

Don't Be Mad at Your Yes*

*A look into the reality of
our yes and no responses

JENNIFER MAZZOLA

How to use this study.

I intentionally kept these writings short so you can use these brief moments to reflect on scripture and how certain points impact your daily life.

Use them as a part of your individual daily routine, or maybe read through them as a group. You can read one a day for a week or take a week on each segment. There is always space to go deeper with a passage or a writing, and we hope you will.

Visit jennifermazzola.com to schedule a time to talk through things one-on-one with Jenn or talk with a group of friends as you journey together.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....2

SECTION ONE

Don't Be Mad at Your Yes.....6

SECTION TWO

Don't Be Mad at Your No.....9

SECTION THREE

Simplify.....12

SECTION FOUR

Leave Margin.....16

Recap.....19

Printable Quotes.....20

Introduction

Read Matthew 5:33-37

"All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." – Jesus, Matthew 5:37

This passage, in context, is in a litany of segments where Jesus is addressing various dynamics. This particular verse is set at the end of a little piece I like to call "How to Handle Your Oath/Your Word." When we say yes or no to a request, we are, in a sense, giving our oath. I realize we use words like "promise" or "swear" to bring gravity to the commitment, but essentially every yes or no should simply be that.

There were two instances where this passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount became deeply applicable to me. Later, I would realize how consistently I struggled to simply let my yes be yes and my no be no.

The first moment was talking with a friend in my office. She was frustrated with her adult child's behavior, and yet, she was also supporting them in several ways. I listened carefully before responding, "Don't be mad at your yes." **If you want to help someone, you should do so without strings attached and without later complaining about the very thing you chose to do.**

Not even a few days later, I sat in my car angry over a bridal shower I was throwing. As I was explaining to my steering wheel that the bride-to-be was not being as considerate and grateful as I would have liked, I heard, "Don't be mad at your yes." (I love when God throws my own advice back at me.)

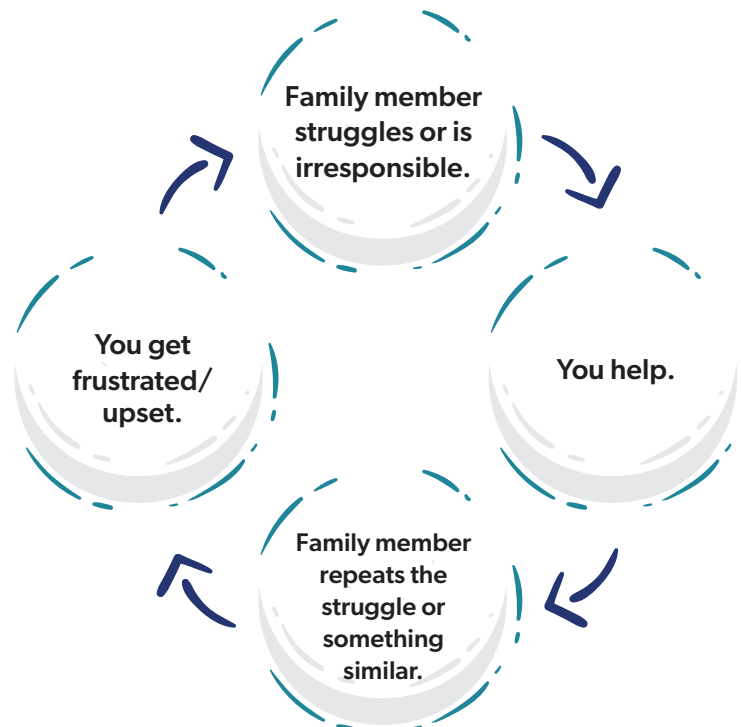
We get "mad at our yes" more often than we realize. We agree to go somewhere and then complain. We volunteer and then jump at reasons to bail. We have children and then get mad when they act like children. We give someone a gift or help them out and then get frustrated when their response doesn't meet our expectations. We say yes to a job and a paycheck but complain when it's work. We get on social media only to be shocked and upset at what people post. We made these choices, and **I believe life has the potential to become way less frustrating when we learn not to be mad at our yes.**

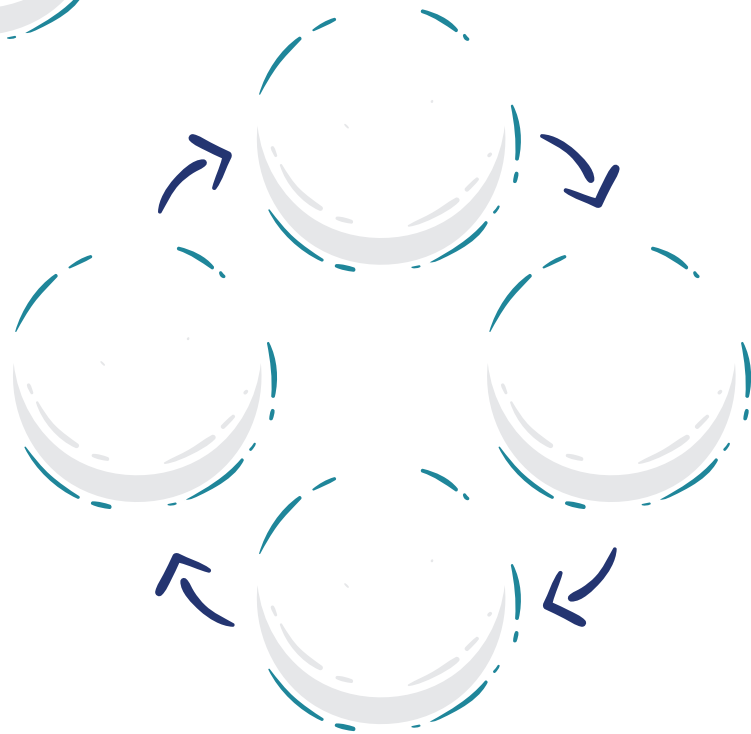
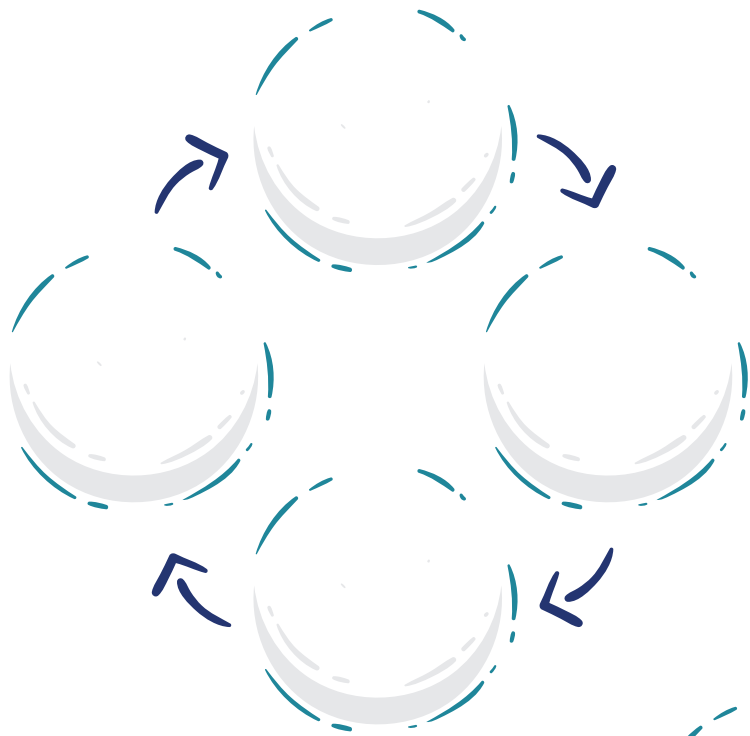
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Introduction Reflection: “Cycles”

We all get irritated that we gave a yes or regret a no at some point. Sometimes we overcommit or we regret sharing the gift of our yes. We have all said, “Dang it! I wish I didn’t say yes, to that!” It’s more when we find ourselves angry, habitually complaining or allowing ourselves to be stuck in patterns of martyrdom that I think we need to step back and ask, “Am I being mad at my yes or no?” And by the way, if we don’t like the direction our yeses or noes are taking us, we can change that. There may be some noes in your life that need to become yeses and vice versa.

The illustration below shows an example of one possible cycle we may find ourselves stuck in. Fill in the illustrations on the next page with your own cycles.





SECTION ONE

Don't Be Mad at Your Yes

Read Luke 15:11-32, Matthew 20:1-6

Ever helped someone and they didn't return the favor?

Have you always had your own internal sense of right and wrong or what's fair?

Do you find yourself critical of others? Feeling like they are "getting away with something?"

Many of us are familiar with the story of the Prodigal Son. There are two sons. The younger one decides to ask for his inheritance early (lots of insulting layers within this request), and the other stays with his father, pressing into the family business (seemingly noble). The younger son crashes his life and prepares to return home to beg for a place in his father's home once again. As the younger son is rehearsing his speech, his father runs down the driveway to meet him, rejoicing that he is home. The older brother, still faithfully working, hears the news. Livid, he stands out on the front porch pouting as the celebration inside rolls on. Once again, the father seeks out his son, imploring him to come inside. I'm not sure if he ever did or not.

Jesus tells another story of a landowner who needs workers for his vineyard. He goes out early in the morning to find workers and offers them a day's wages. Later, he needs more help. He goes and gets more workers, and later again, right before closing time, he grabs a few more fellas for work. At the end of the day, he pays all of them the same. The guys who worked all day made the same amount of money as the ones who worked only at the end of the day.

Please, someone else see how crazy all this is.

I am an older brother/early vineyard worker. Which means I am often mad at my yes. And, like the older brother and the early workers, I question God about His idea of fair, often ending up "pouting on the front porch."

One morning, I was venting about yet another “unfair” scenario in my life, and I related it to the parable of the two sons. My friend kindly made an observation. “Ya know, Jenn, the problem with being mad on the porch is ... you’re missing the party.”

I have missed so many “parties.” I have carried a bad attitude, had my thoughts consumed and been divisive and bitter while life went on and parties happened. I can’t tell you how many times I felt stuck in a crazy cycle of “that’s not fair.” But the reality is: I could have worked just the last hour. I could have squandered my life. Those just weren’t the choices I made. Why am I mad? I said yes to something different.

A coworker made a jab at another coworker one day, “There goes Bob (not real name), leaving early again. Must be nice.” I was new to the office and hadn’t learned the culture quite yet, so I asked, “Is he not supposed to leave early? Do you have to stay until 6?” After a little stammering I asked, “So you could leave too ... you just choose not to?”

The parent that helps their adult child that I mentioned earlier—I shared with them that I totally understood why they helped so much. It wasn’t really about their child, but more that they didn’t want their grandchild to go without. And while I could make a case that enabling is a terrible long-term plan, the reality was, if she felt strongly she needed to give money or time so her grandchild could have and do certain things, then she didn’t have to justify that choice to me. But she also shouldn’t punish her daughter. This pattern in their relationship had lasted years. The daughter found herself in a tight spot, mom rescued, vowing “not next time,” and repeat, repeat, repeat. At any point, either of them could stop the cycle.

When we are in a repeat pattern of frustration, we need to examine our yes and no in the scenario. If we choose to work all day or just the last hour, if we leave home and beg to return or we faithfully remain in the field, we have to accept our yes or no, and we have to accept others’ choices as well.

Why am I mad? I said yes to something different.

Section One Reflection

1. Have you “missed any parties” because you were frustrated that someone was “getting away with something?”
2. Are you holding on to bitterness or resentment toward someone because you can’t own your yes?
3. How do you typically respond when something that’s “not fair” happens?
When someone does not get “what they deserve?”

SECTION TWO

Don't Be Mad at Your No

Read Phillippians 2:12-18 (A good reminder about watching our attitude.)

I love that Jesus makes sure to include either yes or no in his advice on making commitments. I think we too often get this image of Christianity as a never-ending series of yeses. God gave us options for a reason. In fact, humanity gets options right out of the gate.

God is the original designer of "Eat This, Not That." He gives us choices because that is the only true path toward love and freedom. A forced yes or no has very little power, but a chosen commitment, that packs a punch.

Just as we can end up frustrated by our yes, we can also be angry at our no.

We complain about not having friends, but we find excuses to not invest in others. We say no to investing in our marriage and then wonder why it's not vibrant. We say no to getting up and exercising and then wonder why we can't drop some weight. We go to churches and whine about "not being fed," but we don't take the time to feed ourselves. Again, choices we make.

Being a pastor is nothing like I thought it would be. It's this weird space of counselor, motivational speaker, life coach, event planner, scholar, theologian, healer, social coordinator, project manager ... I could keep going. It's an odd job. In ministry, there is a list of conversations you end up having often, and one item on that list goes something like this:

"I haven't been to small group in three weeks, and not one person has called me."

Another might be:

"I keep seeing people grabbing coffee or hanging out, and I am never invited. This church isn't very friendly."

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Early in ministry, I felt a pressure to “fix” these situations, but I noticed over time the same conversations would often take place with the same people. I noticed something else, too. I started to ask some clarifying questions.

“Have you reached out to anyone in your group?”

“Have you invited anyone to coffee?”

We all want to be seen, noticed and thought of, but sometimes we want those things without being willing to see, notice or think of others. This is when we are mad at our no. We don’t volunteer. We don’t reach out. We don’t accept invitations. We don’t extend invitations. We don’t do these things for many reasons (mostly fear and insecurity), but at the end of the day, that is our no, so it’s ours to own. We want to be on the guest list without ever being the host. We want to be “in the know” without actually being “known.”

Just like with our yes, we need to be observant of our no.

No to quality time with our children has implications. No to counseling when our marriage is in trouble might be a missed opportunity. There are good noes, too. No to that temptation can move us one step forward rather than another repeat step back. No to chasing a title or paycheck may ultimately lead to true fulfillment.

When Jesus says, “ ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one,” He is reminding us that these two words are powerful tools. It’s not considering the stuff “beyond” them that can result in dysfunction.

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SECTION THREE

Simplify

Read James 1:19-20, Proverbs 17:27 (*More good reminders.*)

"All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'." (Matthew 5:37)

It sounds so easy, right? Just say yes or no. Don't worry about how it will be received. Don't fret about possible missed moments or opportunities. Don't project how others will feel or what they might say about you. Just simply say yes or no and carry on.

It's not that easy. Let's look at a few tactics that might help.

1. Slow down.
2. Speak clearly.
3. Stay in tune.

Slow down.

When my boys were little, I caught myself yelling more than I would have liked, and it would escalate quickly. One time, for whatever reason, I noticed I wasn't giving them any time to respond. I would request, "Stop," and a millisecond later, "Stop," another fraction of a second, "STop. STOp. STOP!" I went from 0 to 60. I needed to slow down. So, I tried this thing. I would ask them to stop (or whatever the request was at the moment), and I would slowly count to 10 internally. You know what happened, right? Most of the time they would do what I asked, or sometimes I would realize they didn't actually hear me the first time. But when I could remember to slow down, and it wasn't every time, it made all the difference in our home.

The problem is, we aren't in a culture that prizes slowing down. Slowing down is a difficult habit for most of us. Let's think through this, though. What would happen if you waited two minutes before posting that comment on social media? What's

the worst that could happen if you thought through that email response for just five more minutes? Before you say yes or no, think about it. What are you committing to? What does availability in your schedule really look like? Is this a yes or no you will feel good about tomorrow? Of course, we will all have a yes or no that we will wish we could take back from time to time but slowing down our thought process before we respond will ensure that is way less often the case.

Speak clearly.

“Simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ ”

I love that Jesus uses the clarifying word “simply” here. If we have to rationalize, justify or share a million caveats to our yes or no, that might be a red flag. Obviously, if our boss asks us to do something, and we say no, he might expect an explanation, but more of what I’ve observed is our fear-based addendums we attach to these two words.

Explanations are a courtesy, but they are not a requirement, nor do they provide some magical defense from others’ reactions. Yes, we can take that concept too far and build up walls of refusal to explain poor behavior—walking around with an “I don’t owe you an explanation” chip on our shoulder—but we can also find ourselves pre-apologizing for both a reaction we have yet to receive or a rationale we should have already thought through and owned.

Keep your yes or no simple and honest.

Stay in tune.

No one on this planet can guide you through every situation with a perfect yes or no plan. Not all scenarios are black and white and simple enough for the yes or no

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decision to stand out clearly. I'm not sure this isn't a part of life's design. Navigating the whats and whens of yeses and noes seems like it would be best done with a guide that has a vantage point of ... let's say ... all creation.

I do not exist in a vacuum. I am not alone. I can seek counsel for my decision-making from wise friends and mentors, and most importantly I have access to God. Take time to pray, journal, be still or take a walk. We have to find ways to make sure we are staying tuned in to the Spirit within you. He has lots to say.

SECTION FOUR

Leave Margin

Read Leviticus 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19

There is a principle mapped out in the Hebrew Bible:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God.” Leviticus 23:22

“When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” Deuteronomy 24:19

This idea of “leaving margin” is foundational in making sure you have space within your resources to help others. However, for me, it also applies to our time.

Time is an amazing equalizer. It’s guaranteed to none of us, and no one can control it. When I am not mindful of my time, I often end up mad at my yes.

Just the other day, I was requested to attend a meeting for work. I work part-time. The decision to work part-time was very intentional. I also have terrible work boundaries. The request for the 7:30 a.m. meeting was something I could do. I was physically capable of attending that meeting. However, as I moved my finger over the screen to RSVP yes, I paused. Yes, I can do this, but is this the highest and best use of my time? More importantly, I’m already irritated I got the request. Will I be more irritated if I shuffle around my morning routine for a meeting that is less than urgent for my role?

If I say yes to something, it requires saying no to something else; that could be time with family, time with friends, the disruption of a routine or even just me-time. These things are totally fine to rearrange, postpone or adjust, but make that a habit and we are in trouble, because these things are not okay to neglect all together.

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I never want to put myself in a position where I have no margin in my schedule. I have to be mindful, or I will allow others to creep in on my field, forcing their schedules and agendas on my land. The only thing that grows in those plots are weeds of bitterness, when margins are intended for God to guide us toward generosity and divine interruptions. We complain about not having enough time as if our yes and no cannot provide proper fencing. We don't get to blame others for our poor boundaries.

Section Four Reflection

1. How intentional are you in managing your time well? How intentional are you with creating “margin” in your daily routine?
2. Do you feel like you leave space in your life for others, or are you driven by outside schedules and to-do lists?
3. How do you typically respond to opportunities to be generous with your time or gifts? How do you typically respond to being interrupted by unexpected circumstances?

TO RECAP:

- *Don't be mad at your yes.
- *Don't be mad at your no.
 - *Slow down.
 - *Speak clear.
 - *Stay tuned-in.
- *Carefully guard the time margin around your fields.

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mazzola

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*"All you need to say
is simply 'Yes' or 'No;'"*
Matthew 5:37

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*Don't be mad
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*"Do everything without
grumbling or arguing."*
Philippians 2:14

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