

# SOMETHINGS GOTTA GO!

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A Guilt-Free Guide to Saying NO  
to Make Room for Your Purpose



BY JOHN ARNOLD

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## **A GUILT-FREE GUIDE TO SAYING 'NO' TO MAKE ROOM FOR YOUR PURPOSE**

If your purpose hasn't been a priority in the past you're going to need to rearrange your priorities to make room for it now. This inevitably means saying no to some current commitments or opportunities that arise.

Saying no can be difficult even painful. I know. I used to personally struggle with telling people no until two things happened.

First, I discovered insights on why I kept saying yes to the wrong things. I'm going to let you in on that juicy bit of helpful information in this guilt free guide to saying no in just a moment.

Second, I figured out a formula to politely and rather comfortably say no without resorting to cliché's like, "I'm too busy." (Who isn't busy) Or, saying, "I need to check my schedule and think about that" when if I was painfully honest with myself, I already knew I wanted to say no. I just didn't have a good excuse.

By the end of this guide you won't need excuses, you'll have given yourself permission to say yes to your priorities instead. It's much better way to live.

### **What do I mean by saying yes to priorities?**

I was standing in the church office talking to a friend who was using our copier. He was a pastor, a licensed therapist, a spouse, and a father of two children. He was busier than a one armed man hanging wall paper. I couldn't imagine how he handle it all well. Well...that's because he couldn't.

Standing at the copier, the weight of the world seemed heavy on his shoulders. His eyes were full of weariness. I innocently asked him how he was, he replied 'Busy'. Then he lamented, "I've got to learn how to say 'no'."

I half-jokingly (and half not) replied, "No you don't. You're great at saying no." He

looked at me puzzled. I continued, “You have said no to your health, no to your family, no to sleep, no to exercise, and no to eating well. You are great at saying no. You’ve got to learn how to say yes to the right things.” It was a hard truth to hear, but he heard it. I knew it to be true because I had 100% been in the place of lost priorities just a short time before this encounter.

In fact, it took my toddler daughter asking me if I lived at the church to wake me up from just how lost my priorities were. Yeah, that really happened and it was gut wrenching.

## **Over-commitment stinks**

When you over-commit life is miserable. You are burned out, strung out, missing appointments, turning in shabby work, and sacrificing sleep. In fact, you’re likely so sleep deprived that you don’t even realize that what you think of as feel rested isn’t anything near to what rested is. You’re just not thoroughly exhausted.

You live in what I called deferred joy. All your hopes and dreams are put off until some mythical someday when life’s going to be better. Unfortunately, that someday doesn’t come because you too busy scrambling after other people’s priorities, stamping out priorities and just trying to get through the day.

You placate your longing for something better by asserting everything will be better, “Just as soon as school lets out”, “Once this project at work ends”, “When I am no longer chairing the fundraising committee”, or “As soon as we finish renovating the kitchen”.

Unfortunately, someone always comes along with a request before we get to that time of respite, so we fill it before we even get there. This can lead to resentment gnawing at your insides while hang your head and wonder, “Why, oh why did I ever say yes?”

## **Well, that’s a good question. Why do you keep overcommitting?**

Why indeed? Why would you repeatedly say yes to things you don’t want to do? Here are three mindsets that will trap you into saying yes when you don’t want to:

## **TRAP 1: You Don't Understand the Difference Between Could and Should**

I am very versatile. There are numerous ways I could help someone. I can do everything from being president of a board to fixing a computer problem to speaking at an event.

BUT...Being able to do something, doesn't necessarily mean you should.

So often when someone would ask me to take on a project, I felt obligated to say yes as long as I didn't have a direct conflict or I couldn't think of an immediate excuse. Hence, my "Let me check my calendar" response I mentioned earlier.

You scramble for excuses when you aren't clear on your priorities. If your priorities are clear, you don't need excuses. You know where you want to spend your time and you can with a clean conscience say, "I'm sorry, but I have another commitment." Your criteria changes from could you to should you say yes.

As you get clear on your purpose, one of the things you'll be doing in the course, Fire Up Your Purpose, is creating a standing appointment for work on your goals. (You'll learn all about this in Module 4) Treat that standing appointment like a doctor's appointment, meeting with your boss, or equally unyielding commitment and don't hesitate to say, "No I have another commitment." We're going to unpack saying 'no' in more detail below.

But first, your purpose is just one of several priorities that you need to decide must come before other people's requests. For example, care of your health must be near the very top of your list. When your health gets compromise everything gets compromised.

For me, this epiphany came when a friend said, "John, self-care is a holy obligation." Those words came during a period when I was utterly overextended. I was about to crash. It was as if I was on a plane going down and he was a flight attendant reminding me, "You have to put your mask on first." Furthermore, how can we give God our very best if we don't care of ourselves.

When I became clear on the priority of my health and family over volunteering and work, I was able to give myself permission to say, “I am sorry, I have another commitment.” I could do this guilt free even if all I planned on doing was staying at home with my wife and children. That became an acceptable response for me. It was not only acceptable, but wise and prudent.

Sometimes, I must remind myself, “You can do anything, but you can’t do everything. You only have so many hours in a day and only so much of you to go around.”

So one of the first steps to being able to say ‘no’ without feeling guilty is recognizing your priorities along with your limitations. That ever yes comes with an opportunity cost. Overtime at work means less time at home. Attending an event you don’t care about means missing your work out at the gym. Staying late for a dinner party means cutting into sleep. You get the idea.

When you become clear on the cost of saying yes, then saying no becomes worlds easier. You don’t have to come up with an excuse because you genuinely have a prior commitment.

## **TRAP 2: You are a People Pleaser**

Another shortcoming in my ability to say no was being a people pleaser. I would worry that saying no would disappoint or anger someone. If you are a people pleaser you need to embrace three truths to gain your freedom.

First, just because someone is disappointed doesn’t mean you are a bad person. People sometimes have unfair expectations. That’s their problem. Their disappointment says more about them than you.

Second, sometimes disappointing someone isn’t avoidable. When you have competing demands on your time the inconvenient reality is that you are left with a forced choice of who you disappoint. Everyone can’t be a winner with your time.

Third, odds are that you are way over thinking people’s reactions. Most of the time when I say no, the person asking me just moves on to someone else. He or

she seldom gives my rejection another thought.

### **TRAP 3: You are Overly Responsible (or Have an Inflated Ego)**

Lastly, many times I took on responsibilities because I thought that if I didn't, then no one else would. Or, (and this is where the ego comes in) no one could fulfill the request as well as me. If you feel that way, may be your right. May be no one does take on a task you said no to. Or, maybe someone does it horribly. But then again what if may be someone takes responsibility who actually does it better than you. Gasp—say it isn't so!

You need to also consider this — If you take on too much, who is going to sleep for you, exercise for you, parent your children for you, be the best friend to your spouse for you, spend time with God for you. Some priorities must be maintained by you and only you. Which of your priorities are can you not delegate? This is a critical question that you should answer to discover your highest non-negotiable priorities.

### **So how do you escape these traps?**

#### **Escape Step 1: Give Yourself Permission to Say NO**

First, you have to give yourself permission to say no. That's going to be a whole lot easier if you will embrace the three truths I laid out above, which are in short:

- Just because you can, doesn't mean you should.
- Just because you say no, doesn't mean you are a bad person.
- Just because something may not get done, doesn't mean you have to do it.

More importantly, in order to give yourself permission you must fill your mind with a picture of the ideal outcomes you want for your purpose and your life. During the course, Fire Up Your Purpose, you'll learn the value of creating affirmations – powerful present tense pictures in your mind of your goals achieved. These images and your desire for them has to be so clear that intrusive request will be unacceptable. Then and only then will you say no easily and find it permissible.

#### **Escape Step 2: Have Planned Responses**

You may have noticed in many scenarios I said yes, because I didn't have a 'no' readily available. Here is a simple formula for graciously saying no.

1. Thank someone for the opportunity.
2. Tell them no and cite another commitment or limitation.
3. Say yes to helping them in another way if you can.

For example, if someone asks you to serve on a committee at your children's school for an upcoming event, you might reply:

*"I am honored that you have asked me, but I have to say no. Right now I have committed as much as I can volunteering at the school. I could however post flyers at work for you to help promote the event."*

Or, if someone asks you to speak on a weekend you intended to spend at home, you might reply:

*"I appreciate the invitation. I am flattered that you want me as your speaker. I need to say no though. I have been gone too many weekends and need that time to get some things done at home. However, I would recommend you call \_\_\_\_\_ (alternative speaker). He's really great."*

Lastly, if someone invites you to an event you don't want to attend, you may reply:

*"Thank you for the invitation. I have to say no. I have another commitment that evening, but I would love to have coffee with you next week if you have time."*

I have never had anyone push me on what my other commitment is. Even if they did, it's really okay to say, *"I have been gone way too much and I need to be home that day with my family."*

Or, you can cite another high priority. It's even okay to say, *"I have been way overextended and I've got some down time."*

Sadly, most people can relate to being overly busy and needing down time. Whatever your response is, keep it simple so you don't give someone an opening

for pushing harder. If they do, hold your ground with a simple, *“Sorry I can’t.”*

### **Escape Step 3: Take the Earliest Opportunity to eEscape**

Never tell someone let me think about it, unless you truly need to think about it. If your gut is telling you no, then don’t waste your time or theirs by stringing them along. Say no now. Procrastinating just creates an issue you for you to stew on. You don’t need that stress and you’re just burning up time they may need to find someone else.

## **APPLICATION**

Saying no is essential for saying yes to your purpose. Do not beat yourself up for doing the right thing.. With practice you will be able to say no more readily. Take a few moments to do the following actions to prepare yourself to say no to distractions and yes to your priorities.

1. **Count the cost.** What is the cost of saying ‘yes’ to the wrong things? Make a list of the things you are missing out on because of being overcommitted. What could the long term impact be of missing these things. For example, lack of sleep. Over time this could have a serious health impact on you. What about time for your spouse? Neglect this could lead to marital problems or divorce.
2. **Complete all the exercises in Fire Up Your Purpose to solidify a vision of what’s most important to you.** This will strengthen your resolve that your purpose is a priority
3. **Start purging.** What are three things you could say no to right now? What would be one small action step you could take to step away from something you don’t want to be doing?
4. **Start planting.** What are three activities you envisioned for an ideal evening or weekend? What small action step could you take today to spend time in that activity? Schedule these actions steps out of the valley and into the promise land.