Pastor Richard Allen Farmer

The Crossroads Church

5587 Redan Road

Stone Mountain, GA 30088

770-469-9069

When God Says “No”

Text: Acts 16:6-7

**Intro**

Reynolds Lloyd English, Sr. was my maternal grandfather. I LOVED him... and he LOVED me. When I was a young twenty something, not too long out of college, I applied for, and received, a green American Express card. I ran the bill up and, in those days, you could not spread the payments out as you can now. I went to Reynolds Lloyd English, Sr., whom we called Pop, and asked him to lend me $2,000 so I could pay this Amex bill. He did so and I repaid the no-interest loan over the next ten months. A year later I, not having learned my lesson, ran the Amex card up again. I went to Pop. He refused me and said, “This time I’m going to say ‘no’ because if I bail you out again, you’ll never learn”. I later called that “the kindest ‘no’ I ever received”. However, at the time it really hurt this grandson. P.S.: I now carry the American Express Green, Gold and Platinum cards and am in control of my spending. :-)

**Transition**

Imagine hearing a “no”, not from your beloved grandfather but from your Heavenly Father.

A paraphrase of verse 6 as it might have been prayed by Paul: “Father God, thank you for this preaching ministry You have given me. I have added your servant Timothy to our team, and we want to preach Jesus the Christ, in Asia.”

Response by God, through the Holy Spirit: NO!

No? I thought God was *obligated* to grant us the desires of our hearts. I thought this was especially true if our desires were not material. Paul, Silas, and Timothy are not asking for new clothes or a new residence or a new mode of transport. They were desiring a preaching opportunity. Didn’t the Psalter say, in Psalm 37:4,

*Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart??*

How could God say “no” to these preachers who are pure in their motivation and their desire? Maybe their geographic location wish was improper. After their desire to go to Asia is rejected, they tried to go to Bithynia and again are prohibited.

I do not know the form the prohibition took.

* Did God speak in an audible voice?
* Did Paul experience an inner compulsion to *not* go?
* Did Paul, Timothy and Silas see a vision?
* Did a prophet approach the team with a prophetic word? (Acts 11:27-28).
* Silas was a prophet (Acts 15:32). Did Silas hear from the Spirit and then tell the other two members of the team what the Spirit was saying?

Whatever form the “no” took, it was clear they were *not* to go. William Barclay suggests that maybe Paul was prohibited because of bad health[[1]](#footnote-2). Barclay says the passage starts in the third person (“they”, v. 6) and then switches, in verse 10, to “we” language. Luke is present. Barclay suggests that Paul called Luke to come and aid him, for Luke is a physician (Colossians 4:14). Illness? Heavenly vision? Prophetic word? Inner compulsion? The *form* of prohibition is not clearly stated, but the prohibition is! “NO! You cannot go to Asia and you cannot go to Bithynia”.

There was no question of whether or not this team would proclaim Jesus. The issue was *where?????*

The “no” was clear. Once the door was opened, however, the team did what they were called to. It is possible to spend inappropriate amounts of time staring at the door that is closed and mourning missed opportunities. What about the *open* door? Should we not focus on *that* and celebrate *that*?

From Streams in the Desert Daily Devotional, October 23

*“If God says ‘Yes’ to our prayer, dear heart,*

*And the sunlight is golden, the sky is blue,*

*While the smooth road beckons to me and you,*

*And the songbirds warble as on we go,*

*Pausing to gather the buds at our feet,*

*Stopping to drink of the streamlets we meet,*

*Happy, more happy, our journey will grow,*

*If God says ‘Yes’ to our prayer, dear heart.*

“*If God says ‘No’ to our prayer, dear heart,*

*And the clouds hang heavy and dull and gray;*

*If the rough rocks hinder and block the way,*

*While the sharp winds pierce us and sting with cold;*

*Ah, dear, there is home at the journey’s end,*

*And these are the trials the Father doth send*

*To draw us as sheep to His Heavenly fold,*

*If God says ‘No’ to our prayer, dear heart.*

**Illus*.***

From an article in the New York Times magazine (1990):

Secretary of State James Baker tells President George H.W. Bush what the sore spots are, what favors will be asked by Egyptian President Hasni Mubarak, what aid will be sought. ''Mubarak is going to ask for money,'' Baker warns Bush before the Egyptian President enters, ''and you're going to have to say no.''

''*You* tell him he can't have any money,'' the President replies. ''Turning down money is the dirty work. That's *your* job, Jimmy. I want to do the good stuff.''[[2]](#footnote-3)

Most of us want to be the people who both *hear* and *say* “yes” and would not choose the role of the one who must turn down the request for money or the applicant for a job or the tenant on the rental property. Most of us want to be the people who say “yes”, who permit rather than prohibit.

However, what do we do when even heaven seems to be saying “no”?

1. Remember that the Holy Spirit still speaks, leads and guides. Listen to the Spirit.

Cf. Romans 1:13; Acts 8:29; 11:12; 21:4

2. Remember that wherever you are, there God will use you as His servant.

The ministry team went to Troas, received a vision there and, ultimately, went to Macedonia. Luke writes,

*Now after he* (Paul) *had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia,* ***concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel*** *to them.*

When God says “no”, it is a “no” to something specific, but it is also a “yes” to something else, equally specific. God is not trying to shut us down. On the contrary, God wants to fire us up. God wants you and me to be His instruments, His hands, His feet, His representatives in this culture. A Matthew 25 people, whom we aim to be, keep looking for thirsty people to whom we may give water... and hungry people to whom we may give food... and naked people to whom we may give clothes. We look for opportunities to visit the prisoner. If at any of those intersections we hear a clear divine “no” we are assured that God has something else he wants us to do or someplace else He wants us to go. For our entire lives we will be navigating the divine “yesses and “no’s. This is basic spiritual decision-making. What would God have me do? When? Where? How? With whom? For how long?

Let me close by suggesting that God’s “no” is always for the good of the one to whom God says it. God says “no” to spare us from only God knows what.

When God says “no”, may our spirits say “yes” to whatever else God has for us! Amen.

1. William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles.* The Daily Study Bible Commentary. P. 131 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *The Fabulous Bush & Baker Boys*. New York Times Magazine. May 6, 1990. Section 6, p. 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)