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Saying Yes

Saying yes at times is not easy. When someone invites you to do something challenging, fear, discomfort and a desire to retreat can often overwhelm you. A battle can ensue between your mind and heart; you want to say yes, but fearful emotions can cause you to say no. And later it can occur to you, "Was that God nudging me? Did I just say no to God?" That kind of question can gnaw at you; even cause you to pray more often than normal.

I remember when I was young, my parents would often have guests over for dinner. My parents loved to entertain. Often these guests would recline in the living room before dinner, chatting before the meal was served. Frequently, I would stumble into or run by this room and my father would say, "Danny, come on in, and meet our friends." I still remember those feelings to this day. I would be standing in the middle of the living room surrounded by adults, having to explain my current interests and activities to my parents' friends. I would be petrified, but somehow the words would emerge, my dad would often crack a joke, and I would end up even enjoying the moment.

I had a wonderful dad, and I miss him to this day. He died nearly four years ago. He was a courageous, competitive, yet warm-hearted man. He was concerned for his children; among his concerns, he was often fearful that we might retreat or worse hide in earthly comforts, potentially avoiding the natural challenges of life. For him, it was a crime to say no when a healthy challenge was put before you.



Peter and Andrew dropping their nets to follow Jesus

When I was in seminary studying for ministry, invitations started coming my way to speak in front of larger audiences. At that time, I remember my dad telling me never to turn down an opportunity to speak in front of an audience no matter how anxiety producing it might be. He told me always to say yes to an invitation to give a speech or sermon; it was only through experience that the quality of my public speaking would improve.



Jesus tells Matthew to follow him.

Dad was so right, but it was not without fear and pain that I followed his advice. In those beginning years, my nervousness would nearly choke out what I had to say. But, sure enough, over time, my ability to speak with comfort and more clarity increased significantly.

As in daily life, there are no short cuts to growth in spiritual life. It is only through our willingness to head straight into our fears, to be stretched through challenges that we can begin to discover and exercise our God-given talents.

One of the most stretching experiences I ever had in my Christian life was when I was living in Costa Rica doing missionary work in the early 1980s. I had not yet completed my Spanish language training when a pastor and friend of mine asked if I would help him start a church in one of the barrios of the capital city of San Jose.

One afternoon, the pastor asked me if I would knock on the doors of peoples' homes and give them literature announcing the showing of a popular, Christian film at the site of the new church. After some hesitation, I said yes, I would do it. While walking through Barrio



San Jose, Costa Rica

Cordoba, I knocked on the door of a house. An older woman opened the door, looked at me and exclaimed in excitement, "The North American missionary has come to our house!"

She ran out the back of her house into the streets toward other homes and gathered what appeared to be her whole family and a crowd of friends. She sat them all down in chairs in her living room and told them to be quiet, then looked at me and said, "The North American missionary will now speak." I was dumbstruck, to say the least. First of all, I was just barely conversant in Spanish. Secondly, I was not sure what I was going to say. I thought my assignment was to hand out literature, not speak in front of a crowd of people!

Fortunately, however, at that time I was being mentored by this same pastor who challenged me to memorize Scripture verses. In front of this crowd in the woman's living room, I slowly opened my Bible to one of the verses I had memorized. I quickly looked over the surrounding verses, said a silent prayer, and then miraculously began to preach in Spanish! Somehow the words flowed out of me. – in Espanol!

When I was done speaking, the room was silent. I could hear my own heart beating. The older woman whose eyes were aglow, rose from her seat, and told the whole room, "The North American missionary will now pray for me." I thought to myself, "What in the world have I gotten myself into?"

The woman cleared the chairs and formed the people into a group around her, then looked up at me with anticipation. She told me that her legs had suffered for years; she was in constant pain. I laid my hands on top of her head and began to pray. To this day, I have never felt such warmth and radiance in a room in my life. Words poured out of me in prayer. Suddenly, the woman jumped up and said, "My legs have been healed!" I said, "Really?" then quickly recovered and said along with everyone else, "Praise God."

Later that week, the woman with the same crowd of family and friends not only attended the showing of the movie, but, by the end of the year, they, plus many more people from Barrio Cordoba, formed the nucleus of a new and vibrant church. It was another huge lesson for me about the value and eternal significance of saying yes to God's callings and nudges in life. To that pastor and friend of mine, I could have easily said, "No, I am not comfortable going into that neighborhood and handing out literature."

The Christian life demands movement, courage and growth. So next time, when you feel the Lord nudging you toward a challenge, say yes. Then step back and watch what happens.