

WHEN GOD SAYS NO

five ways to respond in faith
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Sometimes God says no.

It is just a fact. We think we're doing His will. We feel as though we responded in faith and said yes to His leading. We're certain that "this" thing...this pursuit...this project. And then we find out that what we thought would happen isn't really what God planned after all.

So now what?

It's in that moment we're left in a mess of emotions and filled with questions.

God, if you weren't planning on saying "yes" to this, then why did you have me go down this road in the first place?

Lord, if this is really a "no," then what's next?

How do I make a right decision when I thought I already made the right decision?

Where do I go from here?

The journey of faith will find you facing these questions at some point.

Maybe a relationship or circumstance that is not within your power to change, like when you're dating someone for a long time with the plan to get married and then {fill in the blank} happens.

Maybe when you apply to the colleges you thought you were guaranteed to get into, but you're rejected from all but one.

Maybe you've been working all summer to make the varsity basketball team only to pull your hamstring in pre-season practice.

Maybe you thought you'd have children after you buy your first house with your husband, but then you have trouble getting pregnant.

Maybe you're pursuing a dream, like writing a book, only to have your proposal turned down.

I could go on and on.

It doesn't matter if you're 12, 22 or 49 — your plans, or let's call them expectations, and God's purposes don't always line up.

What should you do? How do you get your heart and mind around the truth that God is sovereign — meaning the one in charge of your life — even when you don't like what's happening?

When the Advice Is Off

My guess is that when you've been in a situation where you felt you were getting a "NO" or "Not Now" from God, you've likely heard the advice from other Christians to "just trust God...He works all things out for

good...He's got good plans for you." And I'm pretty sure that those words didn't bring you much comfort, even if there is some Biblical truth to them.

**Pain is pain.
Disappointment is real.
Neither can be fixed with a Bible verse if the truth of God's character doesn't penetrate your soul.**

God never promised us that we'll have a life without disappointment or pain. Nor does He expect us to dismiss our feelings with Christian

cliches that take Bible verses out of context. Read closely Romans 8:28...

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Romans 8:28 NIV

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

What does God work for the good? All things!

And for whom? For those who love Him and have been called for His purposes.

If we love God, we can believe that He is at work, even when He says NO to us. But that doesn't mean what we are experiencing is inherently good, nor does it mean that the NO is out of God's will for our lives. He knows what is happening to us and is even permitting some of the difficulties we may face. In our fallen world (thanks to Adam and Eve for disobeying God by eating the apple), we find our lives marked by sin. Yes, sin. Such a simple three letter word that has impacted our world greatly, whether it is original sin, my sin, your sin, or someone else's sin. It doesn't matter who has disobeyed God, for the reality is that we will experience the ripple effect. So many Christians love to quote Jeremiah 29:11, which seems to promise a life without sin's aftermath...

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future..."

Oh this verse is so beautiful, isn't it. Imagine if we really could claim this for ourselves and take full confidence in the fact that our future would be prosperous and harm free. But you and I both know people who love Jesus and have suffered harm, right? The problem isn't with this verse really – the problems is that we take it out of context.

The prophet Jeremiah isn't writing to you or me. Verse 1 tells us who this is written for: "This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar

had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon." Notice the word surviving. Hmm. Wouldn't that mean life was hard?

It gets better. In verse 4, Jeremiah describes that these words are from the Lord Almighty to all those He carried into exile. Hmm. Exile? Well that doesn't sound like a nice place, does it? He goes on to tell them how to live, what to be careful about, and what God will do for them. That is why we know this promise in 29:11 is for the exiles as they pursue truly knowing God...

Jeremiah 29:12-14

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Do you see the real message in this passage? God desired for His people to call upon Him

and seek Him and find Him. His longing is for relationship and His hope is for their hearts to be yielded to Him. These verses aren't really about living a harm-free life.

It is amazing how we turn Scripture written for the exiles into something we expect God to do for us, while we don't in turn recognize our part in the relationship. This passage isn't about clinging to a promise for an easy future. Rather, it seems that this passage is really about painting the picture of God's character and longing for His people.

He wants our hearts and He promises to be faithful in providing for us...through the hardships and beyond.

God doesn't leave us hopeless in harm's way. Nor does He give us a NO without already knowing what will happen in our future. That's because inherent to His character is His faithfulness. God is the definition of faithful.

God's provision for our lives is ultimately found in the cross. His plans are always about our eternal destination. His concern is for our salvation through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to redeem our lives from sin and to give us a hope about our future...eternally.

We may never understand the NOs we face this side of heaven, but that's because God is more concerned with a YES from our hearts as we set our hopes on being with Him in eternity.

The Way Forward

So how do we move past the NO in faith and not become defeated by disappointment? These steps will guide you in embracing the NO from God and turning it into a YES LORD!

1: Admit the Pain

Don't deny the NO that caused the pain you feel. Admit it and confess it to the Lord. Find a friend, mentor, or parent whose faith is strong and share your heart with them.

Seek their support as you walk through the next faith steps.

2: Surrender the Dream

Take the time to give back to the Lord the dream you held in your heart. Record your thoughts in journal or in a letter to God. Share with Him what you hoped for and make a decision to lay it down. Be committed about the process of surrender.

3: Wait on God

The temptation to do something about your pain or to force the situation from a NO into a YES is real. Rather than trying to control the situation, give time for your emotions to settle down into a healthy

place. If you need to talk with a counselor or pastor during this time, definitely pursue that opportunity.

4: Do the Next Thing

Life goes on beyond the "NO" so look up and outward to see where God may want to use you in the here and now. Embrace the opportunity to do the next thing – whether that is something simple on your to do list, getting into a project that was put on hold, or making time for a friendship that was pushed off the calendar.

5: Consider Perspective

While you may never find the answer to why God said NO, you can certainly seek Him for perspective. Spend time in the Word and prayer, searching for a broader, eternal understanding. Ask God your "why" question but don't stop there. Also pursue Him with these questions...

• *God, what do you want me to do with my time now?*

• *What should I pursue instead, even while I wait?*

- *What do you want me to learn or take away from this experience?*
- *What do you want me to teach others about this experience?*
- *How can I comfort others with your truth and hope as they walk through a NO?*
- *And, God, how can I glorify You, even when I don't understand your purposes or plan?*

God can handle your questions. Even if you don't hear Him clearly or understand His purposes, you'll draw closer to Him just by being honest with your feelings. Your faith will grow as you learn to embrace the NO.

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