ability to take appropriate action. **None of us can do anything of any eternal value on our own, but we can do everything He is calling us to do through Jesus Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).**

In the right time, begin taking those steps towards the goals that the Lord put in your heart. Proverbs 11:14 reads, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety." **It is always good to have a godly mentor, friend, or advisor to bounce your ideas off of.** This is where your trust, autonomy and initiative begin to take off. Begin with the small steps and launch out into your calling. As you grow accustomed to trusting the Lord to help you with the basic steps, He will gradually increase your vision. **As you grow in the Lord, your vision will grow as well. The larger the vision the more important it is to walk with a lot of godly counselors, friends, and advisors.** As you learn to trust in the Lord and enjoy following His lead, the Lord will fulfill the desires of your heart.