



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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2 CORINTHIANS 1:12

2 Corinthians Series

Let's bow and come before the Lord and settle our hearts.

[PRAYER] Lord, we come before you now grateful. We're grateful that we don't have fires and earthquakes and storms right around us, but we feel the pain of those who do as we see the hurting people on the news and loss of life and not having the bare essentials that people need to live. Lord, we just asking that you would comfort those people. Provide the resources they need. Empower the Christians. Use the money that we've sent as a church and others are sending individually and the tangible help that's going down to these places that you would provide resources and solutions. Lord, we thank you that you are the solution for the storm in our own lives and comfort that we need. We thank you for what you're teaching us each individually and today we ask that you would do even more of a work inside of our hearts. Lord, I pray that you give us some insight now into your word that would make us different people than when we came in. We believe that you change us. And we ask for those miracles to take place inside of our hearts right now. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're studying in the book of 2 Corinthians, a book that was written by Paul the apostle. But I want to take you to another book of the Bible. I want to take you to the book of 2 Peter 2. I'd like you to stand as I read this passage please. This passage is written by a different apostle, but has some similarities and some application that we're going to draw upon that are going to help us get something today. So I want you to look at these words from 1 Peter 2:18-23.

It says – *Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.* So we find ourselves in similar situations when we're treated unfairly and unjustly and we're trapped. We really can't get out. We're stuck. I'm sure you can imagine being in that situation if you're not in that situation now in your workplace or in your home or a school or wherever.

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. Literally that means conscience facing towards God. In other words, they're doing the right thing even though they're getting attacked or suffering. *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? That doesn't do you any good. But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.* So this is one of God's tools for helping us know how to deal with life inside of our hearts so we can't change the externals.

And then he makes this very interesting statement in verse 21: *To this you were called* (in other words you're called to endure suffering eternally in a way that's commendable before God. *O this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* He was able to give it to the Lord somehow so that God could take care of the picture. Even in the midst of the challenges that were going on he turned it over to the Lord to protect his own heart.

You may be seated. We'll come back to that passage a little bit later on.

In order to introduce us to the passage today, which is 2 Corinthians 1:12 (one verse of scripture today), I want to give you the background of the book so you understand something that is going on in the backstory.

In this story we have the Corinthians and there are some people in the church who don't like Paul. They don't like him. I don't know whether they're Christians or not Christians. We don't know. They don't like him. In fact they're making a big deal about something that happened. Paul told these people, "I'm going to come to you," but for some reason or another he didn't come. So they're saying, "Look at Paul. He's unreliable. He doesn't have integrity. He doesn't do what he says he's going to do." And then they make a bigger deal out of it even that they say, "The God he represents is unreliable too."

Now I don't know about you, but my guess is that you experience this sometimes. You make a little mistake and people start taking it all over the place and they start jumping to conclusions. It happens in the family. Let's say the husband says, "Where's the toilet paper? I told you to buy toilet paper. You didn't buy toilet paper. You must not love me because you didn't buy toilet paper." You see how we can move this to the next step. We can start saying, "You don't love me because..." In other words we take a problem or a mistake that the other person makes and we make this bigger deal out of it. It happens all the time.

I'm sure it happens to you. If you're in the work world, then you make a mistake and people start jumping to conclusions or rumors are going around about you and your problems, and so on. That's what's happening to Paul. It's a real situation for Paul.

Now Paul is going to defend himself in two ways. He's going to defend himself personally and his own integrity, and he's also going to defend God. We're going to save the defending God for next week. It's going to be great. I can hardly wait to teach that story. If you read the rest of the verses up to 13-22, you'll see that God's favorite word is 'yes.' That's what we're going to talk about next week. I can hardly wait to share that with you. But this week we're just going to deal with the part where Paul is defending himself. How does he do that when he's being mistreated or people are jumping to conclusions or rumors are going around about him. We're going to learn some things about how to deal with that in our own hearts and it's going to take us into some great stories about life as well.

So let's look at this verse that I'm going to read to you from 2 Corinthians 1:12. This is our verse today. It's a verse written by Paul to the Corinthians where he says this: *Now this is our boast (this is what we're confident about): Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.*

Now let's just pause for a moment because like Paul we don't want to make a promise that we can't keep. So young people, I want to share something with you right now. Here's a principle and this principle is a good idea. The quote I want to share with you doesn't come from the Bible, but it's a good quote that we need to understand that illustrates this: Under-promise and over-deliver. Have you heard that before? Young people, this is really important because what it's saying is don't promise you're going to do something unless you're going to do it. In fact it would be the best to be in the habit of saying I'm going to do something and do more than you said you were going to do or do earlier than you said you were going to do.

So young people, if your mom says, "Can you take out the trash?" You say, "Okay, I'll do it before I go to bed," and then you end up doing it before 7pm. What happens in that moment? Your mom looks at you and goes, "Whoa. He keeps his word." If you have an assignment at school that's due on Friday and you turn it in on Thursday, the teacher is saying, "Wow. Look at him. He has integrity. There's something about him that's extra and good."

Do you see this idea of under-promise and over-deliver is this idea of doing more than what's expected. Beating the deadline. When you do that over and over again you develop a reputation for yourself that that person keeps her word so that when there's some kind of a problem and you are not able to do it they go, "That's not really him. He normally keeps his word." You see? So this idea of under-promise and over-deliver is a really valuable idea to catch and to use in our lives.

There are some people who are in the habit of making statements and then not following up. If you say you're going to be there a certain time when you want to be there at that certain time. So that's the idea here. We want to get that idea. But the problem is that sometimes life happens and you can't do that.

We don't know what happened with Paul. There wasn't email or texting. He couldn't text him and say, "Hey, I'm going to be late." He's stuck. He can't communicate to them. They're wondering where is he, where is he. So there's this difficult situation that takes place between them and he has to deal with it. So now what we have is some conflict. That's what happens when we have challenges like this. We end up with some kind of a conflict.

One of the neat things about being a Christian is that Christians handle conflict differently than non-Christians. At least they should. We have a playbook, you see. Christians have a playbook that tells them how to deal with conflict that's different from the playbook that non-Christians have.

Now I've got to tell you, not all Christians pull up the right playbook. At least we have this opportunity to choose the playbook so we can respond better to the situations that we face.

I just jotted down several things that are in the playbook for Christians when we have conflict. I could have put passages here, but I didn't. There are scriptures that could go along with every one of these. In other words, the Christians go by the playbook of God's word and from that they develop some ways to handle conflict in life. Whether it's in marriage or parenting or at work or in a ball team or with friends, we handle conflict differently. For example we are humble. I admit my part. I use grace when I'm being confronted or confronting someone else. There's just this response of grace that's different. I take a stand for what's right, but also show love in the process.

I'm sure you're imagining the playbook that a nonbeliever has. It many times doesn't include the same things. They do it differently. A Christian seeks to understand and give someone the benefit of the doubt. A Christian values the person, not just the issue. The Christian seeks reconciliation, not just justice. The Christian talks to the offender instead of gossiping around and telling other people about it. The Christian doesn't get revenge or be jealous. There's a different way of handling conflict if you're a Christian. That's one of the reasons why first of all I enjoy being a Christian. There's a way of handling conflict that works better. There are other ways to handle conflict in life, but they often close relationships they damage. People often get upset, relationships are distanced and all kinds of bad things happen.

It's also the reason I like to partner with Christians. So if you go into business with someone, if you can go into business with a Christian that's great. If you're in a hiring position, if you hire a person who's a Christian you know they're coming with a playbook.

If you're getting married, you want to marry someone who is a Christian because they have a playbook. I tell you, you can marry anybody, Christian or not, and everything is fine until you have conflict. As soon as you have conflict then you have a problem. The Christian has a playbook and when you draw upon that playbook good things happen in our relationships with other people. So it's really strategic to understand this idea of playbook and about conscience.

But you might be saying, "That's not me, that's not where I live. I'm working with people and they're not Christians and they're using the wrong playbook on me." Well you're in good company because you're where Paul is. That's what Paul is saying. These people are coming in and challenging my integrity. They're coming after me. It's wrong is what they're doing.

So now let's go to our verse again. Notice what he does as he's trying to process this meanness that's coming at him. He says – *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies*. Let's just stop there for a moment because what he's doing is he's appealing to the conscience. The conscience is that God-designed internal mechanism that's inside of our hearts that makes us feel good or bad. I feel good when I do the right thing and I feel bad when I've done the wrong thing. Not to be confused with the Holy Spirit who is actually a person who comes to live inside of us who not only makes us feel bad when we do the wrong thing or good when we do the right thing, but He also empowers us to do what's right.

But let's go back and look at the conscience for a moment because that's the word that Paul is using here. He says *our conscience testifies*. It communicates this message of I feel good or I feel

bad. The conscience is valuable for you on several different fronts. One is it helps you get things done. You're lying in bed at night, "Oh I forgot to lock the door," so you get up because your conscience prompts you to do that. Your conscience will help you stop procrastinating. If you procrastinate a lot, you just need a stronger conscience because it helps you do something about it. The conscience helps you deal with if it makes you feel bad when something bad has happened and you feel an offense. I need to go and apologize to that person, or I need to go work it out. The conscience helps you with that.

But in this case the conscience is helping a person when they've been mistreated, when they've been misunderstood, when they're being judged by someone else unfairly, as he perceives it. So here's what the conscience is doing for him. It's helping him in the midst of the struggle of the challenges of being misunderstood to feel okay about where he's at. He's still going to do some things about it.

So when I'm working with a person, a child (I've told you this before) who's bullied, I tell them, "You need to do these things. You need to confront the person or ignore the person or you need to get help. Those are things we can do. But even when we do all of those things in life sometimes we still end up with being mistreated. We have to have a way of processing that inside when we can't change the outside. So Paul is showing us what he does. He says he uses his conscience here and he's testifying that we've conducted ourselves in the world and especially our relations with you with integrity and godly sincerity.

Now here's the problem with the conscience. Sometimes you feel good about something when you shouldn't feel good about it.

I'm in a small group during the week and the Take Jesus Home group that we're in, we reflect on the sermon and we talk about it, but in the group we're in I use it as a think tank for the sermon yet to come. So those who are in the group, some of these things you know are coming out of our group. So I said, "What's the challenge here with the conscience?" Their response is this: People use the conscience to justify all kinds of things. "I feel perfectly fine about this." Well it's wrong. You shouldn't be feeling perfectly fine about it. You see? So their conscience feels good when it shouldn't feel good. So the conscience really has to be trained. Some people say something like this: "God just wants me to be happy. I know He just wants me to be happy, so I'm going to do x, y..." even though the x or y thing is wrong. Why? Because there's nothing in the scripture that says God wants you to be happy. That's a misunderstanding of theology. The conscience is looking for a standard, and that's why it's so important for us to have a standard of God's word in order to rely on that and in order for the conscience to be fed and trained to do what's right. So I just want to say just because you feel good about something or you say "I'm at peace with this" doesn't mean it's right.

In fact that's what Paul says. Those words come right from Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:4. Same people he's writing to and he also uses the word conscience when he says to them. *My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.* So I'm not saying today rely on your conscience. I'm saying it's a tool to move you in the right direction. You've heard that statement maybe "let your conscience be your guide." That doesn't come from the Bible. That comes from *Pinocchio*. What we're saying here is that the conscience is a

valuable tool and Paul is using it as a tool when he's being mistreated and we want to understand how he's using it. He's going to tell us how he uses it. That's why this passage is so great. He's going to share with us what he does to base what he relies on in order for the conscience to be strong and powerful.

So please make sure that if you're feeling good it's based on a standard, not just on how you feel. So don't just rely on the conscience as your standard. The conscience is looking for a standard and it needs that.

So if someone comes and says, "Hey, I told them off. They're not going to treat me that way. Who do they think I am? Let me talk to your manager." And so they do it in a way that I'm standing up for myself and now I feel better because I told them off. I'm telling you there's a way to handle conflict differently as Christians and we need to know how to do that. Some people feel perfectly fine doing something like that as if that's somehow good. It's not good. But the conscience sometimes can make us feel good about doing the wrong thing. Just be careful about that as you're considering the use of the conscience and how it works.

Let's go back to our passage that we're looking at to understand a little bit more about how this works. Notice what Paul is saying that *the conscience testifies*. The conscience testifies *that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity*. I like the word *godly* there because it's not just sincerity. Some people say, "I'm trying as best I can." And I want to say, "Well that's not good enough. You have to do what's required." Just trying the best you can isn't often what needs to be done. You have to do what needs to be done, not just try hard. So it's not just sincerity that gets you forward in life. There's this godly sincerity, which means that the sincerity is somehow wrapped in some form of grace or godliness or something like that.

Notice the other word is integrity. So Paul's integrity is being challenged. But instead of feeling threatened by that, he's confronting them or explaining to them or helping them understand and he's also saying in my own heart my conscience is clear. My conscience is testifying that I have integrity and I can feel okay about that. That does something for us as Christians that's really powerful that we can take and use every day in our lives.

But notice as he continues the passage he shows us what he relies on. This is where I want to park for a minute if we can. There are two things there – *relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace*. So we have worldly wisdom and God's grace.

Worldly wisdom is that sense that oh I have an idea or the world throws these things out. The world has lots of ideas about solving problems or about dealing with life. If I know I don't have enough money for this, but I'm going to go ahead and spend it anyway because it will make me feel better. So we end up going into debt. That's worldly wisdom that says something like that. Oh I know that anger is wrong, but I'm just going to yell at this person and I'm going to feel better about it, or I'm going to use that anger somehow. That's wrong. So what happens is that there is this worldly wisdom that's out there and we start picking up that worldly wisdom and running with it and it gets us into significant problems into our lives. That's on the one side. Worldly wisdom. It's like a playbook. You pick it up, the world has all kinds of ideas about how

to handle life. So we want to know that those things are dangerous. Sometimes they sound very good because everybody else is doing them. That's not the solution.

Then there's the other playbook, which is the God's grace playbook. I've got to tell you, when you do the worldly wisdom playbook bad things happen. So relationships get damaged and people get hurt and all kinds of things happen that aren't good. In the end the worldly playbook leads you in the wrong direction. But God's grace playbook leads you in a direction that brings unity, it brings closeness. It brings peace inside of your heart. There's just a different way to live. As Christians we live differently than non-Christians. Unfortunately sometimes Christians pick up the wrong playbook. Christians pick up the playbook that has to do with worldly wisdom to solve their problems and then they get into trouble. Just keep in mind those two playbooks.

Ed Miller coaches families. He works with families regularly and helps them bring unity in their family because he's taking the godly playbook and bringing it into their home and showing them what it looks like. Many Christians don't even understand that. So he's working with a number of families right now. He's got a whole bunch of coaches that he works with and that we work with in the National Center for Biblical Parenting that change families because we're bringing in a godly playbook. It's really powerful. So I asked him to share just one story about something that happened to him in the last 24 hours I think. Is that right?

[Ed] Yeah. I'm privileged to coach a number of parents right now. One of these parents is up in Connecticut. I've probably been more intensely involved with this family than I have ever been involved with a family. That's because their situation is just desperate.

When I came to them and started working intensely with them about six weeks ago, World War III was about to break out in the home. Mother and son were about ready to kill each other. I mean literally. They were coming to blows. Mom learned a very stern playbook. Very stern. Picking on every little thing. She was kind of able to make it work with her first set of kids, but now she's got these two adopted children and the one un is just strong-willed, defiant, and intelligent, and wounded.

This young man came into their home when he was about four. He was taken from his mother with his sister and he's got scars and wounds, but he is a fighter. Some kids come out of this kind of situation as fighters. He came out as a fighter. So when mom attacks him (and she's really good at it – she comes on strong and hard), he just digs his heels in and fights right back. So a lot of yelling, a lot of screaming, a lot of anger, a lot of hurt, a lot of pain. Just a lot of stuff going on.

That's where I came to them. I started working with them. We started working on a new approach and I've seen just tremendous progress in their lives. There's very little joy in their relationship. I don't see them smile when I see them talking about each other. I see just a lot of pain. And as we've been working on it (and we're talking about intense work) and I've talked to mom about three times a day sometimes (it's that intense) about every interaction she's having with her son. Really intense stuff.

Yesterday I spent the day up here with them in Connecticut after I spoke to the Men's Breakfast in the morning. We've been working on all this good stuff. But I saw a miracle happen yesterday. Sometimes you just get to be a part of a miraculous thing that you want to start to cry when you think about it. Again, not much joy. A lot of conflict. But I'm sitting here and eating, we're watching the Yankees game. This young man is sitting next to me and Mom is standing up. He says, "Mom, would you get me something to drink?" Now her typical pattern of reacting would be to say something like, "Well you have two feet. Get up and get it yourself." Pretty brisk and harsh things like that, and he would then dig in his heels and say something even more negative to her. Then the war would start.

This time I could see the wheels turning in her head. She was thinking about this because she's changing as well. She's thinking, "I'm not going to do that." She said, "Well what would you like?" Then he said (in my sweetest voice), "Could I have some apple juice please?" I almost fell off my chair. I was like, "Did that come from him?" I never heard him talk to his mom like that before. It was just absolutely astounding. I was really moved by that. I just took that all in and said I just had a chance to watch God working in the heart of somebody and seeing the heart of two people, both these people, changing. It was awesome.

[Scott] Thank you, Ed. It's about grace thinking, I think. It's a different way of how we receive something from God and we share with others that affects our whole relational component. If you think about marriage you say those vows in marriage "and till death do this part," just total commitment. I don't think it's the big things that damage the marriage. It's the 212 small things. Like "why didn't you put gas in the car," or "how come you're leaving the clothes on the floor," or just "you took a check out of a checkbook, but you didn't write it in" over and over and over again. It's all these little things and it starts to wear on you, grate on you. Do you know what you need in order for marriage to work? What you need is grace. Say that with me. Grace. You need grace. God's grace. Not worldly wisdom. You need God's grace.

When you're at work and you're dealing with those annoying people you know who I am talking about. You can visualize them. As I say that word 'annoying,' you've got a face to go with that. There's a way to deal with annoying people at work. Do you know what that is? Grace. If you're parenting you do the gender reveal party and oh it's going to be a boy and then you pick out the name and then oh everything is so joyous and you're excited about it all. Everything is great after you get out of the first trimester usually, so then until the last month when you're about to burst then it's painful, but it's okay. And then the baby is born and you're so grateful and things are good. And then you get into the diaper stage – the diapers and the nights that you're up and you don't get enough sleep. So you're going, "I can hardly wait until I get out of this stage." So finally at two years old the baby gets potty trained (hopefully) and everything is fine for the rest of their childhood...right?

If you have child you can look at your child and you can say, "You are a challenge." Isn't that right? Go ahead and say it. You are a challenge. That's what you say to your young person. But you want to say it this way: "You are a challenge, but God is using you to build grace in me." If you're a young person, you're living in a home with imperfect parents. I guarantee you they're not perfect and they're going to make some mistakes. You can look at your parents and say, "You are a challenge." Go ahead and say it. "You are a challenge." When you say that, you can

say it this way: “You are a challenge, but God is using you to build grace inside of me. I want to grow in that grace.”

That is what God does in our lives. God uses life situations to grow us in this grace and this understanding that’s different than worldly wisdom. It’s almost as if we were born with worldly wisdom and we kind of live in this environment and we’ve got to learn the grace. We’ve got to grow in it. It doesn’t happen instantly. We have to grow in this grace in our lives.

This is the passage in 2 Peter. At the end of the passage that says – *but grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. We want to grow in that grace. That’s what God wants for us. We’re always growing with whomever it is we’re working with and situations that we find ourselves in. But there are some people and some situations that I call EGR people. Extra Grace Required. Right? You know who they are.

This is what I want you to do. You’re at work with this person and they come in and they’re annoying and they’re bothering you. I want you to imagine taking a bow and sticking it right on their forehead. So as you’re looking at them don’t actually do it (that would be a problem), but imagine you have a blue bow and you say, “Wow, that’s God’s gift to me to grow me in grace. God wants to do something through this annoying person.” You get into traffic and you go, “I can’t believe I’m in traffic again.” Just take that bow and put it on the dashboard and you say, “Lord, I’ve been wanting to listen to my audio Bible. I have thirty-seven more minutes to do that today than I expected.” So you just want to turn this into an Extra Grace Required situation.

God has given you grace. He died on the cross for you. He offers you a whole new way of thinking, a playbook. But we have to learn the playbook. It doesn’t instantly happen. That’s why the verse in 2 Peter 3:18 says – *grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. Grow in that grace.

If you’re a home and you you’re living at home, whether you’re a kid working with another kid or a parent working with a kid, put the bow on their head. Because you want to look at them differently. They need grace. I know you’re growing in your grace, but that person needs grace. They need something extra and you have it because God has given you this tank of grace that has blessed you so much you can turn around and bless somebody with it. That is so cool. It’s so beautiful.

So we go to our passage today. Paul is making this statement. He’s feeling mistreated by these people, but he’s saying, “Look, my conscience testifies that I’m okay in my integrity and my godly sincerity. I rely on not worldly wisdom, but I rely on God’s grace.” That’s what we need. You and I need it.

Now there’s this playbook we talk about. It’s actually the Bible. So I would encourage you to read the Bible. It’s a playbook to help you understand how to live, but more importantly it teaches you how to relate to God. The first thing you want to do, if you want to employ this grace and you want to have it in your life, is that you dedicate yourself to God. You say, “God, I’m yours. Whatever happens, I’m totally in.” I’m in. Are you in today? I’m in. I want to be in that grace and I want to be growing in it.

I welcome you today if you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior or if you want to dedicate yourself to the Lord fully and say, "I'm in," then you make that commitment today. We're going to have a prayer time in a minute and if you want to come up, we'll pray for you and help you dedicate yourself to the Lord. We'll do it today.

That's what God wants to do in our lives. There's a playbook. It starts with getting totally connected with God. And then all of this power that he talks about in 2 Corinthians starts to infuse us so that we can even have the power to be mistreated and it's okay because God has empowered us. He's given the grace. We're not functioning off of worldly wisdom; we're functioning off of God's grace in our lives.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] So Father, we do thank you so much that we can live differently than those around us. We ask that you would give us the confidence and the courage to respond to your call in our lives to serve you 100%. That we'd be most interested in serving you. Not other people, not other things, but serving you in our lives. We know that will impact the people around us. Lord, for some it means some really tough decisions. I ask that you'd give courage and confidence to make those tough decisions to serve you and follow your playbook. Lord, you know the hearts of each person here and their situations in life. I pray that you would give grace. Grace to meet each person in their own time of need. We ask this in Jesus's name, amen.