

# Loving Well Through Saying No

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By Kathy King

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What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of telling someone no? Do you think it is selfish? Are you concerned about hurting another's feelings or disappointing him or her? Are you worried that the person will get mad? Instead of saying no, do you think, "I should be able to do this... I have the time.... So and so does it..." The list goes on and on.

Saying no is not an easy thing to do. In fact, it can be quite challenging. We live in a culture where we're expected to be able to do "just one more thing" and squeeze something else into our frantic, busy schedules. At times we do not say no to others when they offend us because we just want to "give the benefit of the doubt" and "extend grace." (While there is nothing wrong with either giving the benefit of the doubt, or grace, there is also a time to say no.) We often say yes to someone or something before we even check our heart motivation about it. If we were to ask ourselves, "Why am I saying yes instead of saying no?" we would often come up with people-pleasing motivations: We don't want to disappoint. We don't want to seem selfish. We don't want to offend. The other person is our focus, which is not necessarily a bad thing unless that person is our *primary* motivation. That person, like you and me, is a sinner. Our primary motivation in anything we do should be pleasing the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9). Our Ultimate acceptance comes from Him. When we try to find acceptance in other things (e.g. people, schedules, to-do lists, etc.), we fear the outcome when we say no because our worth, identity, or value becomes threatened. We live in a pattern of functioning that most of us do not even recognize. We may have false beliefs attached to our "no's" that never allow us to say it, even when we should. Beliefs like that may be true, but they are not true 100% of the time. For example, we may think, "If I say no, I am being selfish." Is it being selfish if a person has the flu and does not go to work? No. It is being a steward of rest and health. Though selfishness is part of our sinful nature, stewardship is part of our new nature.

When we think of loving others, we often think that loving well means saying, yes. Loving well, however, means that there are times we must say no. For example, if you are a parent or have worked with children, you know that you cannot say yes to them all of the time. There are times for character development (e.g. to share, learn), times for protection (e.g. from hot stoves, the street), and times for teaching right from wrong. These are times of saying no. The same principles apply as adults. We grow up, but the same sinful nature lives within us. There are times to help teach others about their character, times for protection, and times for teaching. (We also need to hear no from others.)

From an eternal, ultimate, perspective, we know that God is love. God tells us no, and His no is loving. Have you ever thought that the most loving no in all of Scripture was when God told Jesus, His beloved Son, no on our behalf? When Scripture notes Christ's words on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34), God was silent. There was no response. He had to say no to His Son so that Christ would become the sacrifice on our behalf. That is love! It is a love that is hard to understand.

We may have to ask the Lord to reveal our motives for saying yes all of the time. Often in our yes we have selfish motives, when in fact saying no is what will please the Lord. If we say no when there is a pattern of someone wronging us, we may help someone see his or her sin instead of condoning it. When we say no to another thing on our packed, busy schedule, we can say yes to something else, whether rest, free time to spend with a friend or loved one, or more time with the Lord. Loving the Lord and others well means that there are times in our lives when we must say no.