

Saying Yes Is Dangerous!

Life can seem like different things at different times. Sometimes it's like a soap opera with all kinds of relational strangeness happening around you. Sometimes it feels like a bad reality show and you wonder what the next challenge will be and just how ridiculous it will get. Life can be like a rollercoaster with highs, lows, steep curves, flips, turns, sudden up-swings, sudden drops and lots of unexpected twists that feel dangerous. Life can seem boring in one moment and an adventure in the next. There's an old saying widely attributed as a Chinese curse, though it's actually an British saying with no real equivalent expression in Chinese: "May you live in interesting times." Life can be interesting. It can feel intimidating and uncomfortable and God doesn't tell us in advance what will happen. So it's always a surprise.

Life is relatively short compared to all of eternity. If you're fortunate you get about eighty, ninety or maybe a hundred years on this planet. Life's pretty brief so it's important to make it count. You need to face life deliberately, intentionally and purposefully and make the most of what you've got.

Today we're starting a series on how you do that. The truth is God has a much more exciting plan for your life than you probably have ever imagined. God has a script for an adventure story that goes beyond what you think is possible in your circumstances, at your age or in your family. But before you can start that adventure, you have to say "Yes" to God.

Jesus and his disciples preached a message that was radically different from what others were preaching in that time. While others were advocating careful attention to orthodox teaching and established tradition, Jesus and those who followed him preached a radical, life-changing, tradition-defying, nonconventional message of hope, love and inclusion that challenged the customs, conventions and theological authorities of the day. They preached with urgency and conviction that life can be radically different.

They told people that God has an adventure for us and they spoke with joyful intensity. I want you to know that in these next three weeks, I'm going to be speaking to you with joyful, urgent intensity that your life can be radically different. It all starts with that saying "Yes" to God. When you really do that, there are some major changes in your life.

I want to be completely up front about this: if you say "Yes" to God, at least three things are going to happen in your life. So let's look at what changes when I say Yes to God:

1. Your Life Becomes an Adventurous Quest. Both Paul and the writer of Hebrews in the New Testament compared the life of a believer to a race. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24, *"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!"* Hebrews 12:1-2 says, *"...let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross..."* We have a goal to run toward. We're on a quest and God has placed in all of us a yearning, a longing for a life that means more. We may have suppressed it, rejected it, or avoided it because of the fears the world tries to instill in us, but we have a longing for spiritual adventure.

Most of us thrill to the stories of people who go on a trip to exotic places around the world. We watch the stories of people who fly around the world by themselves, who climb Mount Everest. A few years ago the news was full of this guy who flew across a gorge with a jet pack.

For me one of the things that always seemed the most adventurous of all is the space program, probably because I grew up in the age of when space exploration became a reality. That people actually go into space, that we landed on the moon, that people now live in space on the international space station. Now THAT'S an adventure.

Movies and books are full of stories about mythological heroes - great warriors who conquered kingdoms, slew dragons and rescued damsels in distress. Stories of quests and adventure have always been popular.

A hundred years ago Sir Earnest Shackleton put ads in London newspapers because he was looking for men who would go with him on an expedition to the South Pole. Here's what he put in the newspaper: "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success." The remarkable thing: people actually answered the ad – that's how strong the drive for adventure can be.

But the fact is, no matter what our physical condition or abilities, God has an adventure for each and all of us and put within us a yearning for it. When you say yes to God, God will take you on a journey unlike any you'll find anywhere else.

Look at what happened to Abraham when he said yes to God. Hebrews 11:8 says, *"It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going."* Abraham was willing to risk it all and go someplace he didn't know.

But most of us have settled for something a lot less than a life of adventure. Our dreams have shrunk to watching folks do things stupid things on TV. Or we get so excited over the smallest sense of accomplishment. We've reduced our dreams for adventure to something so small - shrunk to the tiny little world of our day-to-day lives.

So, is that all we can hope for? Is that the best we are made for; the best we can do? The answer is no - absolutely not! God has an adventurous quest for us.

You've all heard of pastor Rick Warren, author of the Purpose Driven Life. But you may not know much about his wife, Kay Warren. Ten years ago God began an adventure in her life. She didn't think of herself as the adventurous type. She grew up in a home where being safe was a priority. Her adventure started in the most inauspicious way. She was sitting in her living room reading a magazine. It had an article about AIDS in Africa. She hadn't thought much about AIDS in Africa. It didn't impact her life. But that day as she read that article it showed her pictures and told the story of millions and millions of men and women who were dying alone; without medication; rejected; abandoned. It touched her heart.

Then there was this little text box in the middle of that article that said "Twelve million children orphaned in Africa due to AIDS." She put the magazine down in horror at the thought that there could be millions of people affected and she hadn't done a thing to help a single one of them. How could there be twelve million children orphaned in the world due to one illness and she couldn't name the name of even one of them. She says she thought, "What's wrong with me?" Not, what was wrong with the world, but what's wrong with me?

But she said to God, "God, You don't mean for me to do anything about this, right? I'm a suburban mom who drives a minivan. What do I know about a disease in Africa? What do I know about orphans? What could I possibly do?"

She spent about a month running from God, hiding, making excuses and then there came a moment when she knew God was asking for a Yes. God was asking for her surrender; asking her to trust, even though she had no idea of what the implications of her yes would be. And she said yes. She became an advocate for people in Africa with HIV and for orphans. Nothing in life had prepared her for that. But she knew God was calling.

For you it will be something different. God gives each of us our own quest. Depending on your season of life, where you are and where God has placed you, it will be different.

In the ten years since Kay Warren accepted the adventure, she's met with presidents and paupers; with the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor; with prostitutes and prisoners; with people taking their last breath and with babies taking their first. And she's making a difference.

There's a world out there crying out for heroes; for people of adventure; for people who will be courageous; who will be leaders; who will take on their quest. It's a world of suffering; a world of people in need. It's crying out; calling out for people who will say yes to God. Unlikely heroes; ordinary people who will say "God, I'm scared to death. But I'm going to say yes to you." When you do that, what happens is.

2. Your Life Becomes a Miraculous Journey. Not only will God give you a quest but when you say yes to God, what happens will become miraculous - it will go beyond reasonable expectations. Ephesians 3:20 says, *"...all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think."* Say yes and God accomplishes more than we think possible.

It's not because you have great talents or gifts for the quest. Remember, a few weeks ago I spoke about how God is MOST likely to use people with weaknesses, because then it's obvious that it's God's accomplishment, not your own. It's not because you are perfect and have lived an ideal life. Galatians 3:5 says, *"I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ."*

You can be a different person. It's not because who you are is awful, it's because when you give who you are to God, God opens up so much more. God opens the doors of faith, and gives an assurance that God has something significant to say and do through your life. God wants to do that for all of us. Whatever you have, when you hand it to God it becomes something God multiplies and makes miraculous.

Beyond that, when we say yes to God **3. My Life Becomes a Place of Peace.** This is the third thing that happens when we change and say yes to God. It seems like it's sort of a contradiction. How can you have an

adventurous quest and a miraculous life and find peace at the same time? Especially since we know that the life of a believer is not easy - in fact it's downright dangerous!

We tend to think that peace means the absence of excitement and conflict. In actuality, peace doesn't have to do with external circumstances, real peace is found when you live in the presence of God - it's a heart thing.

In John 16:33 Jesus says, *"I've told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."* Saying yes to God leads to a heart that's no longer restless, no longer searching for fake thrills. Instead you have a heart lit up with passion yet calm in spirit. Saying yes to God opens you up to the real adventure of being a part of what God's doing in our broken world.

So, given all this, if God offers us this life quest full of adventure, this miraculous journey, this opportunity to find peace in the midst of turmoil and trouble, why in the world do we so often say, no? Why would anyone not want to be part of God's adventure? There are two reasons:

The most common reason we have for resisting God is pretty straight forward: **1. We are Afraid of Letting Go of Control.** Your fears of losing control keep you from saying yes to God. Fear is as old as Adam and Eve. After they disobeyed God, they tried to hide from God. Adam said *"I was afraid and I hid myself."* Because of our disobedience, every human being has been running and hiding from God.

Psychiatrists tell us that there are literally thousands of phobias and fears that people can have. But your deepest fear, your fundamental fear is being afraid to lose control and totally trust anyone else. We're afraid to say yes Lord, whatever, whenever, wherever, however, anyway, anytime, anyplace. You're afraid to surrender all; to yield your life completely; to let go one hundred percent and say yes to God.

The biggest factor that causes us to be afraid is, frankly, Ignorance. We don't know well enough what God is really like. God is so loving that, if you truly knew God the way God really is, you wouldn't ever be afraid. But in our ignorance, we're afraid. We have all kinds of false ideas about God - what you heard at some time, what someone said about God.

How do I know when I'm not getting it; when I don't know what God is really like? It's simple. If you're constantly worrying you're probably not getting it. Worry is a symptom that you don't know what God is really like. In Matthew 6:31-32 Jesus says, *"So don't worry about these things, saying 'what will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs."* The CEV version of Matthew 6:32 says, *"Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things."* Do you get nervous; irritable; stressed out; worried; anxious; fearful over stuff? It's ignorance that makes us fearful.

Of course Satan is whispering in your ear all the time, "You know you're going to lose if you give your life completely to God. If you surrender to God, you'll lose your freedom. You'll lose your fun. You'll lose your comfort if you give control to God."

Let me tell you what you really lose when you say yes to God: You lose your guilt, your fear of death, your stress, your loneliness. You lose regret, resentment and shame - all the stuff you want to let go of.

Generally, people who are controlling are revealing high levels of insecurity. Secure people don't need to control things. If you feel secure you don't have to manage everyone's reaction. The greater your need for control the greater your level of insecurity.

What is the antidote to fear? Simple. Get to know God. Psalm 145 says, *"The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation."* Everything God does in your life comes from compassion and love. When you realize that God loves you more than anyone else ever has, it will ease the problems we have with saying yes to God.

The second thing that keeps us from saying yes to God is **2. We Don't Want to Face Our Disobedience.** The Bible says, *"...everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."* That means me - I fall short. That means you - You fall short. Billy Graham falls short. Everyone has sinned. No one measures up. I don't measure up to my own standards much less God's. Neither do you. The Bible says *"Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins."* It says, *"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth."*

Sin is saying I want what I want. I don't want God to tell me what to do. I want to call the shots. The truth is, you've got to choose who will rule; who's going to reign in your life. Will it be the reign of God or will it be you who reigns. If you choose you, you've got a pretty puny ruler. You can't save you or get you into heaven. You can't even solve your problems.

Most of us **say** we want to live for the reign of God. But what we substitute for that is the reign of myself. We want to say yes to God but we also have our own agendas. So it's a yes, but... Yes, God, but I also have my list of things to do.

There's an account in the Gospels about a guy who met Jesus and Jesus said, "Follow Me." The guy said, "I'll follow You Lord, but let me first go take care of things at home. I've got to settle some issues." What he was saying was, "Yes, Lord I'll follow you but I'll deal with my agenda first. Let me take care of my agenda and **then** I'll come follow You." It doesn't work that way. *The man "...said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family." But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."*

Notice two phrases in this verse – "Yes, Lord" and "first let me." Those two phrases are a contradiction. You can't say both in the same sentence and honestly mean it. Yes, Lord and let **me** first. Because if Jesus is Lord then he's in charge. You've got to decide who will be first in your life - you or God.

So how do you actually say yes to God? What do you need to do? How do you surrender? It's yielding to God, letting go. It is not giving up, it's giving yourself. Romans 6:13 says, *"Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God."* Give all of yourself to God.

As Americans the idea of surrender isn't a popular one. We think of it as losing a battle; having to wave a white flag. That's a very negative image - it's being conquered. We think of police chasing a criminal. They him in an alley and all he can say is, "Ok! I give up!" Or on the playground where a bully coerces a weaker child to say, "Ok! I give. I surrender."

But with God, surrender is the most positive thing we can do. It represents ending our addiction to running our own lives; being willing to declare, "God, I'm dependent on you." God's waiting to hear that from you today: "Yes, God, I'm giving in to you. I'm not giving up. I'm not losing hope. I'm giving in. I give myself to you."

Surrender to God is not being beaten into submission. It's recognizing how much God loves you. Then the yes to God is actually offering back love. It is a surrendered heart that says "God, You love me and I understand that. I love you and I give myself back to you."

So why have I called this message Saying Yes Is Dangerous? Because a truly Christian life is opposed to most of what is seen as natural and necessary in our culture and our world. Because when you say yes to God life can be uncomfortable or even painful. In C. S. Lewis' book *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he compares God to this magnificent lion, Aslan. Someone asked about Aslan, "Is he safe?" The response is, "No. He's not safe. But he is good."

I can testify that God sometimes takes our lives, turns them upside down, shakes them and points them in different directions as God's done in my life over the years. But I can also tell you that God is good. You can trust God. This is what the life of faith is all about. The life of faith is believing that when you say yes, you're saying yes to a loving God, not some mean dictator.

The Bible compares God in Deuteronomy 32:11 to a mother eagle. It says *"As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions,."* It's talking about what a eagle does when it's time for her young to fly. Eagles don't build their nest on the low hills. They build them up on the cliffs. The mother eagle creates a comfy environment for her babies to hatch and grow. It's padded with feathers. But she knows when it's time for those babies to fly. So she uses her talons and stirs up the nest, rearranging the twigs so that they start poking the little birds. Instead of it being a comfy place it's now uncomfortable. And she keeps edging them on so that they'll decide to jump out.

The baby eagle eventually gets nudged out. If it doesn't fly that time, the mother eagle swoops in catches it and brings it back up. Then she makes it uncomfortable again until the little bird tries again. If it's not getting anywhere, she comes and catches and she puts it back in the nest and does this again and again, until the bird can fly.

Some of us have stayed in the nest way too long. God may use this sermon series or the circumstances of your life to stir the nest. If I'm doing it right and you're listening, you're going to start to get uncomfortable. Good! Don't let it throw you. You can be certain that God will do for you exactly what mother eagles do.

In the Bible a woman named Hannah desperately wanted a child but couldn't have one. She prayed in the temple, "God, if you give me a son, I'll dedicate him back to you." God answered her prayer and she had a little boy and named him Samuel. While he was young she took him to the temple and said to a priest named Eli, "I made a promise to God so here's Samuel to serve in the temple as your assistant."

One day Samuel was in bed and heard a voice "Samuel! Samuel!" So he got up and went to Eli's room and said, "You called, master?" Eli said, "No, I didn't. You must have been dreaming. Go back to bed." So Samuel went back and he hears the voice again, "Samuel! Samuel!" He goes back to Eli and says, "Master, I heard you call. What can I do for you?" Eli said, "No, I didn't call you. Go to bed." So he went back and heard a third time. "Samuel! Samuel!" By this time Eli's figured it out. It says *"So he said to Samuel, 'Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.' Then the Lord said to Samuel, 'I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel'"* He's saying, "Samuel, I'm about to do something that's going to shake everybody up." And God did. It wasn't an easy time for anyone, but 1 Samuel 3:19 says, *"As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable."* Samuel became an important prophet by saying "Yes."

You have an opportunity to live a life of adventure, a miraculous life that's also a life of peace. God's nudging you to go ahead. Some of us have come right up to the edge and stopped. Others are resisting, trying to push against it. God's just going to keep on pushing. Because God loves you.

You say, "Rob is it dangerous to step over that line? Could it be uncomfortable and inconvenient?" Absolutely. But here's the thing: God's going to be with you. So it's your choice. Do you want to live the rest of your time in the shallows of life? Or do you want to live your life with God helping you become what you were meant to be all along. My challenge to you is this last verse *"Find out for yourself how good the Lord is."* I can tell you how good the Lord is. But you really have to find out for yourself. So you've got to cross that dangerous line.