

The Art of Yes & No

Good to see you guys this morning. If you've got a bible, turn with me to **Mark 1**. We're going to **jump around** here a bit at the beginning, but we'll at least *start* there. If you're new around here, we are nearing the end of a teaching series called **Formation**. Essentially, each year, we spend some time talking about one habit or practice, that has the ability over the long haul to *form* us into the image of Jesus. This year, we're focusing specifically on the practice of *rest*.

And for a *lot* of this series, we've been doing our best to break down some of our **biggest barriers** to rest. Because as we've mentioned several times already, **the irony is that often, rest takes work. To participate in the type of rest that Jesus prescribes, we have to be willing to structure our lives in such a way that leads to rest.**

And today is **no different**. Today, I want us to talk a little bit about our *schedules*. Specifically, I want us to talk **about the tendency many of us have towards overcommitment, and the tendency others of us have towards what we might call under-commitment**. As I talk with people about their relationship with Jesus and their approach to rest, these are two patterns I see coming up frequently as regular obstacles. **Some of us don't consistently rest well because resting well requires managing our time in such a way that allows for time to rest.**

Sometimes, we stretch ourselves too thin by **saying "yes"** to far too many things, which leaves us little time for rest. But **other times**, we say "*no*" to most *everything* (bc we don't want to commit, don't want to tie ourselves down), leaving us nothing but **leisure** time. And while leisure and rest might sound similar, they aren't always the same. Leisure sometimes refers to what the book of Proverbs in the bible calls "**sloth**." *Sloth* is this state of existence where we have an aversion—an almost *allergic reaction*—to anything that requires time, effort or energy from us. And *rest* and *sloth* are *certainly* not the same thing.

So the goal for us as followers of Jesus is that we would learn to say "yes" often enough that we aren't marked by slothfulness, and that we would learn to say "no" often enough that we have margin in our lives to rest. So today I want to see if we can help get on the trajectory towards that balance. Make sense?

But as we do often, I want us to *start off* by looking at the **model of the life of Jesus**. I want us to observe how *he* approached opportunities and interruptions, and see what we can gather from him about how to set up *our* lives that way. So to kick things off, I want us to look briefly at a handful of different moments in the life of Jesus.

We're going to start off with **Mark 1**. Where we pick up the story, Jesus has just *kicked off* his public ministry, and it's *already* going *very well*. People, likely by the *hundreds*, are *mesmerized* by his teaching, they're following him from town to town, he's healing people left and right, which makes *more* people want to follow him. And all of that is what leads to what happens in this passage. Take a look with me, starting in v. 35:

[35] And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. [36] And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, [37] and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."

"Jesus," **the disciples say**, "you will be pleased to know that you are a very big deal right now. You're trending on Twitter, Fallon would love to book you on the show, your approvals are off the charts—things are going *great*, Jesus. In fact, a crowd is outside wanting to hear you speak right now. They want you to make an appearance. So let's get you out there and give the people what they want!" But take a look at how Jesus responds, v. 38:

[38] And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

Okay in case you missed it, that's how **Jesus says "no."** "No, that's what we're doing today. Let's go onto the next place, and do ministry *there* now. I've done all that needs to be done here." Jesus says *no* to this demand, this request of his time. And not only *that*—he says *no* to the request that everyone else is *convinced* he should say *yes* to. Interesting.

Let's look at **another passage**. Flip over with me a few pages to the right to **Mark 10**. In this one, some parents are bringing their kids to Jesus so they can meet Jesus and be around him. As they do, the disciples start to rebuke the parents, insisting that a busy guy like Jesus doesn't have time for children (children in that day weren't revered like they often are today—they were mostly seen as a nuisance). But as the disciples start to rebuke the parents for the interruption, here's what *Jesus* does, v. 14:

[14] But when Jesus saw it (the disciples shooing the kids away), he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."

In other words, Jesus says “yes” to *this* interruption. As everyone else insists that he should say “no,” he chooses to say yes.

Next one. Turn with me to the gospel of *Luke, chapter 12*. This time, we’re *later on* in Jesus’ ministry. But he’s still traveling from town to town, still healing people, still teaching about the kingdom of God, and gets yet *another* person needing his attention, wanting something from him. Take a look at v. 13:

[13] Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

This **man’s request** is to have Jesus *arbitrate* in some sort of financial dispute between him and his brother over an inheritance. Jesus’ response, v. 14:

[14] But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

In other words, **“no.”** “No, I will not be stopping what I’m doing to help you settle this matter between you and your brother. That’s not what I’m here to do, and so even though this may be very important to *you*, I will not be helping with this matter.” Jesus says *no* to a request of his time.

Let’s do one **last story**. This one back in the book of *Matthew, chapter 9*. In this story, Jesus has just been approached by some type of ruler (an official) to come and basically resurrect his deceased daughter. So Jesus is on a mission to go and help this guy. Not only is the family in desperation, but it’s the request of a **ruler—someone of particular importance** in a local government or synagogue. So from a worldly perspective, this is an *important* person making an *important* request. Jesus agrees and is on his way to go and see the man’s daughter. That’s where we pick it up, in v. 19:

[19] And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. [20] And behold (while he was on his way), a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, [21] for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” [22] Jesus turned, and seeing her—

Now, just real quickly, can you **imagine the impatience** if you are the ruler leading Jesus back to your daughter? Can you imagine how you would feel when Jesus stops to address some person in the crowd that has just sought him out? I personally would be thinking “Jesus, we’ve got bigger fish to fry here. We’ve got places to *be*. You’re not

understanding the *urgency* of my situation.” But that’s not *Jesus’* mentality at all. He stops, *welcomes* the interruption, turns and faces the woman, and (continuing in v. 22...)

he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”

That’s Jesus for “yes.” “Yes, I will heal you.” “Yes, I do have places to be, but *this* interaction matters to me *too*, and I’m not too important or too busy to be interrupted. Yes, I will indeed heal you.” And he does. So once again Jesus sometimes says yes, even when he’s in the middle of something, even when he’s on a schedule, and even when what he’s doing is, to some degree, time-sensitive.

So we’ll go ahead and **stop our tour** through the gospels there for today. Here’s all I want you to notice from all of that. We have all these different moments from Jesus’ life (and I probably could have showed you at least a dozen more like those), where Jesus is interrupted, or is presented with an opportunity, or is in demand, or is asked to do something. **In some scenarios he said yes, in others he said no. He doesn’t always say yes, and he doesn’t always say no. He seems to take each situation as its own unique scenario, and makes a call one way or the other.**

And I’ll add, there at least **doesn’t appear to be any obvious parameters** for the types of things he said yes to vs. no *to*. It wasn’t like he said no to some of those things because they were wrong or sinful. **For instance, teaching to crowds of people when they wanted him to was something Jesus did a lot, and yet in Mark 1 he says no to it. Going urgently to heal someone in need is something that Jesus does consistently, and yet at times he allows himself to be interrupted on the way.**

I bring all of this up, in part, because I think there are **two caricatures** people often have **of Jesus**. One is that he always said yes to everything. He always did whatever anyone asked him to do. That he was so *relationally driven* that anytime anyone needed him in any way, he would just drop everything he was doing and say yes to the interruption. And *another* caricature was Jesus was *task-oriented*. He was driven, resolute, robotic, and never had time for distractions or interruptions. His itinerary each day was packed, his schedule was locked in from eternity past, and he never diverged from any of that in the least.

And what makes those two caricatures interesting is that **those are also the two ends of the spectrum for most people I know**. We often read our own tendencies into Jesus’ life a little bit. Because when it comes to how most of *us* spend our time, we tend to gravitate towards one of those postures or the other. Some of us are *people-driven*. We’re relational, we’re go-with-the-flow. Our calendars are more like loose *suggestions*

or *possibilities*, and can be changed at any point for anything, whenever we feel like there's something we'd rather do. *Others* of us are more type-A, and *task-driven*. We have our calendar worked out down to the minute, and any meeting that goes a little long or any person who interrupts us feels like an inconvenience to us...and we usually let them know that. And what's even funnier to me is that, in God's great sense of humor, he often has these two types of people *marry* each other. Am I lying?

But what we see in the passage is that **neither of those** descriptions really **fit Jesus, do they?** His approach to his time doesn't really fall in either of those categories. On one hand, **he evidently had no problem saying "yes" at times to interruptions to his life. And at the same time, he did not feel like he always had to say yes to every request.** He evidently felt complete and total freedom to say "no, sorry, but that's just not what I'm here to do." Or, "no thanks, not now." **Jesus knew how to say yes and how to say no.**

And here's **how I think Jesus accomplished that** balance: **I think Jesus was completely secure in who the Father made him to be.** I say that, partly, because he is *Jesus*, after all. But I also say that because of verses like this one from **John 17:4—we'll put it on the screen.** For context, this is Jesus speaking to God the Father. He says:

I have brought you glory on earth [God] by finishing the work you gave me to do.

"The work **you gave me to do.**" **Not** the work you gave *everyone* to do. Not *all* the work that I could have possibly gotten done in my life. *Not* every possibility and every opportunity that came across my plate. Just the work that *you, God, gave me* to do. That's what brought God the Father *glory.*" *Because of the security* that Jesus had in who the Father made him to be, in the things that the Father gave *him* to do, Jesus could say *yes*, and Jesus could say *no*. He could say, "wow, yeah, I would *love* to be a part of that." And he could say "no thanks actually, I'm good. That sounds like a great opportunity, but that's just not what I'm here to do."

So can I just ask, how many of **us would love to feel that type of freedom** in regards to how we use our time? How many of us would love to feel like we can say "yes" to interruptions when they're good, worthwhile interruptions; *and* say "no" to things, even when they're incredible opportunities?

I for one would love some help with both of those things. Because here's what I know: **if I could develop that same** amount of clarity and discernment in how I use my time—that would be a *huge step* towards me experiencing the freedom to *rest* on a regular basis. If I had some help discerning what *to* do and *not* to do, I would gain *back* so much time to

sit and just *be* with the Father on a more regular basis. And I think that's probably true for all of us: **if we could learn the art of saying yes and no, it would create all kinds of healthy *margin* in our lives for rest and renewing our hearts on the things that matter.** Does that sound *desirable* to you?

Okay. So this morning, I want to see if I can get all of us at least **pointed in that direction**, practically speaking. **How can we healthily discern when to say yes, and when to say no to things in our life?** Now, real quickly: I'm assuming in the rest of this teaching that the things we're considering saying yes or no to are *morally neutral* things, okay? Obviously the *first* place we should always go is *Scripture*, right? If the question is "should I sleep with my boyfriend" or "should I murder someone," you don't need any of the filters I'm about to list out.

But **assuming** that we're talking about things that are morally *neutral*—not laid out clearly one way or the other in the bible, neither right *nor* wrong—in those situations, I've got **four filters** to run things through, *from* the Scriptures, that help us make that call. Four practical filters to help you discern when to say yes and when to say *no*. If you like taking notes, you might want to jot these down. The *first* filter is...

1. Prayer

Likely no surprises on that one, but place #1 you should always go when deciding whether to say yes or *no* to something is right to the Father for wisdom. Take a look with me at **Philippians 1**, v. 9-10 on the screen:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ...

Paul here, speaking from a **second-person perspective**, makes it clear that *prayer* is where we gain the ability to "discern what is best." Prayer is where we gain wisdom for *all* areas of life, and certainly in deciding what to say yes to, and what to say *no* to. To make those decisions well, sometimes we need a word from God himself on what is *best* for us to do and not do. So that's where we start. By asking him.

To do this well, you may need to develop a habit of **not always saying yes or no in the moment**. You might need to learn to start saying things like "hey, thanks so much for letting me know about that opportunity. Do you mind if I take a little time to pray through and discern if that's something I can do?" But then—and this is really important—*actually* pray through it. So just use that as a Jesus-y way to ghost people. Actually pray through

it, and then *you* initiate getting back to them with your answer. Don't make them chase you down and wonder whether you actually prayed through it or not. Actually follow through in praying about it and asking God for discernment.

Now, there are **things you don't need to do this with.** Don't Jesus juke people when it's really an easy answer. *If you're leaving work and walking to your car, and your coworker asks if you can help them carry something to their car that is parked right by yours, don't go "I really need to spend some time praying about whether or not to take this opportunity." Help them carry the thing. If someone has an emergency and needs you to watch their kids for a night, don't go "I just really need to pray through if I'm being called to do that or not."* Some things don't require prayer and deliberation. But a lot of things do. Especially *bigger commitments in our lives. And don't be afraid to do just that.* Especially when it is a bigger commitment, or recurring commitment, or something that is going to consume a good bit of your time on a regular basis, take the time required to pray through what is best. We always start with *prayer.*

Second, and this one will *also* **come as no surprise** if you've been around City Church for very long, we should also employ the help of...

2. Community

Take a look at **Proverbs 11:14** with me:

Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

For you to know, **passages like that one** are a dime a dozen in the book of Proverbs. Over and over and over again it makes the point that when it comes to decision-making, when it comes to saying *yes* to things and *no* to things—when it comes to any type of planning—here's what you need for success: you need *other people speaking into* the situation. Specifically, you need other people that know *Jesus* and know *you* speaking into the situation. That's how you can guarantee wisdom in what you do. When you and I try to make those decisions all by ourselves, we're going to miss things at times. In the words of Proverbs, sooner or later, we are going to "fall." We're going to not think things through. We're going to be blind to certain factors in the decision. *But* when we make those decisions in the context of community—with the help of an "abundance of counselors"—we have a much better shot at getting it right. **More Spirit-filled people equals more collective wisdom.**

So **as we're taking that time to pray through** whether to say yes or no to a decision or an opportunity or a commitment, include in that process *presenting it to others* and having *them* pray through it too. Having them *speak into* it too. Whatever that decision is—whether it's a new job or a new business opportunity or a new relationship. Whatever it is, if it involves your *time* or your *effort*, develop a habit of presenting it before other followers of Jesus. And give them the freedom to tell you what they honestly think about it. In *community*, there is *wisdom* to be had. Next, consider your...

3. Season

Ecclesiastes 3:1: For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.

I'm going to say **something that is really tough** for a lot of us to hear, especially those of us that love new opportunities: **there are things that are great to do, that may even be great for you to do—and yet right now just isn't the season for you to do them.** There may be things that eventually you can and will say yes to—but you absolutely *shouldn't* say yes to right now. **For example, if you are overdrawing your bank account, now may not be the time for that cross-country road trip you've been thinking about going on with your friends. If things are already pretty rocky in your marriage, now might not be the time to take that awesome promotion where you will be working 70+ hours a week. If your life is currently chaotic and your priorities are all out of sorts, now may not be the time to start trying to have a kid (or a second or third kid). Is this making sense? There may be things that are great to do, that at some point you should do—and yet right now is not the season for them.**

Now, **at the same time**, you *might* be in a season right now where you can **say "yes"** to some things that you otherwise *couldn't* or *shouldn't* say yes to. **Maybe you just took the slightly more demanding, higher paying job, because it was a good season for it. So right now you don't have a ton of free time, but you do have a lot of disposable income. That might mean right now is a great time to go over and beyond in your generosity to other people. Maybe you even have the ability to be generous to the same person on a ongoing basis, to meet an ongoing need they have. Maybe your job has very flexible hours because of, I don't know, a global pandemic or something (hypothetically); and so you actually have a lot of margin in your schedule to spend intentionally discipling others several days a week. Maybe you're a college student only taking nine credit hours, and you have a ton of free time to serve people or help people in ways that take a good bit of time.**

A big part of saying *yes* and *no* has to do with discerning the *season* that you're in, discerning what that *allows* you to *do*, and what it likely *prevents* you from doing. So consider the *season*. Lastly, you should consider your...

4. Calling

Okay, first off, **a confession**: I generally really *hate* it when Christians use the word *calling*. I know that's very un-Christian of me. But I don't generally like it. Some of it is what I've mentioned to you guys before, that sometimes I think Christians use that word to simplify justify doing whatever it is they *want* to do, so that no one can challenge them on it. But **that said**, at the same time, I *do think* there is a place for considering our *calling* in the things we say yes and say no to on a regular basis. And here's what *I mean* by that: there are things that God, through the Spirit, has equipped you to do and given you opportunity to do, and then there are things that he has *not* really equipped you to do.

I'll give you **one for me**. I, in general, am not great at one-on-one pastoral counseling. My *inclination*, whenever someone comes to me with a problem they're having in that setting is to go "okay—you should do this and this and this, and then you'll be good to go. You're fixed." My brain defaults to problem-solving mode. Which is not always a bad thing. But generally, when a person comes to you for pastoral counseling, they don't want you to fix them like a project. They *first* need someone to listen. When someone is hurting, *often*, what they need first is for you to empathize. To understand and identify with what they are experiencing, and maybe *then*, once that has been done, start working towards a solution. That often requires a little more than just rattling off solutions. Does that make sense?

Now, **some of me being bad at** one-on-one counseling is **sinful tendencies** in me that I can repent of and grow in. It's me being *impatient* or *insensitive* or whatever it might be. But at the same time, some of it is just how I'm *wired*. Even if I were to repent of *all* of those things thoroughly, it still may not make sense for me to fill up large portions of my day with one-on-one pastoral counseling. I could spend three hours a day every day on one-on-one counseling and still only be moderately helpful in that context. Whereas Jeff or Marcus, two of our other pastors, could meet with *three* people in those same three hours, and be *immensely* helpful to *all* of them, because they *are* wired in that way. The *calling* on our lives is just *different* in that way. Does that make sense?

Okay, here's my point with that: **some of us are currently spending a lot of time on things that are not our calling**. Maybe it's something we *enjoy* doing, maybe it's something we *wish* was our calling, but it's not what God has called us to do. At least not right now. And hear me say, "that is *okay*. It's *okay* for something to not be your calling."

That is why being a part of the body of believers we call the Church is so *incredible*. For example, look with me at [Romans 12, v. 3-5](#):

[3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

He goes on to list out several **different “functions”** among a community of followers of Jesus. We could also call those *callings*. But his point is that each one should do what they’re *called* to do, and do their best to *not* spend large amounts of time doing things they *aren’t* called to do. And over in 1 Corinthians¹ it gives us an additional insight that I think is even more helpful: that **we shouldn’t waste time comparing and contrasting our calling to other people’s calling**. We shouldn’t look at others and go “I wish I had their gifting, or their skillset—because it’s way better.” Instead, **we should do what we’re called to do and let others do what they’re called to**. *Calling* matters when it comes to what we say yes to, and what we say no to.

So **how do we know** what we are *called* to do? Well this past summer, during our *Work* series, we said that our calling is often the intersection of our *passions, abilities, and the opportunities and needs* around us.² So there may be some things that we are *passionate* about, but aren’t our calling. There might be other things we have the *ability* to do, but *also* aren’t our calling. There might be other things I see a *need* for someone to do, and yet still aren’t my calling. Some of us have a hard time saying *no* to things, because we treat every passion, ability, and opportunity like it is a *calling*, and it may not be.

Now **one last clarification** on this one before we close out. My point isn’t that you should *never* do *anything* outside of your calling. You don’t get to tell your roommate that you can’t help them move because lifting heavy things isn’t your calling. You don’t get to tell your wife that you can’t help her with a project because it’s not within your giftset. **Calling isn’t meant to be used as a cop-out to not serve or not love people**. But again, when it comes to morally neutral things—opportunities presented to you that you can choose to take or not take—I think it’s wise to not spend large, ongoing amounts of time on things that God has not called you to do, within reason. Within reason. Does that make sense?

¹ All of 1 Corinthians 12, but specifically v. 21-26.

² You can listen to this complete teaching [here](#).

So **there we have four filters** to run things through when we are considering what to say yes or no to: *prayer*, *community*, *season*, and *calling*. Running things through those filters should help us in our desire to say yes to the right things, and say no to the wrong things for us. It's not a catch-all, it's not a perfect system, but together they do make up some sources of wisdom, if we're willing to pursue them.

In the **Practice Guide this week**, there is a practice called a *Calendar Audit*. Essentially it walks you through examining your schedule and time, to see whether your calendar matches your priorities. I won't give you all the details here, because it goes into great detail in the PDF. But the hope is that this can be a practical next step for us in making the best use of our time and creating a healthy margin of work and rest in our lives.

But **as we close**, I just want to **circle back around** to where we started. Remember we said that the reason Jesus was able to say yes and say no was because he walked in a security about the "...*work the Father gave him to do.*" That's what made it all possible for him. He was secure in who the Father made him to be, and what the Father called him to do—which meant he did not have to look for security or identity in dozens of other places or opportunities available to him.

If I could **venture a guess this morning**, it would be that **many of us in this room find ourselves saying yes and saying no to so many of the wrong things, because we don't feel like we have that sort of security.** And so in light of that, I just need you to hear me and the Scriptures say this morning that that kind of security is ready and available to you. In 2 Corinthians 5 it tells us that "he who knew no sin, *became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God.*" When God the Father looks *your way*, if you are in Christ, he sees the *righteousness* of Jesus. Which means practically, you are not *in need* of security. You do not have a *lack* validation. You are not *lacking* when it comes significance or value. And you don't need to search those things out by saying yes to every possible opportunity that comes your way. When it comes to all of that, you are already set. The cross and empty tomb of Jesus made sure of that.

So **this week**, when you are faced with that opportunity to say yes or say no, and you think to yourself "but if I say no, I won't be..." you can just stop right there. If you say no, you will still be full and complete and righteous and holy in the eyes of God. This week, when you think to yourself, "but if I say yes to that, I might miss out on..." you can stop right there. If you miss out on a later opportunity, you will still be full and complete in the righteousness of Jesus. You have what you need—now you are free in Jesus to say yes, and free to say no. Let's pray.