

The Art of Saying No

The most important word for a teenager to learn is the word NO. (This is not limited to teens so everyone listen up here.) If we lived in a perfect world this wouldn't be as much of a problem as it is, but we live in a world where there are people who exploit and prey upon the weak and disadvantaged. Who are the weak and disadvantaged? For the purpose of this discussion, they include people who have a problem saying NO.

What do we mean by saying NO? NO is an easy word. It's just one syllable and two letters. One letter less than saying yes, but two letters more than saying nothing at all. And therein lies the problem. To some people if you don't say NO fast enough or hard enough they interpret it as saying yes. But the word NO is a very powerful word. It is probably the most important word in our language. NO tells people that you are someone and you refuse to go along. NO means that you will not allow yourself to be taken advantage of. NO means that you are not going to allow yourself to be passively controlled by others. NO means that you think for yourself. NO means that you own yourself. And {In:self ownership 'owning yourself'} is an important concept in the Church of Reality.

NO is the word that starts revolutions. NO is the word that allows the oppressed to rise up. NO is the word that is the point where change occurs. When the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. started a revolution for the equality of people, the revolution started by saying NO. When Rosa Parks was told that she had to sit in the back of the bus she said NO and NO changed the world. Gandhi in India said NO and drove out British control. Nelson Mandela said NO and ended apartheid in South Africa. Susan B. Anthony said NO, that women will not be denied the right to vote, and she prevailed. No is the word of empowerment. NO is the word of leadership. NO allows us to look at who we are and what we are doing and decide who we are and what we will become. NO allows you to stand up for yourself, to defend your rights, and to assert who you are in the world. You can not own yourself until you own the word NO.

When you are a teenager there are people out there who would take advantage of you. Some are adults who want to molest you and some are your friends who want you to do things to fit in. There are people out there who are users who just look at you as a possible resource for whatever they want from you, who are looking for people with a weak NO to take advantage of. Sometimes they want you to participate in a group so as to self reinforce doing things that are wrong. Common things include drugs, sex, money, religious cults, and gangs, but it could be almost anything, and generally when you think about it, it's something that you know you shouldn't be involved in and there is just a lot of pressure. In fact any time people are pressuring you the pressure should alert you to think things through. Are you being pressured because it is the right thing to do and people are looking out for your best interest? Or are you being pressured because someone wants something from you that you don't want to be a part of? Sometimes it's not so easy to tell the difference.

NO often has a price. If you say NO, then they won't be your friend anymore. If you say NO, then you are un cool. If you say NO, then the person won't date you anymore. Sometimes they will threaten violence against you if you say NO. NO is not an easy word because it's easier in the short term to just go along to get along. But if you do that, then it forms a habit and you lose control of who you are and you can end up doing things that have consequences for the rest of your life. You can end up in jail, raising babies instead of going to school, seriously injured, drug addicted, or dead.

NO gives you the inner strength to control your life and make your own decisions for yourself. When you say NO then you reclaim who you are. You are telling the world that you own yourself. That you are a strong person. That you control your own destiny. That you care about your future. That you know that choices have consequences. That you are not going to be a drug addict. That you do not have to give in to other people's sexual needs when you don't want to have sex with them. That you are not going to be a gang member. That you will not wear a Burqa. That women have the same rights to self-determination as men. That you will not worship fictional deities. That you are not going to smoke cigarettes to fit in. It's your life. You own it. But you have to say NO to claim it.