

# ***“When God Says ‘NO!’”***

**August 1, 2010**

**2 Samuel 7:1-17**

**Acts 16:6-10**

**A Sermon preached by  
Pastor Rob Fulton  
First United Presbyterian Church  
Bellefontaine, Ohio**

Now, there are times in MY life...and perhaps YOURS as well...when it seems for all the world that God...or circumstances...or the forces of nature...or WHATEVER you want to call it...is saying “NO!” to my very best intentions in life. Let me show you what I mean.

When I was in college, I wanted to join the Sigma Chi fraternity in the WORST kind of way. It was a good fraternity...a nice bunch of guys. Some of my best friends were joining. And I thought I couldn't LIVE if I didn't also pledge Sigma Chi. But I didn't get in. For whatever reason, they said “NO!” And for the life of me, I couldn't understand WHY?

After college, I went to work for a mortgage banking company...a North Carolina based firm that I thought would keep me in North Carolina. They sent me to Washington, D.C. instead. I hated it...couldn't stand it. I wanted to be in North Carolina. After all, that's where all my friends were. That's where the girl I thought I might marry and spend the rest of my life with was. So after working for them for 18 months and trying numerous times to get transferred back to North Carolina, I resigned – in order to go back to “God's country,” perhaps get married, and do what I originally planned to do with my life...which was to go to law school and become an attorney...or so I thought. But once again, life said “NO!” The girl I thought I might marry married somebody else instead. The law school I wanted to go to said “NO!” While several said “Yes!” the one I wanted said “NO!” And I was crushed...devastated. I couldn't understand WHY. Here I had what I thought were good, worthwhile plans for my life and I kept getting all these “NO'S!”

Well, while I was trying to figure all of that out, the “call” to go to Seminary and become a minister somehow came upon me. And this time I said “NO!”...several times, in fact, until I finally figured out that the One who was doing the calling simply WASN'T going to that “NO!” for an answer. So I went to seminary...not the one I WANTED to go to, mind you...that one said “NO!”...but I went. And somewhere along the way, I finally realized that that was where I was SUPPOSED to be...that maybe I'd been getting all those “NO'S!” for a reason.

I did well in Seminary – got good grades...met and married Janet. And then, upon graduation, I decided I wanted to serve the Poplar Grove Presbyterian Church in Poplar Grove, North Carolina. I was as sure of that as anything I had ever been sure of. Poplar Grove is where God wanted me! But once again, God...or somebody...or something said “NO!” Actually, I think it was Mrs. Hargrove, the grand dame, matriarch, “Mother Superior” of the church who said “NO!” But in any case, the answer was “NO!” And once again, I was left to wonder “WHY?”

Well, as life would have it, Janet and I moved back to Ohio and took a church in Carlisle, down south of Dayton. And there we stayed for seven happy years, two dogs and three children.

After those seven years, I decided it was time to move. And I found several churches I really liked. But once again, each time I thought I had made the right choice, the answer came back “NO!” You're not going there. Until, that is, you good folks here in Bellefontaine called. And then the answer was “YES!” And now, some 24 years, another child, four more dogs, seventeen puppies (and another 8 born just this past Friday!), three rabbits, 34 sheep, 3 cats, a bunch of kittens, a pony and two goats later...not to mention nearly 1000 sermons, hundreds of Sunday School classes and study groups, 150+ weddings, well over 250 funerals, thousands of hospital visits, 476

new church members, 260 baptisms, untold number of meetings and countless smiles and tears later, the answer is still “YES!” And how GLAD I am that it is!

And yet, despite all the “YESES!” that have come my way in recent years, I think it is still the “NOS!” in life that give me the biggest problem. To think I’m trying to do something that I believe is good and right and worthwhile, only to have my efforts turned aside by a big fat “NO!”...well, it’s often more than I can understand!

King David must have felt the same way when God said “NO!” to him too. David wanted to build a “house” for God...a temple...a church...a place of worship – a worthy and worthwhile goal to be sure. But despite David’s best intention, God said “NO!” The story is told in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. Listen for the Word of God, and in it, allow the Holy Spirit to bring meaning for your life today!

#### 2 Samuel 7:1-17

Friends, rejoice and give thanks for this is the Word of the Lord!

“Surely the Presence of the Lord”

#### Prayer

Now, before we get too far into today’s story, let’s get a little background. King Saul is dead and David has become king of Israel...at least of Judah...the southern part of the kingdom. Saul’s one surviving son, Ishbosheth, has been made king of the northern part of the kingdom...where he served for two years until he was murdered in his sleep by two officers of his army who thought they were doing David a favor. When they brought David the news of Ishbosheth’s death, however, David was FURIOUS at them for killing an innocent man in his sleep and had THEM put to death.

Well, with Ishbosheth now dead, David became king of ALL of Israel. After making his capital in Hebron for several years, David and his armies conquered the fortified hill town of Jerusalem, capturing it from the Jebusites and making it the new capital of Israel. Renaming it the “city of David,” David enlarged the city and further fortified it from enemy attack. And as the scriptures tell us, *“David grew stronger and stronger, for the Lord God Almighty was with him.”*

And then a new development happened that further strengthened David’s power and legitimacy as the king of Israel. King Hiram of Tyre (which is now Lebanon) sent a trade mission to the new King of Israel. In tribute, Hiram provided David with logs from the cedars of Lebanon and carpenters and stone masons to build the king a palace. After all, Hiram figured, if David is going to be king of the strongest nation around, he ought to live in a palace fit for a king. And again, the scriptures report David’s success: *“David realized that the Lord had established him as king of Israel and was making his kingdom prosperous for the sake of his people. So David and his seven wives and twenty-seven sons and one daughter moved into his palace in Jerusalem. And there David ruled Israel for 40 years.”*

Well, as David began to reflect upon his success through the years and marvel at how much God had blessed him, he began to dream of a way he could give honor and show thanks to the Lord. And he began to talk to the prophet Nathan about his dreams.

Now this, of course, is the first time we hear about the prophet Nathan. But it certainly won’t be the last. Being a prophet, Nathan was God’s voice to the people...but more importantly, to the King. He spoke on God’s behalf to David. And as such, because David was *“a man after God’s own heart”*...Nathan was also the King’s advisor...David’s confidant and counselor.

So David told Nathan about his plan to honor the Lord.

*“Here I am living in a beautiful house made of cedar while the Ark of the Covenant is kept in tents! I will build a house for the Lord to dwell in... a palace fit for our God... a temple where God may reside and where he may be worshiped in honor and in praise!”*

#### 2 Sam. 7:2

Now, in order to understand what David wanted to do, you need to know that the Ark of the Covenant was the most sacred...the most visible presence of God for the Hebrew people. To us Gentiles, all we know about the Ark is from the Indiana Jones movie of a few years back: *“Raiders of the Lost Ark.”* But to the Jewish people, the Ark was SO HOLY...SO SACRED that in it’s very presence, the very presence of God was thought to be found.

Built to exact specifications which were given directly to Moses from God, the Ark of the Covenant was a gold covered box of acacia wood, decorated with gold-winged angels, which

contained three sacred objects: a golden jar containing manna from heaven...Moses' ancient rod which he used to part the Red Sea and bring water from the rock...and, MOST sacred of all, the stone tablets upon which God wrote the Ten Commandments. Carried on rods covered with gold, the Ark of the Covenant was to go wherever the people of Israel went...thereby signifying God's holiness and presence with them always.

Well, while the Israelites were a wandering people...wandering in the wilderness...settling into the promised land...the Ark of the Covenant was kept in a tent which would be moved from place to place...even going into battle when the Israelites fought against their enemies. Which, of course, presented great difficulty and trauma when the Philistines managed to capture the Ark and the Hebrews went down to a resounding defeat. Eventually recaptured by David and returned to Jerusalem with great fanfare and celebration, the Ark of the Covenant...representing the very presence of Almighty God...now resided in a tent while David lived in a palace. So David wanted to correct that situation and, in effect, give God a fittingly honorable place to live...a house...a palace...a temple. *"It isn't right that the king should live in this beautiful cedar palace while the ark, the very presence of God, should be in a little tent out there. I will build a house for God...a temple to honor the Lord's name."* Surely it was a worthy and honorable thing for David to do. And apparently Nathan, the prophet, agreed. *"And Nathan said to the king, 'Blessings on you! Go and do all that you have in mind, for the Lord is with you!'"*

Well, sometimes your brilliant, noble idea may be from God...and sometimes it may NOT! It may sound like the best idea in the world...a totally worthwhile thing to do. But if it's not from God, you might as well forget about it! It simply WON'T come to fulfillment. God will say "NO!" Of course, the difficult CHALLENGE is knowing when your brilliant idea has God's blessing and when it doesn't.

Sometimes you'll have friends, like Nathan, who'll say, *"Yea! Go for it! God'll surely bless you!"* only for you to find out later that what YOU have in mind is simply NOT what God intends. Which is EXACTLY what happened to David. While Nathan, the prophet, originally thought God would bless WHATEVER David wanted to do, the Lord quickly informed both Nathan and David otherwise.

*"That same night, the Lord said to Nathan, 'Go and tell David 'You are NOT the one to build a house for me to live in. From the time I rescued the people of Israel from Egypt until now, I have NEVER lived in a temple. I have traveled around living in a tent. And in all my traveling with the people of Israel, I have never asked any of the leaders that I appointed to build me a house made of wood.'"*

The parallel passage of this same event in 1 Chronicles puts it even MORE explicitly:

*"NO! NO! I said NO!"* proclaimed the Lord. *"You shall NOT build me a house to live in!"*

Surely, it was a hard and difficult message for David to hear. It was a great idea...a great plan on David's part – a loving tribute to honor God. But it wasn't GOD'S plan. And yet, even in God's "NO!" God didn't reject David's idea completely. Instead, he simply told David his plans would be left to another to carry out:

*"When you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will make one of your sons king and will keep his kingdom strong. He will be the one to build a temple for me and I will make sure that his kingdom continues forever." 2 Sam. 7:12-13*

Someone else will do it David, but not you. My answer is "NO!" You shall NOT build me a house to live in.

Ten centuries later, another "man after God's own heart," the Apostle Paul, ALSO had a dream...a goal...a burning desire to go to the region of Asia Minor known as Bithynia to preach the gospel of his Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. And surely it was a worthwhile goal...a dream that would bring glory and honor to God and to God's Son. But though the goal was worthwhile and though the results would have been to God's glory, God said "NO!" to Paul. As the book of Acts reports:

*"The Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go to Bithynia." (Acts 16:7)*

Now, you need to know that it was not just for arbitrariness that God said "NO!" to Paul. The Lord had other things in mind...BIGGER plans...GREATER goals. The scriptures go on to report:

*That night, Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" As soon as Paul had his vision, he got up and got ready to leave for Macedonia, because he decided that God had called him to preach the Good News to the people there." Acts 16:9-10*

By going to Macedonia, you see, Paul took another major step in the process of spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Macedonia was in Europe, the first place the gospel was preached outside of the middle-eastern, Asian world. And from Macedonia, Paul traveled to Philippi and Thessalonica and Corinth and Athens and eventually to Rome. And from Rome, the Word of God spread into ALL the known corners of the world. Had Paul ignored the Lord's "NO!" and gone on to Bithynia, like he wanted to do, he may well have done a good thing...no doubt about it. Sharing the Good News of the Gospel is ALWAYS worthwhile. But he would have missed out on the much GREATER PLAN God had in mind for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

Now, there are, it seems me, three lessons to be drawn from these stories of God's "NO!" in David and Paul's lives that can help US when it seems for all the world that God is saying "NO!" to the plans and directions WE may want to go in life. First of all, when God says "NO!" it's not necessarily a rejection of us OR our worthwhile goal. It may simply be a REDIRECTION. It may be that the TIMING is not right. It may be that God has much GREATER things in mind for us. Who KNOWS what it is? WE certainly don't! God's "NOS!" are often among the most perplexing answers in life to figure out. But GOD knows. GOD knows what is right for our lives far better than we can ever HOPE to know. And unless we are going to put ourselves in the place of God – which, by the way, is the first and greatest of all the sins – then we'd better learn to TRUST GOD and LISTEN when those "NOS" come our way.

Secondly, when God says "NO!" it may well mean God has a better way. Maybe God's "NO!" is because God knows what we want to do is not right for us. Maybe God says "NO!" because God has something DIFFERENT for us to do. May God says "NO!" because there is someone else who can do what we want to do BETTER than we can.

You see, God knew that David wasn't a builder. That wasn't his gift...his ability...his skill. He was a warrior...a leader...a song writer...a poet. But he WASN'T a builder. There was another, who would come AFTER David...his son, Solomon...who would be far more skilled at building God's temple than David could ever HOPE to be. It would be Solomon's job to build the temple, not David's. So when God says "NO!" to our plans and dreams, TRUST GOD and LISTEN! God always knows what God is doing...even if WE don't!

And thirdly, when God says "NO!" humility and obedience is always our best reaction. When God said "NO!" to David's desire to build the temple...or to Paul's attempt to go to Bithynia...neither one of them ranted and raved or threw a temper tantrum. Neither one of them screamed and shouted, "Why NOT God? Why NOT? I wanna do it! I WANNA do it!" Instead, both of them, in great humility and obedience, accepted God's "NO!" and left themselves open for whatever it was God had in mind for their lives. For David, it was the continuing expansion of Israel's greatness and glory...which in turn gave glory to God, for Israel's glory was God's glory. For Paul, it was taking the Gospel of Christ to new places...new believers...new ears to hear the Word of God. Who KNOWS what God may have in mind for US!

Finally, when God said "NO!" to David's plans and ideas to build God a house to live in, notice carefully what David did. He went into the tent of the Lord's presence...the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was kept...and he knelt down and prayed. He didn't pray for God to CHANGE God's mind. He prayed a prayer of THANKSGIVING...THANKING God for God's presence and guidance and wisdom and leading in his life...and asking God for the ability to TRUST, that he, David, might CONTINUE to walk in the ways that God would have him go!

What a model of faithfulness for us to follow! When life shatters our dreams and God says "NO!" to even our BEST intentions, may we, like David...like Paul...LISTEN to that "NO!" and TRUST that God, in all of God's wisdom and love for us, KNOWS what is best for our lives!

To GOD be the glory, both now and always! Amen...and AMEN!

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.