

# Why Can't I Say 'No'?

"You ought to let me cut and highlight your hair." I heard the voice over my shoulder. When I turned around, my eyes had to look down about two feet to find the source of the offer, one that came with a long, Southern drawl.

"Hi, my name is Hepsiba. (That's in the Bible.) I do hair. I do pastor's hair, associate minister Calvin's hair and administrator-apostle Johnson's hair. Now he's actually bald, but I put a thick, all-natural beeswax with Retin-A<sup>TM</sup> on his hair, and then I pull it through a rice paper sorta hat.

"We rinse it, blow it, dry it, and then I take those seven thickened strands and do a back-combing. It looks so natural; nobody says a word about his baldness." Through this entire monologue, Hepsiba had not taken a breath.

Well, I thought, I actually do need a trim. My father was always confused because I told him that I dyed my blonde roots brown every eight weeks. I don't think he bought it, really.

Hepsiba happened to have some time that very day, so I thanked her profusely and got directions to her shop. I was about to learn one of the Holy Spirit's greatest lessons concerning ignoring His still, small voice.

Actually, the still, small voice inside me was not still and small. It was screaming, jumping up and down, holding its throat in a mocking chokehold, falling over while kicking its legs. Looking back, I now see that my inner man was really, really trying to tell me something.

But I thought maybe Hepsiba needed ministry. Perhaps she was demon-possessed, and God was sending me to deliver her.

To her credit, my daughter tried to stop me. She respectfully

pointed out that there was no one else—I mean no one— in the hair salon. The telephone never rang the entire time we were there.

Hepsiba had to go to the drugstore to buy a hair-coloring kit. While she was gone, I noticed that there was dust on the appointment book. I pointed out that perhaps the dust was simply a light covering of recently cut hair. Then my spirit man started singing, “It Is Well With My Soul.”

Hepsiba sat me in her chair and threw an old, dye-stained cape around me. Grabbing pieces of my hair she muttered, “Mmm,” followed by: “Well, it’s only hair. I’ll be right back, don’t go anywhere.”

“Run,” cried my little inner man. “Run! Remember Samson; remember Absalom.”

When I was waiting for Hepsiba to return from the back room where she had disappeared with her discount drugstore bag, I noticed the poster on the salon wall. All the models wore newly styled, shiny Afros. Diana Ross, Shaft and Shirley Caesar were all smiling and modeling the newest, most modern style—for 1971.

“I’ve never done Caucasian hair, but it can’t be that different. I just want to bless the Lord’s servant,” said little Hepsiba. She then proceeded to give me what I found out later was a Jheri Curl™. Let’s just say it was the last Jheri Curl I’m ever going to have.

One of our daughters is African American, and four are biracial. My hair doesn’t resemble theirs at all. I have my Aunt Minnie’s hair.

All heads of hair are not alike. I think even Hepsiba knows that today.

## **A Little Knowledge**

Being in full-time ministry holds many challenges. One of the greatest is learning how to say no to people who offer me their services. It's not that I don't appreciate their good intentions—when they are good—but sometimes it's better to leave well enough alone.

At one women's conference I ministered at, I was introduced to a massage therapist, who said to me, "I'm only three classes away from my license." Even her pastor's wife assured me that this girl had remarkable hands, though she personally had never had a massage.

Three and one-half hours later, the therapist had given me a full-body massage. I got up from her new massage bed, which still smelled like plastic, and threw up.

I know she meant well, but there must have been something in those last three classes that this gal needed to know. A great lesson came from that three-hour massage: A little knowledge can be dangerous.

She had quite a bit of understanding regarding muscles—especially those that hurt right away—and some giftings, including great compassion. That compassion is what got her into the field to begin with.

She meant well. But she hurt me. It took months before my neck stopped aching.

There are so many precious people in churches along the way who want to help, want to stand out in the crowd. Many simply want to give back to you out of grateful, loving hearts.

Some are truly gifted; others aren't.

Why would I bother telling you about them? Certainly my intentions are to make you laugh and forget for a while any trials you might be facing. Laughter is good medicine that goes deep into your bones and restores you physically and

emotionally.

But I also want you to know that if you've ever suffered, you are not alone. Suffering comes to each of us in different ways. Often it has come to me because I hesitated to refuse someone's well-meaning but misguided offer.

## **Risking Rejection**

I remember well the photographer-makeup artist who made me look like a (with great respect to the bereaved) dead person. Would my skin ever recover?

Then there was the vitamin-mineral lady. And I remember the hostess who just wanted to swing me by her home for a minute so I could meet her family. The problem was, she was supposed to be taking me to the church service.

What this woman really wanted was for me to minister to her husband and teen-age children. They wouldn't come to the service, so she thought it was "God" who arranged for her to pick me up for the meeting.

Her husband and children were appalled that I was there and furious with the woman. She meant well, but she was not sensitive to the Holy Spirit. I was late for the meeting, and the pastor was understandably unhappy.

"Why didn't you just tell her no?" my husband asked me. What a silly man!

"I was a captive, and she didn't exactly warn me, and, God did want me to go..." I sort of trailed off. My excuses sounded pitiful.

It's the same reason we buy half a frozen cow out of someone's trunk, open a charge account we don't need when the salesgirl's eyes begin to water or buy all the new makeup (and brushes) they use on us during the "free" makeover. All the time we know we can't afford it and do not need it.

We say yes to magazine subscriptions and buy Girl Scout cookies when we already bought six boxes of the same thing from the other neighbor's daughter. One can never have enough thin mints! Or we buy two to get one free, even though we don't need the first one. I can always give it to so-and-so, we think.

So what is it? Why do we act this way?

It's fear—and guilt. That's why we say yes when we mean no.

We fear how we will look to other people if we refuse them. We say we want to appear generous, grateful, spiritual, Christlike or whatever, but in reality we just don't want to be rejected.

My family continually tells me, "Cathy, please don't say yes and then have us cancel later when you don't want to go."

I know, I know. We need the Lord to help us speak the truth. When He tells me to say yes or no, and I don't obey, that's a lie. But it is also offensive to my Lord for me to say (or do) what people want if it's not also what the Father desires.

Do you remember the biblical account of the old prophet and the young prophet in 1 Kings 13? In the story, an older, seasoned, prophetic seer hears of the wonderful ministry of a younger prophet. The old man sets out to see the younger one, who had done a really bold thing by standing up against the wicked king without fearing for his own life.

Who was this brave, young, hero prophet? The old man wanted to find out. There is always a cry in the land from a fresh voice, one who is uncompromising, one who cannot be bought; someone who would willingly lay down his life for the king, for his people and for righteousness.

When the old prophet found the younger man, he asked him to come to his house for a meal and a drink and some fellowship.

The young man refused, having been directed by God not to stop to take refreshment or to return the way he came.

The young prophet had received two simple commands from God, and the old prophet knew of these commands. He knew the boy needed to obey precisely and immediately. He devised a test worthy of an up-and-coming major vessel of God.

The old prophet lied to the young man, saying, “But God told me you were to come home with me and eat” (see 1 Kin. 13: 18). Did the young man stand firm and obey God’s exact instructions?

No. Possibly fearing what the old man would think, the young man disregarded God’s commands. While still in the early part of his ministry, he was found to be only partially faithful—which is to be unfaithful. And sadly, his unfaithfulness brought on his demise.

What about you? The brighter you become, the more bugs you will attract, and not everyone will be drawn to you for the right reasons. Will you fear what people think? Or will you stand firm and follow God’s exact instructions?

Are you afraid to speak the truth because you may be rejected? Perhaps you should consider these words from Isaiah, “Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass?” (51:12, NKJV).

Do not fear man’s rejection. Be faithful to God, seek only His approval—and learn to say no to the other voices that try to influence you.

*Cathy Lechner is the author of several best-selling books, including You’ve Got to Be Kidding, I Thought This Was the Great Tribulation! and I’m Tired of Crying, It’s Time to Laugh Again! from which this article was adapted. Both are published by Charisma House.*