

Some sort of a prayer

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [August 19, 2015](#) issue

I gave a rambling talk recently and a long line of teenagers came up to speak to me afterward and it was instantly clear that every single one of them wanted to ask me something while ostensibly asking me something else, or say one thing while seeming to say something else. I was so instantly moved I could hardly stammer any sort of answer. I tried hard to hear what they were not saying aloud but were saying with remarkable courage. It takes startling courage to be a teenager, you know. There are so many theatrical personas to try, but masks and disguises can get stuck. Or you get trapped behind walls that begin as protective but become prisons. One kid in particular stays with me. He's tall and shy and nervous. He says *How do you deal with rejection?* and somehow I instantly get it that he does not mean essays and stories and poems and how you handle people saying steadily bluntly no to your insistent yes! He's asking me about hope and despair and lovers and heartbreaks. He's asking about the girl or boy he adores who does not love him. He's staring at me. The other kids wait politely. I want to reach up and cup his face in my hands as if he was my son, but you have to be honest with kids, you cannot merely bloviate and issue arrogant pomposity, so I tell him you have to learn to be neighborly with no. You are going to see it every day and you might as well be friendly with the concept. Someone else's no doesn't actually kill your yes; it only means that someone else's yes is still out there waiting. You see where I am going here? There's more yes than no, is what I am trying to say. I suppose that's what we mean by faith. Faith's a big word, bigger than any religion. It means yes where everything sure looks like no as far as you can see. Am I making the slightest sense here, son? I actually call him son. The other kids must have thought I was being avuncular but for a brief moment he was indeed my son, and yours too. We shook hands and he held only my hands just a bit longer than the usual thing, which I took to be some sort of a prayer.