

## Saying yes and saying no

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Haverkamp's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

One way to approach the epistle text for this week is to talk about the spiritual discipline of saying yes and saying no, an idea I was first introduced to by [M. Shawn Copeland](#). (I find [The Message translation of this passage](#) helpful here.) God created us with the freedom to say yes and say no. But as Paul reminds us, we don't always know how to use this freedom very well. We often say yes when what we really wish we could say is no, or we say no when we really wish we could say yes. Not being able to say no sometimes makes saying a true yes even harder.

Elizabeth Gilbert [posted this on Facebook in April](#):

- 1) For most of my life I never said NO to anything or anyone, because I didn't know how.
- 2) Slowly I learned how to say NO to people I didn't like, and to things I did not want to do. This felt for a while like the highest teaching. But there is a higher teaching still...
- 3) Recently I have learned the hardest lesson of all: How to say NO sometimes to people whom you do love, and to things that you do want to do — based upon a compassionate comprehension of the limitations of your own energies, time and emotional capacity.

Which is to say: Sometimes you must gently refuse even some things which appeal to you, so that you can focus your limited human attention not only on what is important, but on what is possible.

And yet, we can't trust ourselves to consistently say no or yes when we need to. We can't trust ourselves to always make decisions that will make us the healthy, loving, unselfish, and joyful people God in Christ invites us to be.

So saying yes and saying no is a spiritual discipline—something we must practice to grow closer to God in Christ. In the end, it's Christ who fills in the gaps, Christ who can step in and give us grace, because Christ walks with us.

As Paul goes on to say, God justifies and Christ intercedes for us—and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.