

How Does Saying “No” Mobilize Local Resources?

While sipping an iced coffee, I intently listened to a friend who serves as a missionary in Asia share about a recent experience. A local leader asked her if she would pay for his expenses to attend a leadership gathering within the organization in which he serves. With kindness, and declining to oblige to his request, she redirected him to share his need with his local church and suggested he pray for God to supply for this need.

No doubt he was disappointed that his need wasn't met immediately, and, he committed to doing those two things—he prayed and shared his need with his local church family during a church service. After the service, a man in attendance gave him some money to help him attend the leadership gathering—a whole month's salary! Based on the donor's meager economic level and job, this was definitely a sacrifice for him. In addition to boosting this local leader's own faith, the testimony of how God provided through fellow believers thoroughly encouraged other local leaders. Local resources can be mobilized!

This story could have gone very differently if my friend didn't say, “No,” and redirect him toward a healthier, self-sustaining solution. The end result would have been like what

is typically exercised: *If you have a need, ask the foreigners. The foreigners give because that is what they are supposed to do. End of story. No glory to God, and no inspiration to foster local interdependence, local giving, and local support.*

As difficult as it might seem, saying, “No,” along with redirection in non-crisis situations, leads to mobilizing and giving of local resources. Dr. Charles Brock powerfully words this phenomenon: “Stingy? No! A growth producing stewardship? Yes! Such growth is desirable wherein independent self-hood is realized with full dependence on Christ.”¹

How can saying, “No,” produce stewardship and independent self-hood? When cross-cultural workers say, “No,” they are inviting and redirecting the cultural insiders to seek-out God and interdependence from their own

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Quoted in Jean Johnson, *We Are Not the Hero: A Missionary's Guide to Sharing Christ, Not a Culture of Dependency*, (Deep River Books, 2012), 77.

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networks, churches, and communities. Essentially, they are promoting healthy local-interdependence and self-giving with full dependence on God, rather than unhealthy global dependency.

When the cross-cultural workers and visitors say, “No,” with a redirect, they open the door for the local ‘Boaz’ (Ruth 2) to rise up and take care of their own widows and poor. When they say, “No,” they create more room for local ‘Tabithas’ to use their skills to support the poor at their own doorsteps (Acts 9:36-43).

Perhaps the apostle Paul had growth-producing stewardship with full dependence on God in mind when he gave these instructions:

Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her. But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God . . . If a woman who is a believer has relatives who are widows, she must take care of them and not put the responsibility on the church. Then the church can care for the widows who are truly alone. (I Timothy 5:3-4, 16, NLT).

I deduce Paul to be saying: Don’t seek out churches to take care of widows in your family circle, look to yourselves! This is your God-given stewardship responsibility and privilege, and because this action pleases God, He will provide. I am taking some liberty, but I also hear Paul saying: *The local church is commissioned to take care of widows who are truly alone, don’t shift this responsibility to outsiders.*

Saying, “No,” with a kind and thoughtful redirect, should not translate as stingy, but rather the opposite — it can spur on local stewardship, generosity, and interdependence, which pleases God.

You might be thinking, “How can we possibly say, “No,” when we have access to so many resources?”

Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her. But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them.

If mobilizing local resources is part of our mission aim, we may need to convert this question to: *How does bringing in outside funding stifle growth producing local stewardship, healthy independent self-hood, and local-interdependence?* Being a “yes-man/woman just because we can is not enough reason to give in ways that actually lead to long-term languishing and learned helplessness, which is the opposite of local-interdependence and faith in God to provide for what He has called people to.

Kindly saying “no” along with redirecting local leaders, disciples, and churches is actually generosity when it serves as the impetus to mobilizing and giving locally. Perhaps, add “no” with a healthy redirect to your mission strategies. 

