

Saying “NO” (Learning How To)

Part 1: It’s Empowering

(preached 8/25/24)

DO YOU HAVE TROUBLE SAYING “NO”?

- * Do you agree to things you wish you hadn't?
- * Do you feel others take advantage of you?
- * Do you overload, overwhelm, and overcommit yourself?
- * Do you feel that you're often giving and rarely taking?
- * When you do say "no" do you feel guilty?
- * DO WISH YOU COULD SAY "NO" MORE OFTEN w/o feeling badly about it?

God says “no” and so can we. There are well-meaning Christians who believe God says “yes” to everything but the truth is He says “no.” After the Apostle Paul was caught up to Heaven and show many wondrous things, this happens:

[2Co 12:7-9 ESV] 7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 ***Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.*** 9 ***But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul asked for this “thorn” to be removed and God said “NO”

because the thorn was serving as a lesson of humility from the Apostle who would write 2/3rds of the NT.

TODAY we’re going to see how to say “no,” when to say it, and not feel guilty after.

- We’ll discover there are times when it’s healthy, sets proper boundaries, and gives us mental “space” from something that might be harmful.
- We’ll see there are both passive and active “no’s”, what those are, what they do, and when to use them.
- We’ll understand that sometimes we need to say “no” before we can say “yes.”

What’s the most popular word from a toddler? “NO!” Why are they like that?

- Saying no is an act of power—the power of the will.
- It’s an attempt to set ourselves apart from someone or something else whether a person (usually an authority figure like a parent), a concept, or a rule (normally set by an authority).

- Driven by a sense of independent identity from an authority figure, society, rules, tradition, etc.

Think of a young person **WHO REBELS AGAINST THEIR PARENTS**, needs to go off and do their own thing, make their own mistakes...but sometimes comes around later and realizes their parents weren't so far off the mark about some things.

Saying “no” can be good, saying “no” can be bad.

Today we will wield our “no” like a sword and a shield to glorify God and protect our hearts.

LET’S TALK ABOUT WILLPOWER AND BREAK IT DOWN INTO 2 CATEGORIES: STATIC AND DYNAMIC.

- Static willpower is passive, like status quo, and doesn't require a lot from us.
- Dynamic willpower is more energetic and requires an active effort—both mental and physical—to accomplish.

STATIC WP: I get up in the morning, make my coffee, and look at my phone. This is still an act of will, but doesn't require much. I can do this w/o thinking or expending a lot of energy. We can also call this a “habit” and habits are like putting your car on cruise control. Status quo and repetition of pattern.

DYNAMIC WP: I get up in the morning for a workout: jogging, going to gym, reading 3 chapters of my Bible and writing a summary of it. Acts like these force us to assert a greater level of mental and physical energy to start and accomplish. Moves us OUT of status quo. It's a flex, it's us being “stretched” to “expand the wineskin.”

Patterns/Habits we find ourselves in are maintained by static WP and can be good or bad. If static WP has us praying 5 minutes a day, reading some Bible, and drinking water then its good. If status WP has us late night snacking, drinking booze to cope, playing hours of video games, cussing when we're frustrated, gossiping when we're lonely, etc. then its bad.

If it has us saying “yes” when we should be saying “no” then its bad.

The reason we say “yes” when we should be saying “no” is because we've been static for too long.

We're caught in a low energy, low maintenance pattern that, even if it's destructive, we continue to maintain.

There's a term in astronomy called **"a decaying orbit."** Sometimes a satellite up in space gets too close to the earth and gravity starts pulling it in...slowly. Said satellite is still orbiting around the planet like it should be BUT it's slowly drawing closer to the earth rather than maintaining the same distance. What happens is that it eventually crashes and burns when it's drawn in too close. Not being able to say "no" at the right times is like being in a decaying orbit.

The key to being able to say "no" is to move it from being static to dynamic, from passive to active.

- I get up in the morning and make my coffee and it's mostly mindless.
- But if I go want to go jogging that requires me to "kick it up a notch." It needs an active flex in my mind first, then my body.
- It's a conscious thought, needing more energy, that breaks me from my status quo pattern of just coffee and social media.

We're not just gathered here today listening to this sermon merely to say "no" to our spouse, kids, and the people taking advantage of us...*we're also here to give a dynamic "no" to our habits and patterns that are destroying us.*

THE HUMAN "TAKERS" IN OUR LIVES ARE NOT OUR ENEMY: OUR INABILITY TO SAY "NO" IS OUR ENEMY.

We cannot change other people, but we can (re)train other people.

WITH THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WE CAN CHANGE AND TRAIN OURSELVES.

It's time to bring our no from static to dynamic and here's how:
it's an act of will, just like going jogging in the morning vs. drinking coffee and looking at my phone.

It requires a push and a flex that breaks us from our static pattern into the dynamic.

- Lifting your cell phone is static, lifting a grocery bag overflowing with heavy items is dynamic.
- Starting your car and driving is static, having to crawl under your car to investigate the noise is dynamic.
- Riding the escalator up is static, taking the stairs is dynamic.

Zacchaeus' static pattern was to do what he did yesterday: rob from the poor to make himself rich. He was good—no great—at it. Had it down to a science and loved the opulent lifestyle that resulted. I don't believe it required much mental or physical energy from him at all...he was running on cruise control.

One dinner with Jesus catapulted Zach from static to dynamic.

The Gospel smashed his old wineskin and replaced it with a new one that would stretch. When the Holy Spirit convicted him that he was actually stealing from people and living in sin, Zach immediately broke his status quo and said this:

[Luk 19:8-9 ESV] 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham."

Who did Zach say “no” to? His greed, his love of money, his addiction to pleasure, and his justifications for doing what he did. He denied himself, took up his cross, and followed Jesus.

You've actually employed a dynamic no already, but have likely done so as a triggered reaction vs. an act of will. If you've been triggered and gave a visceral, angry “no!” in response to someone else, that's a dynamic “no” but also a spontaneous reaction.

LET YOUR DYNAMIC NO BE PREPARED AND PREMEDIATED, NOT REACTIVE. Practice it at home in private. Feel the emotion, say it loud, be intense! Why? Because just like motivating yourself to go the gym vs coffee and social media, it takes an internal push that breaks you out of your static pattern.

Example: *Johnny Doe is always asking you to borrow money*...that he rarely pays back. You've been wanting to tell him no for awhile, but every time he asks, you just give it to him. Your spouse hates it and you've gotten in fights with them over it.

You tried denying Johnny once and felt crushing guilt afterward, telling yourself you weren't being a good Christian, etc. Truth is you don't want to lend or give him money anymore but don't know how to tell him "no."

At home in private, imagine Johnny approaching you for money. **NOW GIVE A DYNAMIC "NO!"** Say it loud and outloud, feel the emotion, be intense.

I do this a lot, especially when temptation starts trying to kick down my internal door. I will often say "no!" even when I'm in the presence of my family. My wife and kids will say "who are you talking to?" Who I'm responding to is my heart or flesh trying to get me to do or say something I shouldn't.

We're taught by Paul to take every bad thought captive—to bind them—and that starts with a energetic and active "no!"

The next step is to talk your conscience down...which we just did an entire sermon series on so I'm not here to preach that. Nutshell: remind it that *your righteousness is apart from obedience to the Law*. That the Blood of Christ has cleansed you from all and that you don't need to give or lend money in order to be righteous.

Giving and lending (and all other good deeds) needs to be done FROM a cleansed conscience, not FOR one.

Let me give a visual, reminding all of us that the human "takers" in our lives are NOT our enemies.

Cain and Abel bring an offering to God, Who accepts Abel's but rejects Cain's. Cain gets really angry and the Lord says this:

[Gen 4:6-7 ESV] 6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Each of us has a “door” inside us that we can either open or shut. As of verses 6-7 Cain’s door is still shut...but the monster of sin is crouching like a predator on the other side of it, waiting to pounce on Cain the moment he “opens” it.

Imagine you left your door open and a robber breaks in...what’s your best response?

- If you’re unprepared, your only response is panicked flight or visceral uncontrolled fight.
- If you’re prepared, you will flee properly (like military retreat) or fight and drive the robber from your home.

The robber **is NOT** the people in our lives taking advantage of us. **The robber is the voice within us** guilting us to always say yes and give them what they want.

- The thief is our internal desires telling us the best way to cope with our problems is the bottle, that eating is one of the few pleasures and comforts we have left, and is scintillated by the latest gossip.

4000 years after Jesus warned Cain about what was outside his door, He told us how to deal with this same thief that has broken in:

[Mat 24:43 ESV] 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, **he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.**

When the Master of the house knows the thief is coming, he’s prepared for him. Whether he runs into the panic room to be safe, or pulls out Ole Bessie: the 12 gauge shotgun.

BY BRINGING OUR “NO” FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE, WE ARE DOING JUST THIS. We are properly fleeing or casting it out of our house and by doing so, *we are giving ourselves SPACE.*

SPACE ISN’T JUST THE FINAL FRONTIER, IT’S ROOM TO BREATHE. When Johnny shows up unexpectedly and asks for money, we feel pressured don’t we? Closed in, no room to breathe. He’s telling us how much he needs it, they’re going to shut off his electric, kick him out of his home, his kids don’t have clothes for school. Your conscience is saying “*if you were a real Christian you would just give him the money*” and you’re suffocating.

So in the past you “created space” by giving him the money....

Not anymore.

Create space ahead of time by kicking the robber out of your internal home. Practice your dynamic no and talk your conscience down on your own time. Then when Johnny actually shows up you'll be able to tell him "no" because *you already created internal space.*

If you were to actually kick a robber out of your house, what would you do next? **You would shut and lock the door.** Maybe build a fence around your home.

Here's what you've accomplished were you to do all these things:

- Kicking the robber out is your active, visceral no that you practiced and prepared for.
- Locking the door and building a wall is a positive act of static no.

Just as it takes little energy to make your coffee in the morning, it takes little energy to maintain a lock or wall. **We call this "setting boundaries."**

Just as it would take some work to build a fence, we must do the work of establishing boundaries...within ourselves.

Well-meaning people tell us we need to set boundaries with **others** and I disagree: we set them with ourselves. When we do, we'll actively enforce and apply them to the people in our lives. We'll do so in a prepared and premeditated manner, vs. being triggered and merely reacting.

If you take the time to decide your internal boundaries, *you will train the people in your life.* You won't change them, but you will train them.

If you're always saying yes it's time to take personal responsibility: you have trained the "takers" in your life to see you as their source and come to you.

Your freedom begins when you stop being angry with them, and realize the biggest "taker" is your guilty conscience beating you to death to say yes all the time.

Which gets a better result: trying to cut all the “takers” from your life, or making a long-term healthy internal change?

A change where you're not feeling guilty all the time for saying no, and you have pre-set boundaries that you will enforce?

YOUR BOUNDARIES WILL DISAPPOINT AND ANGER OTHERS.

Especially those who've come to rely on you.

This is another internal talk we need to have with our consciences *ahead of time* where we tell it that others' disappointment and anger does NOT determine our righteousness.

The only Being Who gets to decide that is Jesus Christ and here's what He says:

[2Co 5:21 ESV] 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Remind that internal voice trying laying on the guilt trip that Jesus took your sin and made you HIS righteousness. We already have this free gift. Jesus has already made the decision and He's the only One qualified to decide.

Take the time and confront the internal thief/accuser. ***Speak God's truth to it.*** Remind it that you ARE the righteousness of Christ and don't need to work for it.

THEN WHEN JOHNNY COMES ASKING FOR MONEY, YOU WILL CONFIDENTLY TELL HIM “NO.” When he starts telling you how much he needs it, you will peacefully maintain your no.

When he says “what kind of Christian are you?!” you will answer: “a forgiven one.”

The same thing will apply when our flesh tells us to reach for the bottle as a coping mechanism, food for comfort, or what have you. We will be able to do what Jesus commanded: deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.