

Text: [1 Timothy 1:12-17 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: October 12, 2025

Title: "Saying No (For the Sake of Yes)"

Theme: Saying "no" is a faithful act that creates space for God's greater "yes" in our lives.

1

"No" is a complete sentence
You've heard that before, right?
It's an incredibly powerful and EM-powering idea
That "no" doesn't need to be explained or apologized for
"No" can stand on its own

Honestly, this concept is a driving force behind this series
That saying "no" can be a sacred act
Sacred because we need to RESPECT one another's "no"s
And Sacred because it opens up space for your "yes" to actually mean something

We're going to talk over the next few Sundays
About our "no" – today
About how to navigate others' "no"s in the context of community –
so talking about how we live together with different values
And then how we interpret God's "no" to something we really want
So let's get started

2

We all know someone
Or maybe we are someone
Who says "yes" to far too many things
To the point where you don't really have either the time, or the energy, or ability to actually do any of the things well
We say "yes" because, well, FOMO – we don't want to miss out

And yet you get to the point where you end up resenting all of it,
because it's all too much
Does that sound familiar to anyone here? Just me?

The world is full of opportunities
But we can't say "yes" to everything
Otherwise, we have nothing left for the people and the things that
really matter to us

So "no" is an exercise in boundary setting – maybe around our
time or resources
But also, and often, around our physical bodies or our hearts
And it's important that we treat people's boundaries with the
respect and sacredness they deserve

Now, I'm aware that the church relies on people saying "yes" to
serve in all kinds of ways
Otherwise, where would we be?
I'm also *painfully* aware that the overall trends in volunteerism are
declining – have been for decades

Still, I'm committed as a leader to be a respecer of people's "no"
Because in those instances where someone approaches ME with
an opportunity
And I need to say "no"
I want people to understand
It's not that I don't WANT to help
Or I think the work doesn't matter
It's because I try my best not to say "yes" unless I can GIVE my
best to whatever it is – my time, my effort, and my heart

So if you are feeling over-scheduled, over-committed, and over-
stressed about all of it
I hope you'll take away something useful today, amen?

3

Jesus took the idea of “yes” and “no” very seriously
We find today’s scripture lesson smack in the middle of the most
important ethical instruction that he ever offered
Right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount!

It’s situated in a section where Jesus takes traditional teachings
from the Torah
And then reinterprets them, usually *raising* the requirements
around them

“You have heard it said...
Don’t make a false solemn pledge, but follow through on what you
have pledged to the Lord...
BUT I say to you...don’t pledge AT ALL!
Not by the heavens...
Not by the earth...
Not by Jerusalem...
Not by the hairs on your head...
Let your YES be YES, and your NO be NO...and that’s all!”

When I read the Bible, I’m struck by how big a deal this idea of
the solemn pledge was to ancient people
Maybe it’s just that we’ve just gotten so used to untruth
And to people NOT fulfilling their commitments
That we just don’t treat a “yes” or “no” as sacred

But this topic gets a lot of time and attention in the Bible
In Matthew, Jesus is talking about a “solemn pledge”
Now, if you were to look over the whole of scripture for words in
this vein – “pledge”, “swear”, “take an oath”
You’d see there are three main contexts for these ideas

The first is when you swear to the truth of a statement
As in a court of law
You probably know the commandment
“Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex.
20:16) – in other words, don’t lie in court

Second, there’s the idea of putting something up as collateral in a
financial transaction¹

So someone might offer property in *pledge* for a loan

But by far the most IMPORTANT way this word shows up is
around promises that we make – or that God makes

Either TO DO something
Or NOT TO DO something
So this teaching is about our commitment

And what I’ve learned in studying this passage
It seems the problem Jesus is trying to address
Is people making promises they don’t intend to keep
While making it SOUND as though they do

People knew better than to invoke the name of God
That would be breaking the commandment about taking God’s
name in vain (Exodus 20:7)
So people would instead swear by heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem
Or even by the hair on their heads
(Given the transformation I’ve seen in my own hairline through the
years, I’d be reluctant to swear on that!)

The point here is: if you’re gonna commit, commit
And if you can’t, then don’t
Let your “yes” be “yes,” and your “no” be “no”

Now what this means in practice is two things:

1 - We need to be a lot more careful about what we say “yes” to
And

2 - Once we say “yes,” we should make every effort to carry out
what we’ve said we’ll do

4

I read a [great piece](#) this week in the New York Times

About how we react when people cancel social plans with us

Comedians have bits about how none of us really want to do the
things we commit to

And so when someone cancels, we’re secretly grateful and happy
“A free night! Yay!”

I mean, I feel that sometimes

When the pace of life is such that we get to Friday and are dead
tired, I get that

I also know that when I push through and do the thing, I’m grateful
for it

The point of the piece was to say, technology has made it so easy
and painless to cancel –

we can text and never have to look the person in the eye

The author says there’s a cost to that, though

Both in terms of our integrity – our “yes” isn’t sacred –

And because every time we do it, we’re saying “no” to an
opportunity to experience community

5

So how can we let our “yes” be “yes,” and our “no” be “no”?

Because I take for granted that all of us WANT to be people of
integrity

Who can be relied upon

Who will follow through

It all hinges on the care we put into deciding what deserves our
“yes” and what doesn’t
And then learning to exercise the sacred “no” without guilt

We have to begin with a recognition that each one of us is finite
Finite in time
Finite in energy
Finite in skills and attention and resources
We are human and therefore limited

Only God is infinite
Only God has unlimited capacity
All the rest of us have to make decisions about what gets a “yes”
and what gets a “no”

Sometimes we say “no” because we recognize that we just CAN’T
do it
That we have reached our limits
There are moments when the amount of relief we feel in saying
“no,” in letting go of something, just feels so good
Because we need margin, we need space and breathing room in
our lives

I mean, that’s the whole point of Sabbath, right?
That’s why the commandment exists – to put some space back in
your life
Sabbath is a day a week –
or if you can’t get a day, at least a few hours –
to say, “no” to everything except what nourishes our lives

I know,†There are times when all of us are at max
And we HAVE to be at max –
Mom or Dad is not well, for example
Or we have a kid who’s not well

Those are challenges we all face
But we can't live maxxed out like that forever

I know you don't want to disappoint people
But when we overcommit, it's often true that we also disappoint,
isn't it?

We're not present
Our heart's not in it
We're not offering our best work, our best selves

Sometimes saying "no" is the most faithful response
Because it allows us to guard our priorities
It allows us to guard our hearts
It allows us to maintain our integrity

And it opens up space to breathe in what God is doing all around
us

We just can't do that living the way most of us live right now

We need to get better at saying "no" for the sake of saying "yes"
to the life God has for us

This week, I just want you to practice letting your "yes" be "yes"
and your "no" be "no"

When someone asks you something: don't say "yes" immediately
Don't say "yes" unless you intend to follow through
Before you answer, pray on it
Ask God for wisdom

And when you have say “no,” don’t feel guilty
That’s sacred
Trust that’s it’s for the purpose of God’s greater “yes” over your
life

Because you are finite
You are limited
You are not God

“No” is sacred because it reminds us of that truth

Amen.

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¹ It should be noted that this is a different noun in Greek than the word used in Matthew 5:33. But it does illustrate a point about how we use this word in English....it’s about a commitment we make.