

Text: [2 Corinthians 6:1-10 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: October 26, 2025

Title: “When God Says No” > *The Sacred No* week 3

Theme: When we hear “no” from God, the question is whether we’ll have the patience and faithfulness to experience God’s ultimate “yes.”

1

This is a dilemma that every person of faith will face at some point
The crisis that’s provoked by unanswered prayer

We often say that “God answers every prayer, sometimes it’s just
that the answer is no”

Or, at the very minimum, the answer sometimes is “not yet”

Which is a really hard thing to face

When it’s something YOU really want

Or it’s something you believe would be good for the world, and
not just yourself

Or when your prayer is for healing of body, or healing of a
relationship

Every preacher loves passages like Matthew 7, where Jesus
says, ““Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who
asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who
knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7, NIV)

It's passages like what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12 that I don't
know what to do with:

“I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to
torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it
away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for
you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”

(2 Cor. 12:7b-9a, NIV)

2

To hear “no” from God can be devastating
Devastating to faith
So much so that I’ve spoken to people whose faith never
recovered
Who turned away from God, who turned away from the church

If this is something everyone is going to have to navigate at some
point, wouldn’t it be great if we had some insight into WHY
God sometimes says NO?

Well, you can find a lot of sermons out there that will promise
precisely that
I know because I looked this week!

But that’s not what this message will be
Because I’m convinced the only ones who can actually answer
the “why” question in any given situation
Are YOU, and GOD
That’s it – no one else

It may be that you only ever come to an understanding of why
after you’re well on the other side of the situation
When you see how the thing you prayed for wasn’t as good as
what actually happened
For example: you didn’t get the job, but then the company folds a
year later
And at that point, you may say, “I get it now”

But other times, I’m going to be honest, you’ll never know
That “why” is so personal and individual, I don’t even want to
attempt to answer that question

When it comes to faith, “why” questions just aren’t that fruitful
Because the “why” questions, when answered, they tend to shift
our experiences from faith toward certainty –
not necessarily helpful, actually

I think that’s why, when you read the book of Job, for example
Here’s a man who has lost everything, and he spends dozens of
chapters on the question “why?”
But ultimately, he folds when God appears and confronts Job with
his own ignorance
We want certainty, but all God has to offer is faith!

And so God’s response might seem harsh, until you realize it
holds the key to the way forward
So instead of talking about “why”, I want to focus on this idea:
“God said no. What do I do now?”

3

Paul was a man well-acquainted with “no”
As evidence, I’d first cite that famous story of his “thorn in the
flesh” that I referred to earlier –
no one is 100% sure what that was, but it was likely some
physical ailment

But even apart from that, there’s the matter of his everyday life
Once he began following Jesus
It wasn’t glamor, it wasn’t peace
It was struggle and difficulty

And there’s no place he talks about in as much detail as in 2
Corinthians 6
Here he was, out every day sharing the gospel
And what he had to show for it was – in his own words:
“problems, disasters, and stressful situations.

We went through beatings, imprisonments, and riots.
We experienced hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger.”
Hardly the stuff you want to put on your recruiting poster, right?
(vv.4b-5)

I have to imagine that a big part of his prayer life every single day
was:

“Please, Lord, I’m willing to follow. But can you make this easier?”

If you’ve ever tried hard to do the RIGHT thing
The thing that you believe God needs from you
And faced resistance – I’m guessing this prayer is quite familiar to
you too!

“Please, Lord, just let this be easier”
If you’ve prayed it, you’re in good company
So did Jesus
“Let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39)
And clearly, the answer was no

Here, I want to pause to propose a question that may be worth
considering:

Is the real problem – whether for Paul, for Jesus, or for us
Is the problem that God said no?
Or is the real problem that PEOPLE said no to God?

I wonder how many of our faith struggles around “God’s no”
Are really a misattribution problem
We thought it was GOD saying no
When in reality, it was PEOPLE saying no to God

God sent Paul to preach to the people
“We are begging you not to receive the grace of God in vain” he
says

But often, the people didn’t want to hear it
So let me ask you: is that God’s fault?

I do think that’s worth considering
If we really believe in free will, like we as Methodist Christians say
we do
Then I wonder how often the “no” we hear really comes from
God’s mouth
As opposed to people who instead have chosen to say “no” to
God

Now that may seem like a cop-out
A way of letting God off the hook –
because God is also supposed to be all-powerful, right?

But I think to reframe the question provides some consistency
with the way Paul answered this question for himself
Keep reading just beyond that piece about the hardship he faced
And you find this: “We displayed purity, knowledge, patience, and
generosity. We served with the Holy Spirit, genuine love,
telling the truth, and God’s power. We called the weapons of
righteousness in our right hand and in our left hand.” (2
Corinthians 6:6-7)

In other words, WE did what WE needed to do

And if it didn’t work, well
That’s not on US

4

This may be a deeply unsatisfying direction for a message about
God’s “no” – I realize that

But I perceive, based on the witness of the whole Bible
That the only real response in the face of God's "no"
The ONLY way forward
Is continued faithfulness
Continued trust

Because what's the alternative?
The only alternative is to abandon faith altogether
To give up

At some point, it comes down to this:

Believing that God knows
That God sees
And that God will not abandon us

Now, I know it is easy to feel abandoned when we keep praying
And nothing is happening
But if I had let that feeling carry the day, I would have walked
away from my faith 100 times over

Jesus didn't get saved from the cross
Moses never made it to the Promised Land
And Paul continued to face resistance everywhere he preached
the gospel

Their prayers were not answered
God said "no"
But we continue to tell their stories
Because, even so, THEY WERE FAITHFUL

5

Unanswered prayer – God’s no
Frequently drives us to seek answers to the question “why?”
And I can’t answer that for you
YOU may get an answer to that question, or you may not

Either way, I will say this:
99% of the time, the answer to the question “why” is going to
arrive so late that by that point, it won’t matter much
By the time it arrives, you’ll be far past the immediate crisis of
faith that God’s “no” drives us to

And maybe you’ll have learned, weeks or months or even years
later
That the “no” you thought you were hearing
Was really a “not yet”
Or a “no...but I have something else for you!”

But even if you never get an answer to the question “why?”
The challenge to is to keep faith with God
To continue to trust
To keep doing the right
“We were treated with honor and dishonor,” Paul says
“With verbal abuse and good evaluation”
“We were seen as both fake and real”
“As unknown and well known”
“As dying – and look, we’re alive!”

This is the difference between Good Friday and Easter Sunday
There is an ultimate “yes” in the presence of God
That triumphs over and transcends every “no” in our lives
Every hurt, every disappointment, every difficulty

This is the good news
This is what Paul risked his life every day to proclaim
Whether God said “no”
Whether the people said “no”
He didn’t care!

The question for us is whether we have the patience
And the faithfulness
That we need in order to see God’s ultimate “yes”
That’s all!

Amen.

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