

The woman who said NO to a king

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One day I was sitting on my porch reading a book- it was following a conversation I had with someone and we were talking about stress and busyness and frustration with others and they said you really need to get this book about boundaries and read it so I did. Boundaries, when to say yes, how to say no, to take control of your life. And so I was sitting outside on our deck reading this book. And my neighbor came to the fence and said he was cleaning out his house and had some books and wondered if I wanted any of them. He showed me a couple he had in his hands - and I knew instantly that I was never going to read them. And so I said - sure! Thanks so much! And he left his pile of books for me to do something with.

There is a deep fear in saying NO - and it often revolves around our desire to be kind. I want to be kind, and compassionate and faithful and usually I equate those things with saying yes to what is asked of me by others.

How many of you would say you struggle with saying NO - when someone asks you to do something, your boss, your friends, strangers whoever - and you struggle to say no?

I had decided, as I guess many of you have - that saying no and setting limits on others is not loving - now then there are those of you who have absolutely no problem saying no and actually ALWAYS say NO first, or all the reasons it won't work first. - you know who you are - or at least the people around you know who you are.

The other day I was with this little girl who was about 18 months and she was wanting something in her bag that her mother had packed for her. And so the little girl was struggling trying to unzip the bag...so I reach over and tried to help her and the girl snatched it back and said no. I said - would you like some

help? No - so I waited and watch her continue trying. And continue trying. And continue trying. So I said again - would you like some help and reached towards the bag - No. This went on for a LONG while - She never said yes and after a long while I just took the bag and opened it for her much to her dismay.

Kids love the word NO because it is the first time they are able to begin setting boundaries - where they start to realize they are their own person - separate from others, and they get to make their own choices. And it is important to allow children to begin to develop their own boundaries and teach them that they are in control of them. When parents teach children that setting boundaries or saying no is bad, they are teaching them that others can do with them as they wish. To feel safe in our broken world, children, teenagers, adults need to have the power to say things like

No

I disagree

I choose not to

Stop please

That is wrong

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In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see. Fences, signs, walls, manicured lawns or hedges are all physical boundaries. This is where my property begins... Boundaries define soccer fields, and cities and states. Relational and Intangible boundaries are just as real and just as important but they are not always as easy to see.

“Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> pg 31

For instance we all have skin as a tangible boundary, but then there is also this little area around me that I kinda want to claim and I don't want others standing in my space. We have - boundaries about what we are willing to do or not willing to do. Who we are going to be around. Time is a boundary. We get to choose how we spend our time.

You can either have a few hours of my time or someone with no boundaries on their time would have any amount of time someone needed. A boundary is deciding how I let myself be treated.

Boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out. At its most basic, boundaries are when to say yes, and when to say no.

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Queen Vashti and the King teach us about boundaries -

The book of Esther is featured only one Sunday in the three-year lectionary cycle that we usually use to determine our scripture lessons and that the particular passages featured on that Sunday are about Queen Esther and not Queen Vashti,

I grew up knowing next to nothing about Queen Vashti. As a young girl, I had not learned the story about this woman who said no to a king.

Merry with wine, the King of Persia summoned her to come before all the men who have been drinking and partying with him over the past 187 days. His motive is clear: he wants to crown the final day of his party by showing off his beautiful queen.

Queen Vashti refuses.

We are not told why she refuses to come before all these rowdy and drunken men.

So angry and humiliated is the king that he immediately turns to his seven legal counselors about what to do. One of them, Memucan, says, "Not only has Queen Vashti done wrong to the king, but also to all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus." Now all the wives will begin to refuse their husband. Suddenly what began as a personal dispute has mushroomed into a political crisis. Suddenly the king is not the only man who is humiliated by Vashti's "no;" every man in the empire has been offended.

This is quite a humorous story because of its absurdity. The excess of the king, him wanting to show her off. And then his response to her refusal. And yet it is all too real and prevalent in this world to this day that men think women's bodies are there for their pleasure.

Here is the thing about her no -

Others got mad at her, really mad. Does that mean she was wrong? When you have healthy boundaries - people with unhealthy boundaries are NOT going to like it and they are going to be angry and they are going to reframe it as - you are in the wrong.

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[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FzX3cJPn6gOX4O70pefYzN0\\_AM4wOogV/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FzX3cJPn6gOX4O70pefYzN0_AM4wOogV/view). Pg. 31

This is SUCH typical behavior in an abusive relationship - they hit you - and then if you say that isn't ok - the person who hit you will be angry at you and try to convince you that you are in the wrong. But it is ALSO when say you are working for someone and they make you work overtime over and over and over again and the first couple times you know they are in a bind but then after awhile and nothing ever changes in how work is distributed so you eventually say no I can't - you set a boundary because that is what you need for your own health and for your family - chances are THEY will be angry and they will

reframe it as you are in the wrong and are not the loyal employee they once thought. That does not mean you should not have said no? Of course not. That doesn't mean it will be easy.

Another thing about Queen Vashti's no - It cost her that relationship. Her status, her well being, her reputation, and in fact at first there seemed to be no point in her no- All the king did was get another women. But her act of defiance, her willingness to create healthy boundaries of what she was unwilling to do, her powerful NO put in motion and changed history.

When people cross a boundary and they treat us in a way that is not acceptable, or we are asked to do something we don't want to do and we draw a boundary with consequences, it will not be easy and it may cost us the relationship - if they are unwilling to respect our boundary. Or it may strength our relationship. "Boundaries are a litmus test for the quality of our relationships."<sup>2</sup> If they only love our yes - and our compliance - they don't really love us.

It is fascinating to me how some of the most fundamental religious of communities that have strict boundaries about what isn't allowed. No caffeine, no this, no that. And yet it is very common in these fundamentalist communities to use faith as a tool to tell women their bodies are not their own. That being faithful to God is allowing others to set their boundaries for them. That their bodies are for other peoples entertainment.

When people try to say that —

Remember Queen Vashti -

Sometimes we mistakenly think that to say yes to everything is how we are faithful and loving, and to say no when someone asks us to do something is self centered. We should love one another and deny ourselves. Problems arise when boundaries of responsibility are confused. We are to love one another,

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<sup>2</sup> pg 112 Boundaries

not BE one another. I can't behave for you. I can't work through disappointment that limits bring for you. I can't feel your feelings for you. I can't grow for you; only you can. Likewise you can't grow for me. I am responsible for myself, and I am responsible to you.

This happens a lot in parent/child relationships. A parent loves their child so much they would do anything for them. They never want to squelch their spirit so they never say "NO" and so the child then has them up playing in the living room with them in middle of the night. This literally happens y'all. It begins as a deep desire to care for another - but if you can't and don't tell your children NO then a couple things - they won't know how to tell others no - OR they won't be able to hear other's NO and you've set them up for a lifetime of thinking they don't have to respect others boundaries. If you can't say NO - then you really can't say YES.

We need boundaries to thrive, and boundaries are in fact showing love.

Now... Before you think I'm giving you justification for saying NO to everything. Here is the thing - boundaries aren't NOT just about keeping the bad out, and saying no. Our boundaries need to be flexible and permeable and have ways for the good to get in. So if you build up walls all around you and say NO ALL the time you also have boundary issues. It means you can't let things in. You can't EVER hear other people's yes -when they want to be in relationship with you. And if you can't hear no - you have boundary problems.

The more clear you are with your boundaries, the more you are free to be loving and caring. Some of the most loving and caring people, have the clearest boundaries, they KNOW what is theirs to do.

Healthy people CAN hear then RESPECT another person's NO. Unhealthy people can't hear no.

Sometimes, people in power, people in control won't approve of your NO. If they are benefiting from you they won't like nor approve of your NO. (No's can be threatening - it means you can't control someone if they refuse to listen to you and obey you.) Don't let people tell you it's NOT Christian to have boundaries.

An important part of our life as Christians is finding the courage and the encouragement to say NO when we need to, not because it's the easy thing to do, but because it's the right thing to do. Establishing boundaries is faithful and necessary for our flourishing and being the person God created us to be. If you don't establish your boundaries, someone else will.

We as a culture have work to do in empowering people to say NO - but also enforcing the consequences on people who can't hear others's NO... who disrespect the boundaries of another person. No means no.

I think the courage, and faith that her self worth didn't come from the king but from God is what enabled Queen Vashti to say NO - I am not willing to be treated in this way. I am free to choose how I spend this one wild and precious life. God says to us, my yoke is easy and my burden is lite - if you experience faith as this oppressive force, or life as this heavy thing lets talk.