

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*When God Says No – Part Two.*"

Go ahead and open your Bibles to **2 Corinthians 11**.

We have been in a series called, "*Pursuing Wisdom.*"

When we started the series I told you that wisdom is not:

- Knowing the future
- Or knowing why God is or isn't doing certain things.

Instead, part of wisdom is being able to handle trials well.

One of the unique trials we experience is hearing no when we pray. I don't think it's too much to say that when God doesn't answer our prayers the way we want:

- It can be very difficult.
- It can cause hurt and confusion

And it takes wisdom to respond well.

So last week we started looking at examples of hearing no so we could learn from them.

Let me briefly review....

God might say no (lesson 1) because we're being selfish.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

James says we might hear no when we pray just to have our desires and passions satisfied.

The next lesson...

God might say no (lesson 2) because it's not His will.

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL he hears us.

Sometimes we are going to hear no without necessarily asking selfishly, it simply isn't God's will for reasons that we might never understand.

The next lesson...

God might say no (lesson 3) because sin has consequences.

Last week we looked at 2 examples of godly men who heard no because of sins they committed. In other words, hearing no was part of their discipline.

Anyone remember the examples?

- Moses struck the rock and was unable to enter the promised land. He pleaded with God to let him go, but God still said no.
- David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah murdered. God said the child Bathsheba was pregnant with was going to die. For 7 days David fasted and prayed for the child to live, but the child still died.

The next lesson...

God might say no (lesson 4) because of the other person.

Last week we read about some very godly men praying for others:

- Jeremiah
- Moses
- Samuel
- Noah
- Daniel
- Job

All these men heard no, but it had nothing to do with them. It had everything to do with the people they were praying for.

In other words, sometimes God says no and it has nothing to do with us. It has everything to do with the people we are praying for.

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Now the new lesson for this morning...

God might say no (lesson 5) because He knows what's best for us.

Look at **2 Corinthians 11:23**.

These first few verses are not about God saying no. Instead, they set up the verses about God saying no.

2 Corinthians 11:23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a

sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

When I read these verses I think, *“How could one man suffer so much?”*

Second only to Job, Paul’s name could almost be synonymous with suffering.

Here’s my point in having you read this...

When you have suffered as much as Paul, you don’t pray about suffering unless it’s very serious. I’m not condemning anyone who has asked for prayer for a headache, or heartburn, or a stubbed toe, but I’m guessing Paul didn’t ask for prayer for these things.

Keep this in mind and turn to the next chapter.

Here’s the context for these verses...

Paul had one of the most unique experiences in all of human history. He took a trip to heaven!

It was so dramatic, so as not to sound prideful in talking about it, he talked about it in the 3rd person as though it happened to someone else. This can make it sound confusing, but Paul is talking about what happened to him.

With that in mind look at verse 2...

2 Corinthians 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

He didn’t seem to know whether he went physically in his body, or spiritually like an out of body experience.

2 Corinthians 12:3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

The words **that cannot be told, which man may not utter** destroy all the books about supposedly going to heaven. If Paul – the godliest man in the Church Age – couldn’t talk about what he saw, what are the chances these other people can?

Since this was such a great experience, regardless of how wonderful Paul was, he was still human, cloaked in flesh, and susceptible to temptation. As a result, he could become proud. That’s not my opinion. That’s exactly what he goes on to say.

To prevent that from happening, look at verse 7 to see what God did...

2 Corinthians 12:7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

There is much speculation about what this thorn was. I tend to think we don't know, and it's good that we don't know, and here's why:

- If the thorn was physical, then the person with an emotional problem wouldn't find any application in this
- If the thorn was spiritual, then the person with a mental problem wouldn't find any application in this
- If the thorn was mental, then the person with a physical problem wouldn't find any application in this

But the way it's written allows me to say this to you...

Whatever your thorn is:

- Whether it's physical
- Whether it's emotional
- Whether it's mental
- Whether it spiritual
- Whether it's related to:
 - Your job
 - Your marriage
 - Your family
 - Your children
 - Your parents
 - Your finances

This account has application for you.

Look at verse 8...

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

Paul was accustomed to suffering. Again I doubt he prayed about anything unless it was serious. Let me get you to notice 2 words in **verse 8**:

1. First, notice the word **pleaded**. It doesn't say Paul prayed about this. It says he **pleaded** with God about this.
2. Second, notice the word **three**. It doesn't say Paul prayed about this 1 time. It says he prayed about it 3 times.

It must have been excruciating. I can't even imagine.

Now again, if I was unfamiliar with this account, here's what I would think...

1. First, Paul has already suffered so much. Give the man a break. Take away this affliction he's dealing with that is so terrible he has to plead about it 3 times.
2. Second, as far as I can tell, Paul didn't do anything to deserve this. The text gives us no indication this is discipline for sin. So of course God's going to take it away from him.
3. Third, Paul is probably the greatest man in the Church Age. God must love him tremendously and be blessed by all he has done for Him. Of course God would want to do something for Paul in return.
4. Fourth, do you remember last week when we were talking about Moses and David? I said if there's anyone in the Old Testament I would expect to have their prayers answered, it would be these 2 men. Well, if there's anyone in the New Testament I would expect to have his prayers answered, it would be Paul. When you pray and people are raised from the dead, you know you're a prayer warrior. So when Paul prays, he hears yes.

But look at **verse 9** to see what God said...

2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **10** For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When I was growing up, sometimes I heard no from my parents when I asked for things. Often it was for one of the reasons we have discussed:

- I was asking for selfish reasons.
- Or it wasn't my parents' will for me
- Or my sin had consequences: I had done something wrong so they said no

There is another reason my parents would say no, which seems to be the reason God told Paul no: they knew it was best:

- My parents told me no, because they knew that was best for me
- God told Paul no because He knew that was best for Him

But there is one major difference between my parents telling me no and God telling Paul no...versus God telling us no, and that difference is finding out why.

Here's what I mean:

- When my parents told me no, they usually said, "The answer is no, because..."
- When God told Paul no, He also told him why.

But we don't get to find out why. God doesn't say, "The answer is no, because..."

And isn't it much more difficult because we don't get to know why?

How many times have we prayed, not gotten what we wanted, and said:

- Why not God?
- Why wouldn't You want this?
- It seems like this is best?

Since we don't get to find out why the answer is no, what are we forced to do?

Trust God knows what is best and walk by faith!

Habakkuk 2:4 The just shall live by faith.

There's a reason it says this:

- We really do have to walk, or live, by faith.
- The Christian life is a life of faith.

Not sure there are many more applicable times in life than when we hear no.

Now I want you to notice something about this account that is very encouraging...

God told Paul no, but it was for Paul's best.

Many wonderful things happened to him because God said no:

- **7 So TO KEEP ME FROM BECOMING CONCEITED because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, TO KEEP ME FROM BECOMING CONCEITED.** – Twice Paul said the thorn would keep him humble.
- **9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** – So God's power would be shown in his life. The power of Christ would be manifested versus his own power.
- **10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.** – The thorn would cause him to be weak, which is to say not dependent on himself, which would actually make him strong, because then he would depend on God. This is one of those paradoxical statements in Scripture:
 - When we are weak and dependent on God, we are actually strong.
 - When we are strong and dependent on ourselves, we are weak.

And when God tells us no, we want to remember that it is for our best.

On this side of heaven, I'm sure we can't see all the reasons, or maybe even any of the reasons, why it's best, but we can trust this is the case...

Romans 8:28 We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Which basically means when we don't get what we want it's still for our best.

And the next lesson to learn about God saying no...

God might say no (lesson 6) without being displeased.

Go ahead and turn your Bibles to **2 Samuel 7**.

2 Samuel 7:1 Now when the king (this is David) lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, 2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." 3 And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you."

David spent years living in caves when he was on the run from Saul. In chapter 5 he built his palace, and in chapter 6 he brought the ark into Jerusalem. But he was still discontent because while he lived in luxury, God didn't. So David wanted to build God a temple.

This reveals part of the reason David was the Man after God's Own Heart.

David consulted with Nathan the prophet who told him it sounded like a good idea, but look at verse four...

2 Samuel 7:4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. 7 In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'"

God said no, but let me ask you a question...

Was God displeased with David or his request?

We know he wasn't for two reasons...

First, David was asking for:

- Something good
- Something God wanted...

We know that, because God had David's son, Solomon, build the temple in his place.

Second, God was so pleased with David's request He gave him many wonderful things in return.

This teaches us an important lesson...

Sometimes God says no, but it doesn't mean that He's displeased with us or our request. In fact, like in David's case, He could be completely pleased.

But for reasons we don't understand, as we already talked about, it simply isn't his will.

Let me get you to imagine some situations that reveal why this is so important...

- You pray for someone's salvation but they don't get saved
- You pray for someone's repentance – maybe even a child's repentance – but they don't repent
- You pray for someone's sickness – maybe pray for your own sickness – but there is no improvement in health
- You pray for a spouse, but you're still single
- You pray to have a child, but you can't pregnant
- You pray about a certain ministry...
- You pray about a job situation...
- You pray about your finances...

The list can go on and on with the different things we pray for...but the answer is no.

What are we tempted to think?

- God is displeased with me
- God is displeased with my request

If this happens, go back to this account with David.

The wonderful encouragement for us is when God says no, it doesn't mean he's displeased with us or our request.

He could be very pleased.

Our last lesson...

God might say no (lesson 7) and we shouldn't pout.

Let me show you something interesting that happened with David that serves as a good example for us. Go ahead and turn two books to the right, past 1 and 2 Kings to **1 Chronicles 29**.

These verses are about David accumulating the material for the temple. Look at verse 1...

1 Chronicles 29: 1 And David the king said to all the assembly, "Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great, for the palace will not be for man but for the Lord God. 2 So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones

and marble. 3 Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: 4 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, 5 and for all the work to be done by craftsmen, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the Lord?”

God told David he couldn't build the temple, but David did everything he could to set up Solomon for success. He stopped short only of actually building the temple himself.

David gave considerably of his own wealth for the building of the temple. Then he asked the people how many of them were willing to give too.

So think about this...

When God told David no, what could David have done?

He could've pouted!

He could have said:

- *Why not?*
- *What's wrong with me?*
- *Am I not good enough?*
- *It's not fair.*

Instead, it's like David said, *“I can't understand the reason, but it's what God wants and I trust Him, so I will continue serving him faithfully.”*

I think this lesson is important, because:

- None of us like hearing no...child and adult alike.
- It is one of our least favorite words.
- When we hear it, it is tempting to get upset or pout.

But instead we should follow David's example and keep serving the Lord faithfully.

F.B. Meyer said, *“If you cannot have what you hoped, do not sit down in despair and allow the energies of your life to run to waste; but arise, and gird yourself to help others to achieve. If you may not build, you may gather materials for him that shall. If you may not go down the mine, you can hold the ropes.”*

In other words, if God says no, look for other ways to serve Him and others.

Let me conclude, not just this sermon, but this whole discussion of God saying no with my favorite account of God saying no.

Turn to **Matthew 26**...

Matthew 26:39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” **40** And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? **41** Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” **42** Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” **43** And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. **44** So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.

Three times Jesus prayed for the same thing.

This looks odd, doesn't it? Jesus praying for something, being told no, praying about it again:

- It gives the impression that Jesus didn't know if His prayer would be answered.
- And it gives the impression that the Father wouldn't hear His prayer.

Let me tell you very clearly that there was no question in Jesus's mind that he was going to die. On at least 3 different occasions that are recorded, which tells us there were probably other occasions that were not recorded, He told the disciples is going to die. Here's just one example...

Luke 9:22 “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

That's pretty clear isn't it?

So it begs the question, why did he pray this...and why 3 times?

Let me get you to notice something interesting about this prayer session...

Whenever Jesus went off alone to pray like this, unless I'm missing something, He went far enough away from the disciples that we have no record of what he prayed.

Yet during this prayer session:

- He brought these 3 disciples close enough to him that they could hear what he prayed and record it for us in Scripture.
- He kept coming back to wake them up, not just to get them to pray, but it almost seems like He wanted to make sure they heard what he was praying.

This was a very important prayer session, not just because it strengthened Christ for what he was about to endure, but because of what God saying no to Jesus reveals to us about being saved...

In **verse 39**, toward the middle of the verse, look at the words **if it be possible, let this cup pass from me**.

Why did Jesus pray the same thing 3 times?

Not because he was trying to avoid going to the cross. But so we can know the only way we can be saved was for him to go **TO THE CROSS**.

We could easily ask, “Could I be saved by...” and then fill in the blank:

- *By being good enough*
- *By going to church enough*
- *By praying enough*
- *By reading the Bible enough*

Jesus’ prayer lets us know the answer is no.

Have you ever thought about this question...

What if God said yes to Jesus’ prayer?

What if God said, “*I love My Son so much I don’t want Him:*

- *To have to die*
- *To have to suffer*
- *To have to go through this agonizing excruciating death*

If God said yes to Jesus, we wouldn’t be saved. He would be saying no to us.

So God said no to His, so He could say yes to us. Because he loves you and me so much...

Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who LOVED US. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let me close with this...

If you say yes to what Jesus did for you, which is to say you confess your sin, repent of it, acknowledge that you need Jesus’s sacrifice, then God says yes to you.

But if you say no to what Jesus did for you, which is to say you will not confess your sin, you will not repent of it, you will not acknowledge Jesus’ sacrifice, then God says no to you.

Let’s pray.