

When God Says No

2 Samuel 7:1-9; 16-18

A couple celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary with an elaborate party. When the festivities were over, the woman turned to her husband and said, "John, you know we've been miserable for fifty years. We've fought every day, disagreed on nearly everything.

We can't go on like this, and I am praying God will put us out of our misery. I've made a commitment to pray every day God will just take one of us home. And when God answers my prayer, I'm going to live with my sister in Grand Rapids!"

Often we think we know exactly what God ought to say to us. But sometimes the answer is No. In today's Scripture, David had three big No's from God. He got a No about his plans, a No about his purpose in life, and even a No about the practice of his faith.

God said No to David's plans. After the ark of the covenant was restored to Jerusalem and peace abounded, King David wanted to build God a house, a Temple. The king lived in a fine house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant, symbolizing God's Presence, was still housed in a tent.

David felt that God would want to rectify that situation and David – being the most powerful ruler in the world of his day, the undisputed master from Egypt to the Euphrates, the king of Judah, Israel, Jerusalem, Ammon, the Canaanite states and the chief of Moab – was just the one to do it.

At first, Nathan the prophet agreed, but later told David God had said No. David can't build me a house, said God. I never asked for a house in the past, and I don't want one now. So God said No to David's plans. No's are hard to take, but they are not always the last word.

In Somerset Maugham's story, "The Verger," Mr. Foreman had always wanted to be the caretaker of St. Peter's Anglican Church in England. But he could not read or write and because of that he loses his job and is forced to make a living another way. He opens a tobacco shop, then several shops. He becomes rich and successful.

His banker, learning the businessman's secret exclaims, "You mean to say you've built this business and amassed this fortune without being able to read or write? Man, what would you be now if you'd be able to read and write?" Mr. Foreman smiles knowingly and replies, "I'd be the caretaker of St. Peter's Church."

No is not always the last word, and not every No is from God. Life sometimes hands us setbacks simply because we're human and live in a fallen world. God has chosen to allow other forces to be at work for a time. Evil is at work. Free choice is at work. An orderly universe means that the same water that quenches thirst drowns people.

Not everything that happens in this life is God's will. Not every crushed dream is willfully crushed by God. And if we trust, the Lord God will bring some good for someone out of every calamity.

But there are times when God says No. For reasons we cannot see, God doesn't ratify our plans. And when this happens, God says to us as he did to David.

Second, **God said No to David's purpose in life.** David had expected to be a shepherd, but God said: No, I need you to be a prince. Undoubtedly David didn't understand that at the time.

He was secure in his father Jesse's house in Bethlehem. His was with his mother, six brothers and two sisters. His life seemed set. He was a shepherd and a shepherd he'd remain. That was his purpose in life. But everything changed when God said No.

Sometimes things change, of course, because times change. There was a time when an appropriate gift for your wife was an apron, but not today. Aprons are out; physical fitness is in. And an appropriate gift today is a membership to a fitness gym.

You know, I had an appointment with my cardiologist this week. He said that everything seemed fine, but that I should take up jogging because it could add years to my life. And he's right. I feel ten years older just thinking about it.

Some things change just because things change, but some things change because God says No.

Third, **God said No to David about the practice of his faith.** David expected to practice his faith in God by building a magnificent Temple. He was prepared to spare no effort expense to create a structure looming to the skies for God's glory. He wanted to build God a house. But God said, No David, I'll build you a house, a dynasty, an everlasting throne.

In our religious life, we want to practice worship our way. We like to enjoy our Sunday services, our discipleship classes and circles, our close church friends - and stop there. But God says No. You can't stop there. You must reach out. Bring others into the church and to the faith.

Everyone deserves to know that they are loved by God. Everyone should be invited to the Christian Faith. And those outside the church will never know Christ unless Christians tell the story of Christ with their words and their lives. It's costly to practice our faith God's way, to submit to God's plan. But when we do, we see like David, God says No to our way because God has a better way.

Three times in today's text God said No to David. Then David went into the tent of worship, the No's still ringing in his ears. What did the king say? He could have stood defiantly before God and complained mightily.

But David didn't complain. Rather, he PRAISED. He sat before the Lord and cried, *"Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"* David could still believe and praise God in the face of God's No because he had learned that, hidden in every "no" of God is God's graceful "yes."

No, David, I won't approve your plans, but Yes, I'll give you power to accept mine.
No, David, you cannot be a shepherd, but Yes, I'll make you a king.
No, David, you cannot build me a house, but Yes, I'll build you a house, a monarchy, spiritual and eternal. And one day, my very son will rule on that spiritual everlasting throne.

Which is God's great ultimate YES to all humanity.