

The Yes Effect

2 Corinthians 1:20

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Heavenly Father, we're so grateful to come into Your presence at the close of this year and to recognize Your faithfulness in our lives, in our families and in the church. We're grateful for the ministry You've entrusted to Your servants who have guided us through this past year. They have been such a gift and blessing, through their lives, their words and leading us in worship. As we look ahead to a New Year, thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your presence with us and for the promises we have that You are indeed able to do exceeding abundantly far above all we could ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The missionary Adoniram Judson served for many years in what was then called Burma (now called Myanmar) without seeing any fruit of his ministry. There were no baptisms of people who had come to faith in Jesus Christ. When asked about the fruit, he answered, "As much as there is a God Who will fulfill all the promises, that is the evidence of success. It's not in the numbers who have come to faith, but it's the fact that there is a God Who will fulfill every one of His promises.: That was the hope of the missionary who hadn't seen the fruit in his day.

But today we have seen the fruit, which perhaps comes from seeds that were sown during his time on that field of Burma. Recently a group of God's servants in that country gathered from every one of the provinces and together committed themselves to seeing the nation turn to faith in Jesus Christ in both word and deed. They longed to see the evidence of cultural transformation in that land that for so long has been so far from the witness of Jesus Christ.

During that event, 80 representatives of the church pinned on the map where they were from, covering every single province. These people—across denominations and from every province—committed themselves to collaborating together to serve God in their country. They pledged themselves to bringing spiritual transformation, by God's grace and enabling power. At the end of that meeting, with tears flowing freely, we sang "Amazing Grace."



My friend Al Jones, who was leading the conference, said that through the eyes of faith, every province from north to south and east to west had been adopted and would find hope and life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thank God for the faithfulness of servants like Adoniram Judson who have gone out in faith and served without seeing the fruit but holding on to the promise. That is our hope as well as we look forward to a New Year. We see challenges before us in many ways—individually within our families, in our occupations and studies—yet how wonderful it is that God’s promises never fail, but are new every morning, beginning tomorrow morning and throughout the New Year.

In a changing world where promises are often broken, is it not encouraging to know that God always keeps His Word? As we read in 2 Corinthians 1:20 in the New Living Translation, *“For all of God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding ‘Yes!’ And through Christ, our ‘Amen’ (which means ‘Yes’) ascends to God for his glory.”* The Yes Effect is proclaimed in the Word of God and we should respond to God’s call by saying, “Yes, whatever the challenge may be to us individually, to our community and to our family.” Whatever it is, we ultimately see the potential for the greater glory of God. And New Year’s Eve is an ideal time for us to say yes to God.

Pastor Sunday asked me to bring a message on this last day of 2017 based on something from the Yes Effect to motivate us here at New Covenant Bible Church to take new measures of faith and respond to God in the affirmative as we launch into 2018. Having just celebrated Christmas, we’re reminded that the Yes Effect is profiled for us in many lives throughout Scripture. These lives can be inspirational, informational and encouraging regarding what is involved when we respond to God with the affirmation, “Yes, we’re willing.”

So today, we are considering the characteristics of the Yes Effect. As we say Yes to God, there are certain consequences that are compelling. The pattern is found not only in the lives of Elizabeth and Mary, but also in the lives of our Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Then we will see the life of Martin Luther and the life of a modern-day servant of God as also being examples of how the Yes Effect has led to four different outcomes.

The Yes Effect of Mary and Elizabeth

Our first example, whom we focused on last week, was Mary and her cousin Elizabeth. They illustrate the potential, the power and the pattern of the Yes Effect. Mary received the joy of the Lord communicated through God’s messenger Gabriel in his report of a new happening. If you remember, it was *“good news of great joy”* (Luke 2:10). Though Mary couldn’t quite

comprehend it all, she allowed God's presence to overshadow her fear and lack of clarity. She didn't question God's estimation of her, but instead trusted that He thought she could do this—and if He thought she could, then she could, through His presence and power. Mary has provided an example we can follow that gives us hope, even as we recognize our own shortcomings and inadequacies every day. As we say yes to God, His enabling grace will work in our lives to go beyond what we personally are able to do in our own strength.

With this good news in her heart, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, who is also in the middle of a miracle. Upon hearing Mary's greeting, she felt the baby leap in her womb and the Bible says she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She told Mary, *"For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy"* (Luke 1:44). Elizabeth affirmed Mary and joy was multiplied for both of them as they shared their stories. The word "happy" comes into the text in the Common English Bible. *"Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her"* (Luke 1:45). That's where true happiness comes—in knowing the Lord will do what He promised. We too can walk in that faith and step into that work. That's what happened with Elizabeth and their joy was multiplied when they shared with each other what God had done in their story.

The first characteristic of the Yes Effect is that it doesn't come from the revelation of man, but through the revelation of God. In every case, God reveals something to the individual. With Mary, He revealed His good news of great joy through the angel Gabriel. Then the joy of the Lord was multiplied for both Mary and Elizabeth as they shared their story.

Joy is the second characteristic of the Yes Effect that one experiences when one says Yes to God and sees God at work through that Yes.

The third characteristic of the Yes Effect is the engagement in the community of faith. Elizabeth and Mary represent the beginning of a new community of faith, as Elizabeth affirmed Mary with those words, *"Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her."* Today the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is that community.

Then the fourth characteristic of the Yes Effect is the advancement of the gospel in both word and deed. The fruit of Mary's womb—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—is the gospel incarnate, both in His words and in His every deed on earth.

The Yes Effect of Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ transformed history. His Yes Effect experience was like none other, because He was the Son of God. It was there in Gethsemane that He withdrew from the disciples. We read these words in Luke 22:41-42: *"He...knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father,*

if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.'

That's the Yes Effect of the Son of God to God the Father.

Consequently, in doing this, He also defines the term "Yes Effect" as being the effect of saying yes to God. Perhaps even as you are at the end of one year and the beginning of another, you might realize there are some places where you are holding out, such as reading Scripture, sharing your heart's burden, being open to the encouragement of a close friend or family member, or even stepping out in faith to move to a new area of God's purpose for you. You know God wants you to say Yes, but what is it going to take for that step to be taken, trusting in God's enabling grace?

It has well been said about the Lord Jesus Christ, about His example as none other, that all the armies that ever marched and all the navies that ever were built and all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as this one Man. Jesus exemplified characteristics of the Yes Effect as no one else could, for He was the revelation of God's Word which became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He embodied the joy of the Lord, even as He said to His disciples, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full*" (John 15:11).

Jesus engaged the community of faith by sending out the disciples as His witnesses, with the apostles as the foundation of the church and Himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Jesus advanced the gospel in word and deed, mandating His followers to do likewise. "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:19-20). He promises to be with us, not just for another year, but until He returns.

The Yes Effect of Paul and Lydia

The Yes Effect of Jesus is supreme for our encouragement and as an example, but we also have flesh and blood examples—the Apostle Paul and Lydia, the business woman from Thyatira. It was Luke the physician who reported in the Acts of the Apostles that the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from speaking the Word in the province of Asia. Paul went down to Troas where he had a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with him, "Come to Macedonia and help us." Concluding that God had called him, Paul said Yes. As soon as he had seen that vision, the Bible says in Acts 16:17 that he got ready to leave for Macedonia.

As soon as we receive the calling from God, let's not wait until tomorrow. Let's take the example of Paul. As soon as we receive that convicting nudge, that revelation, let's take that step of faith—whatever that might look like to you. And it will be different for most of us.

It was then that Paul and his band of missionaries, including Luke, Silas and Timothy, encountered a group of people, who in fact were all women. I don't know why there weren't any men there—can anybody help me with that? Why was it only women who were out there waiting for that word that would change the whole continent of Europe? It's a challenge to us men. Sometimes we let the women step up, but we need to accompany them and maybe even encourage them.

In this case, as Paul was speaking the truth of the gospel, it was one of these women whose eyes and heart God opened to receive it. Lydia, the business woman from Thyatira, said Yes and became a new creature in Christ. Her second Yes was, "Yes, I'm ready to be baptized." Then, "Yes, I'm ready to invite you, Paul and your friends, to come to our home to spend the night." And finally, Lydia said Yes and opened her compound to the first church in all of Europe—the church at Philippi.

So now we have another godly woman, along with Elizabeth and Mary, who said Yes to God. May they each encourage and inspire us with their faith and readiness to say Yes to God. It was the Yes Effect of Paul and Lydia that advanced the gospel to Europe for the very first time. Recently Pastor David gave us this quote from Christopher Ash:

It's grace that it never stops with us. It never stops at any boundary, any border of culture. It's the nature of grace that it's always reaching one group of people in order to reach another group of people.

This is what has happened. It started in Jerusalem and now it's in Europe. Grace has gone from one group of people to another group of people. Later, Paul wrote a Yes Effect letter to this church in Philippi from a prison in Rome and that church became the only church to consistently support him financially and through prayer. The church with which he would have this special relationship all began in this meeting with Lydia.

In Philippians 1:3-6 Paul wrote, "*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.*" And the reason? "*[B]ecause of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this...*" and this is the promise that goes, not to the individual, but to the plurality of the community in their church, "*...that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*"

When you say Yes to God, these are the kind of effects you can expect, as this church became the host church of a movement that launched the gospel across Europe

Here we have the promise through the Apostle Paul that they were going to be a source of great joy for him and that God would complete among them (plural) the good work He has begun. At the end, Paul tells them, “You are my joy and my crown” (Philippians 4:1). So we see the characteristics of the Yes Effect emerging in the life of Paul.

First, he had the revelation of the triune God: the Holy Spirit in Philippians 1:19, Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection (3:20-21), and God the Father as the God of peace (4:9).

Second, Paul speaks of the joy of the Lord. From beginning to end, his letter carries a message of joy: “*In every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy*” (Philippians 1:4).

Third, he engages in the community of faith in Philippi. He mentions longing for their companionship (1:8). It’s a community with the deepest Christian love. To be sure, there were issues to be worked through, but Paul demonstrates the desire of the servant of God who is called to say, “What we’re looking for as we engage our community is deep love and joy.”

Then he takes it to a final step, saying that the community of faith should radiate two things: righteousness and justice (1:10-11). These should characterize not only their community, but also set an example to the city itself. The hope is that the righteousness and justice present in the community of faith would create the desire, the need and the inspiration for righteousness and justice in the broader secular community itself. They were to be a transforming church on a transforming mission, to see transformed lives and a transformed culture. That’s what happened in Europe.

In 2009, there was an event in partnership with Tim Keller called “The Global Cities Initiative”—a global summit in New York City. At that event, Tim expressed their goal in this statement: “Envisioning the church with vibrancy and visibility that represents a presence that cannot be ignored by the larger culture with the potential of transforming that culture.” It’s no wonder that in New York, the secular press called Tim Keller “The Pastor of New York.” His life has touched that city, with the church then influencing the culture to the point of at least recognition.

The final evidence that the Yes Effect resulted in the advancement of the gospel in word and deed through the life of Paul is that for the first time, Europe was impacted by the gospel because God’s servants were faithful to the call.

As application for us here at New Covenant, we’ve heard of several opportunities for our congregation. First, giving toward our building. Second, ministering to our “Judea and

Samaria,” including sleeping over at the Lazarus House here in St. Charles and providing meals there. Then, giving toward the needs of those who go to the uttermost parts of the world, the many wonderful missionaries we’ve come to know and love in this church. Plus, supporting the youth outreach trip that will be going to the Ukraine this summer. These are ways we can engage in a very tangible way.

The Yes Effect of Martin Luther

Throughout 2017 we have been thinking about Martin Luther’s legacy, celebrating the 500th anniversary of his influence that permeated not only the Christian world but also the global world. Especially in northern Europe, he impacted many dimensions of life both spiritually and culturally. We’ve seen this was launched through a moment of faith—a Yes Effect moment—when he was seeking insight from God on a message he was to give. He came to the conviction, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that justification is by faith alone without works. Out of that conviction he pinned his 95 theses on that church door in Wittenberg. That started a spiritual movement we are still part of to this day.

Luther’s soul searching and awakening sparked the Protestant Reformation. He wrote, “I gave heed to the context of the words from Romans 1:17, for in it is the gospel, that the righteousness of God is revealed by faith. As it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” The Yes Effect of the Holy Spirit illuminating the mind of Martin Luther brought into focus the heart of the gospel, which is considered to be the essential core of Christianity. It transformed his life and led to the Reformation we have been celebrating this past year. Luther said, “When I discovered that I was born again of the Holy Spirit, the doors of paradise swung open and I walked through.” That was his description and it’s the experience of many from then until now.

What were the characteristics of the Yes Effect in Luther’s life?

First was the revelation that Luther said came from God: “The internal clarity of Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind of the believer, illuminating his mind to see the truth of Scripture as the truth of God.”

Secondly, Luther understood the joy of the Lord. He wrote, “The heart overflows with gladness, and leaps and dances for joy... In the flash of a moment came the deep secret of joy. You will have as much joy and laughter in life as you have faith in God.” [Can you see Martin Luther dancing?] He had found his God. Through his experience, the Holy Spirit is active and has taught us as well.

Thirdly, he engaged the community of faith. Luther joined an Augustinian monastic community of faith and ended up launching a movement that reshaped the religious landscape of the world.

Then the advancement of the gospel in word and deed was almost beyond imagination. It has been documented in the World Christian Database—which is overseen by Marv Newell, a member of our church—that the Protestant community that identifies with Martin Luther’s decision now numbers 560 million. They are found in almost every one of the world’s 234 countries. This is truly the expansion of the gospel in word and deed, which is one of the characteristics of the Yes Effect.

The Yes Effect of Sama’an

Our last example of the Yes Effect is of a current-day servant. His name is Sama’an, which means “the servant of the most high God.” It all began for Sama’an on the day he had been invited by a trash collector—whose name is Qidees, which means “saint”—to visit his people at the Zabbaleen community on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt. Qidees had come with his cart every day to gather rubbish from Sama’an’s street.

Sensing the Holy Spirit’s prompting, Sama’an began to share the good news of Jesus with Qidees. As their talks grew longer and more frequent, Sama’an invited Qidees into his home to continue their conversation. And would you believe that a miracle took place? Qidees was drawn to the gospel, confessing his sin and accepting the Lord Jesus as his Savior. It was the Yes Effect moment in the heart of Qidees. The words of Sama’an, the servant/saint, brought about the formation of what today is one of the largest—if not the largest—church of Christian followers in the entire Middle East. And it all went back to that one moment of faithfulness in sharing the gospel.

As Qidees grew in the knowledge of the Lord, he looked with compassion at his people, the Zabbaleens, and at his neighborhood, Garbage City. He looked into stalls thick with pig slop. He walked with the gamblers, drug abusers, alcoholics and aggressors. He ached at the brokenness of his people. Soon he began to share his heavy heart with Sama’an. Day after day he pleaded with Sama’an, “Come and help my people. Tell them about Jesus.” From 1972 to 1974, he gave the same invitation to Sama’an without relenting.

Finally, Sama’an got the sense that this invitation wasn’t coming from a man, but through a man from God. [Have you ever experienced that? Sensing an invitation that’s coming to you from God through another person?] One Friday at the beginning of March, as Qidees was once again begging him, Sama’an sensed the Lord saying, “I’m the One Who’s calling you. Go with this

man.” Sama’an said Yes to God, relinquished his fear and agreed to meet Qidees after work that evening. That turned out to be a very big Yes regarding what was to come, resulting in joy for many.

Sometimes we think our Yeses are very small, and it might seem small when you’re saying it, situationally with a family or community member. But if it’s a calling on your life, God can make big things out of small things. That’s why He says in His Word not to think the small things are so small, because God can make them big. Little did Sama’an know that the Yes Effect would advance the gospel—and transform the community of faith living in Garbage City.

But there was a strong pull against the call. As Sama’an went to Ramses Square—that famous place in Cairo—to catch a bus to the meeting point, he began to have second thoughts. He found himself catching a bus in the wrong direction. But as they drove around a roundabout, the bus tilted and he felt kind of like Jonah—like he was on a ship going anywhere but Nineveh, but instead it was a bus going around the Ramses Circle. Sama’an knew how Jonah’s story ended and realized he needed to change his course. So he got out of that bus at the next stop and got on to a bus going the other direction, headed toward Qidees and Garbage City.

The heart of God working in Sama’an was about to bring about a change not only in the culture of Garbage City, but also in the city of Cairo—and in fact the entire Middle East. After reaching Garbage City, Sama’an and Qidees walked for a long time, past shacks made of used metal and walls built from garbage that loomed around them. Sama’an had grown up as a farmer’s son, so he was used to barn smells, but his lungs could not handle the sickening stench of Garbage City.

Not surprisingly, many who lived there were physically very ill. Toxins from the garbage and the sewage seeped into the ground, into the water and into the bodies of the people who drank the water. But the damage didn’t stop there. The community had an astronomical percentage of addictions to alcohol, gambling and drugs. There in the middle of the rotten food, the scrap materials and the filth, Sama’an saw a group of people who themselves had been discarded as trash. What had broken the heart of Qidees, the garbage collector, was now breaking the heart of Sama’an.

What’s it going to take to break your heart? We’re used to being Christian. This is our culture. God can do things through us, but it’s tough to get things done unless our heart is broken and responsive. That’s the condition that must be open to God’s move as we enter into a New Year.

Sama’an’s heart had been broken and things began to happen. The smell alone was hardly manageable, but the sight of it all was more than he could bear. “I can’t help these

people,” he sighed under his breath. Sure, he could ride the bus back to his comfortable apartment, but he could never un-see what he’d seen.

So instead of looking down at what he saw in Garbage City, something inside him caused Sama’an to look up. There he saw a small mountain that towered above the district’s filth. The name of the mountain was Mokattam, which literally means “broken off.” As Sama’an looked around at the garbage and the people in that dump, smelled the odor of the city and stood in its filth, he told the crowd, “I can do nothing to help you.”

Have you ever felt that way about a great need? He knew the Lord had told him to come to this forsaken place, but he now stood traumatized by the great need he was witnessing. He didn’t know what to do—but he knew the One Who did. So once more Sama’an said, “I can do nothing to help....” But then he completed his sentence by saying, “...except to start praying in this place.” That spirit of prayer, directed toward the One Who knows all and can do all, helped Sama’an break his paralysis and he started to move.

Sama’an arranged to meet Qidees two days later, on a Sunday morning. The need around him was too much for human eyes to take in. He knew God had met with His people at Mokattam in times past, so he looked up at that mountain and then climbed it. Half-way up, he closed his eyes to the impossible scene below, listen and expecting. In that spirit of listening and expecting, he found the opening of a long-forgotten cave where the monks used to pray and worship. For three consecutive Sundays, Sama’an prayed there from morning to evening. He asked, “Why have You brought me here, Lord? What do You want me to do here? Tell me Your will for this place.” On the third Sunday, he took two people with him and prayed until the sun started to set.

When I was hearing Sama’an’s story two years ago, this is what really touched my heart. This miracle was too much to be possible. But I saw the conviction of God’s servant Sama’an, who was speaking to me, and it came alive. I knew God was able to do the impossible—but could He do this?

Here’s what happened. As darkness closed in there on the mountain, a storm began to brew. The wind whipped around Sama’an, billowing in his ears, muffling the sounds of the city below. Dust stirred all around. He shielded his face with his hands. Soon, discarded magazines and office papers soared high up into the air. Pieces of cardboard and plastic flew about, as if the very breath of God had brought them to life. It seemed like everything in Garbage City was rising up. The wind had lifted up crumpled bits of trash, whirled them around in the air and tossed them up as high as Sama’an’s vantage point on the mountainside.

He squinted and coughed into his hands. Papers continued to fly higher, indiscernible from the birds in the sky. Out of the many papers that rose up from below, one single sheet floated down to settle itself on the rock where Sama'an had knelt. Then, the whipping wind calmed to a gentle breeze. Sama'an's friend reached out to pick up that one piece of paper from the ground. It was a page from a Book we should be familiar with. Can you help me? Yes, it was a page from the Bible.

As the last bit of sunlight shone on the mountainside, they opened their eyes to the Word of God on the thin page in front of them: *"And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people'"* (Acts 18:9-10).

Sama'an looked at the cave where people of God in ages past had come to pray. He looked down below at the dwelling places constructed of spare parts. Suddenly, he sensed in his spirit that God wanted the citizens of Garbage City themselves to rise up and pray on this holy mountain, to build a sanctuary in that sacred place, that he would see himself one day. And it came to pass.



The massive cave church of Cairo's Zabbaleen community has become one of the largest Christian churches in the Middle East. Do you know how they built it? They had to spend years carving out the stone to create the space where some 70,000 worshippers come throughout the week.



Do you know what happened to Garbage City and the Zabbaleen people? They were transformed. It's one of the stories in the news today that you can see online. The Yes Effect is about ordinary people like Sama'an—like you, like me—seeing extraordinary change, adventure, activated faith, transformed people and communities.

The Yes Effect examples are here to motivate and encourage us to take new measures of faith in our lives—wherever we are in our journey, whatever age, whatever family, whatever situation in our work or our mission or our church. As we go into 2018, may we respond to God in the affirmative, saying Yes as we launch into this New Year.

We pray that His Kingdom would come and that His will would be done in our lives, in our church, in our community, in St. Charles, in the Chicago area, Illinois, the United States and the world. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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