

Turning Nonsense into No-Sense



Regardless of who you are, where you live, or what roles you play, I'm willing to bet that there have been times when life has overwhelmed you. Maybe you're feeling that way right now, even as you read these words. If so, you're experiencing the nonsense of life: trying to keep up with today's hectic pace while simultaneously making sure that you're living a life of meaning and purpose. It's not easy.

Somewhere along the way, each of us must figure out how we can meet our immediate family's needs, contribute to our communities, meet our work commitments, be active and engaged in the lives of our extended family members, be helpful to neighbors, supportive of friends, make a contribution to our church families, grow personally, find time for rest and relaxation, and most importantly, find time to deepen our relationship with Christ.

Just thinking about all that gives me a headache!

As we wrestle with competing demands, we also discover that life doesn't come with guarantees or warranties. As a result, many

of us are playing roles we didn't expect in a life that looks nothing like what we anticipated.

In trying to keep up with all we feel we must do, we succumb to the "Acceleration Syndrome," which tells us we must work faster and harder to keep up—and that if we don't, we'll be left behind. That thought terrifies us, so we convince ourselves that we should, indeed, work harder and faster, without asking ourselves what the result will be for our own health and happiness—and that of our friends and families.

Regardless of who you are, or what you do, juggling your many responsibilities is likely a full-time job. As a result, you may be in survival mode: doing whatever's next on the list without taking the time to stop and ask if it is even something that should be on your list. If that's the case for you, perhaps you've gotten so busy you've forgotten you have the power of choice and can actually say no.

That's where turning nonsense into no-sense begins: by reclaiming your right to say no rather than letting a sense of obligation dictate your life.

You do have the power to say no. You must believe it in order to be able to do it, however. And in order to be able to do it, you must pause long enough to make sure that what you're doing is the right stuff for you, given your abilities and the season of life you're in. You must know your priorities and passions, your strengths and weaknesses, and what you do and don't like to do.

Instead of getting swept up in the societal tsunami that says the more you do the more you matter, you can choose a different measuring stick for your life. Instead of compiling and completing a long list of "Things to Do" each day, create a list of "Things that Matter," and focus on this instead.

The task of identifying your priorities is essential for one simple reason: *The ability to say no begins long before you're asked to do something.* And that's where most of us get into trouble. Instead of being prepared to say no, we're caught off guard so we shoot from the hip, fly by the seat of our pants, respond in the moment, and ultimately,

as one survey respondent wrote, “Somehow we accidentally say yes when we really mean no.” I’ve done it myself many, many times.

Preparation is the key to turning life’s nonsense into no-sense. What can we do to be prepared?

Give yourself permission to say no. Many women are unable to say no because they think they shouldn’t. And because they don’t give themselves permission to speak the word, they never do. One of the first steps to no-saying is to tell yourself it’s okay to say no. In fact, I suggest you speak the words out loud right now. Say, “From this day forward, I give myself permission to say no.” No-saying begins with permission.

Practice using the word “no.” As a recovering “yesaholic,” I actually had to practice saying the word “no.” Maybe you need to do the same. Speak the word out loud. Shout it. Whisper it. Repeat it. Chant it. Cheer it. To this day, I often get myself psyched up before returning a phone call by repeating the word over and over before I pick up the phone. I say, “No. No. No. No. No. *No!*” My kids think I’m crazy, but it works.

Simplify your nos. Often we are our own worst enemies when it comes to saying no because we overestimate the significance of a no. Being honest about what you are saying no to makes it easier to do. For example, there’s a difference between saying no to working in the nursery and feeling like you’re letting someone down, although often we make no-saying more complex by combining the two. Instead of thinking, “I’m turning down a request to work in the nursery,” we think, “I may damage my relationship with Jill by turning down her request to work in the nursery.” Practice simplifying your nos instead of loading them with implications that don’t need to be there.

Understand that it’s not possible to do everything, even if you want to. The sooner you accept that it’s not possible to do everything, the

easier it becomes to say no. Knowing that using the word is necessary makes it easier to make it part of your vocabulary. Be honest with yourself when you're disappointed that you have to say no. Think, "I wish I could say yes to chairing the fundraiser for school, but my other obligations keep me from being able to do so." Or, "I really wish I could get away with my friends this weekend, but it's just not possible for me to do everything." It's more honest—and realistic—to acknowledge limitations than pretend they don't exist. Ignoring them won't make them go away.

It's necessary to master the four steps outlined on the previous page in order to say no...and live to tell about it. Once you do, however, you'll be on your way to turning the nonsense of life into no-sense! These four steps are the foundation of developing a no-saying mind-set.

Taking Action

Singers warm up by singing the words, "Mi, mi, mi, mi."
Begin your no-saying by singing the words, "No, no, no, no."

Discovery Questions

1. How will understanding that "the ability to say no *before* you're asked to do something" make it easier for you to say it?
2. Have you given yourself permission to say no? Or are you stuck in a yes-saying rut?
3. Do you routinely make it harder to say no by overstating what you're saying no to? If so, how will simplifying your nos make it easier for you say to them?