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2 CORINTHIANS 1:13-19

2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I just thank you for the message that we have in your word today in 2 Corinthians. Thank you for the things that you teach us every week that really touch us on a deep level. A place where we experience our need for you. A place where we understand more about our frailty and our weakness and your strength, how you want to give us the power that we need to live every day of our lives. We know this book of 2 Corinthians is all about this power that we can have. Today, Lord, I ask that you would be ministering to each one of our hearts in that way. I suspect that there are people who come in today in this room who are hurting in some challenging ways. I pray that you would touch their hearts, you'd bless them. There may be people here that are even questioning their faith. I pray that you would touch their hearts. There are people who are seeking to decide if they want to trust you as their Lord and Savior. I pray that you would reveal some good things today out of your word. We know that it is powerful. Reveal to us your power that we can have in our lives. Use it this morning. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

If you're learning how to pray or if you want to experience a depth in your prayers then taking the scriptures and praying through the scriptures is often a good way to do it. Open your Bible to a passage of scripture. I recommend the Psalms because the Psalms are often prayers offered to the Lord. They're songs, but the songs are often directed to the Lord so as you're reading the psalm in a prayer time you can pray the scriptures back to God. It's just a way for you to connect to God's heart in a very special way.

I chose this song today because it's a song that David is praying back to the Lord. In fact he's taken different quotes from other psalms that he's written and he puts them together in this psalm and he's offering it up to the Lord. This is not the passage I'm going to be teaching from today. We're going to be looking at 2 Corinthians 1. But this psalm illustrates something very important that we'll need in the passage that we're studying today. So if you would stand with me, I'm going to read this.

Now notice verses 15 and 11 I've switched around, so they're not in the same order. I did that because of the application that's in verse 11 that just stands out to me. So we'll read that part. I encourage you to read the whole psalm on your own, but I didn't take the whole psalm because I want to just focus on the words that are here, particularly that one word, *chesed*, in verse 15.

But here's how he starts out the psalm: *Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put*

my trust in you. Oh what a beautiful prayer. At the end of the psalm at verse 15 he says – *But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and chesed.* That's that word *faithfulness*. It's translated *faithfulness*. We don't know how to translate the word really. I'll describe that more. But it's translated here *faithfulness, chesed*.

And then verse 11 I think is the apex of the psalm, which reminds us of what we need to be doing as we come before the Lord. *Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.* Wow. We can go home after that. I mean it's just so valuable and powerful. I just love that psalm and what God wants to do in our lives through it. You may be seated.

In the book of 2 Corinthians Paul is writing to the Corinthians and at first in the passage he is defending himself because there are some people in the Corinthian church who I don't know whether they're believers or non-believers, but they're challenging Paul's integrity and they're saying, "Look, he said he was going to come and he didn't come." Because Paul for some reason had to change his plans or something. "He said he was going to come, but he didn't come. And so he must not have integrity." In fact they went further to say, "His God must not have integrity either. He doesn't keep his promises and Paul doesn't keep his promises either." So Paul defends himself in the first part and then he looks at the promise.

So last week we looked at Paul's defense of himself, about how his conscience demonstrated. If you look at verse 12 there the verse says in your Bible – *my integrity and my godly sincerity are validated by my conscience.* So we took that apart. Is the conscience helpful, not helpful? How do we understand that? That was last week. Being attacked in this integrity and Paul defending himself.

He continues to defend himself in these next verses starting in verse 13. He says this: *For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

See, Paul is defending himself. He's saying, "Look. I wanted to do this. I wanted to do this twice. I intended to do this. This is what I wanted to do." Now obviously there's a little conflict going on here, but I just want to suggest that Paul handles it well in that he gives them more information graciously.

You know sometimes when we're attacked or in a relationship, even a marriage relationship, someone in the marriage says something and you feel attacked. Instead of explaining yourself you start getting into defensive angry mode here. That's not what Paul does. He just describes here's what I wanted to do, and I wanted to do this and I intended to do this. So he doesn't enter

into this defensive angry mode. He just explains a little bit more about what was going on in his heart.

I would suggest those of you who are married might want to practice this idea of sharing more information about what's in your heart. When I'm working with a couple in their marriage or pre-marital counseling, I suggest they do what we call narrating life. Basically what you're doing is you're telling people what's going on in your heart so they know. Because the other person is wondering, "What is he thinking?" or "What is she thinking?"

So just take the example of driving down the road. He's driving the car. And to narrate means "I'm going to turn at this street here because I want to check out what's going on in that building if they're still building that building over there." Instead of her wondering, "Why are they turning here?" So there's some narration going on. Or "I'm going to come home a little bit late because I have to stop by the store on my way home." Instead of wondering, "Where is he?" or "I'm going to go to bed at 9:30." All that is narrating life. When you narrate life for someone else they get a picture of what's going on in your heart and they're able to understand. It just works better.

In a good relationship there's a lot of communication going on. Like Paul is doing here. He is narrating life. I would suggest you want to look at ways to do that in order to keep your relationship strong. Let me tell you what I'm thinking. The "let me tell you what I'm thinking" kind of statement that Paul is making here is good for the relationship between him and the Corinthians. So that's what he's doing for them. He wants to share that with them.

Now the Corinthians because they're attacking God and His character and the fact that He doesn't keep his promises, Paul now is going to launch into some guidance for them so that they understand this idea of God keeping His promises.

In order for you to understand what is yet to come, I need to explain a cultural practice that existed in the day that has to do with this "yes, yes" and "no, no". Because you're going, "What's all that about?" You'll see that repeated down in verses 18-20, which we're going to look at in just a moment, the idea of "yes" and "no".

In Jewish tradition the religious leaders suggested that people are so fickle today that they say "yes" and they say "no," so you want to make your word valuable. When you say something, you want it to mean something. So what you need to do (and this was their practice), you need to swear on something. You need to say, "Yes. I swear on Jerusalem," or "I swear on heaven," or "I swear on earth," or "I swear by the hairs on my head." Something like that. I swear on something to make your word sound more powerful and meaningful so that people would know that you mean what you say. That was kind of a current tradition at the time.

Well Jesus came along on His Sermon on the Mount and He challenged them on that. When it came to the Sermon on the Mount He said, *"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head,*

for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

Just say "yes" or "no" because "yes" and "no" need to mean something. Does your word mean something? When you say "yes" or you say "no," does that mean something to you? Or are you in the habit of saying "yes" to some things and then don't do them or "no" to something and then you end up doing it. So when you say "yes" and when you say "no," Jesus is saying, let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no, no". That's how we need to operate in life.

Now Paul says, "Am I the kind of person that says, 'Yes, yes,' and 'No, no'?" In other words do I add a double yes and double no to show you that I really mean business? No. I don't need to do that. I'm not fickle like that.

You have to ask the question why didn't God reveal to Paul that he wouldn't be able to go? Because Paul said he was going to go and then there was a change of plans. Something happened. We don't know exactly what happened, but he couldn't keep up with his word. Wouldn't it be great if God revealed His game plan to us or His master plan so we knew exactly what was going on? I don't think so. I think God doesn't do that because if we knew everything that was going to happen in our lives, we wouldn't need to trust God, would we? We wouldn't need to reveal that personal relationship with Him so He could guide us along the path of life. We would just know what it is and we would just trust in the plan instead of in the person.

God wants us to trust in Him. So our plans do change. That's why in James 4, talking about the same issue that Jesus is talking about here, that Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians, in James 4:15 James says to the people, "You don't tell people I'm going to go in this city or in that city or I'm going to buy or I'm going to sell. Because you don't know what tomorrow will bring." You need to say, "If the Lord wills, I will do that," because we always submit our ideas of "yes" or "no" to the will of God. That's what we need to do. So that's what Paul now is addressing.

You just have to understand the background here. Paul now is going to come in and he's going to say, "Does God say 'yes' or 'no'?" No. God says "yes" because God's favorite word is "yes."

Let's read on in the passage. In 2 Corinthians 1:18 – *But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes."* God's favorite word is "yes."

My granddaughter, Sahlor, I was pushing her on the swing this week and her favorite word is "do it again." Then she says, "Let's play rough," so I was playing rough with her. She would jump on me on the couch and then I would pick her up and throw her into the cushions of the couch. And you know what her favorite words are? "Do it again." My intent was I'm going to do this until she stops. She doesn't stop. She will continue this forever. "Do it again, do it again, do it again." Her favorite words are "do it again."

God's favorite word is "yes". That's a really powerful word in the English language, isn't it? Yes. You apply for a mortgage: Yes, you're approved. You apply for a job: Yes, you're hired.

Last week I listened to the story of Tim proposing to Margie. If you ever get a chance to hear the story, first of all you've got to allot about thirty minutes for Tim to tell you the story because this is the most elaborate proposal I've ever heard in my life.

Tim first of all doesn't even tell her that he's in town. She thinks he's gone back to New Jersey, but they're in St. Louis. He takes her on a scavenger hunt where she keeps finding clues, visiting mentors who are giving her letters and gifts and all kinds of things. Finally then back to St. Louis (this is after hours of traveling around the scavenger hunt) she's following 4,000 rose petals to get to this certain place. I'm jumping ahead in the story, there's so much involved in the story it's unbelievable. I can't believe you put up with all of this. It must have been so traumatic to wait all this long. Finally Tim is waiting at the end of all of the rose petals and first he pauses and there's this long uncomfortable pause and then he says, "Will you marry me?" And what do you think she says? Yes! That's right. She says yes.

It's such a powerful word. I just want to encourage you. Last night I wanted to watch the Yankees game. My wife and I don't have a TV and every once in a while I like to watch TV, so I texted my friend Ed. Will Ed even have his phone on him, I don't know. I texted Ed, "Can I come and watch the Yankees game?" I know that he is watching it. You know what he says? "Yes." I go, "Oh yes." It makes you feel good, doesn't it? Yes! Not just that I get to watch the Yankees, but that there's this "yes" that's His favorite word that God loves to share with us. It's His favorite word. "Yes."

Let me just challenge you. Think of ways to say "yes" more. Let's say you're typing on the computer and your son comes to you and says, "Dad, can I..." instead of saying, "Wait a minute. No." How about, "Yes. Give me fifteen minutes to finish this up." Let's start with the word "yes". Young people, I'd encourage you to do the same thing. If someone comes to you, you might have some hesitation, but the first word out of your mouth could be "yes". Say "yes" as much as possible because it just builds relationship. Then you can come back and you can modify it or change it.

In our office when people call up at the National Center for Biblical Parenting, all of our staff is trained to try to say "yes" first. Then we modify it if we have to. Many times we can say "yes". But we even use that word. "Yes, we can help you with that." The word "yes" is just a powerful word and God uses it when it comes to this idea of promises. So Paul is now taking that idea of "yes" and saying, "God is faithful."

If you are here today and you're wrestling with your faith and you need a little bit of a stamp of integrity on your faith, you're going to hear that from this passage today. Because God is saying there's a "yes" stamped on that applies to your life. In Him it has always been "yes". Wow. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. So there's this stamp which is Christ.

Now verses 21 and 22 we're not looking at today, but there's also this other stamp of the Holy Spirit. It's even mentioned that He's a stamp right here in verse 21. We'll come to that next week. But right now we're talking about this stamp of Christ.

You see Christianity stands apart from any other religion. There is no other religious leader that died for our sins and was raised again on the third day. There is no other one. That is the stamp of the credentials that God has a promise for us, that we serve a risen Lord. That is powerful. It is the “yes” in Christ that we enjoy. Lots of promises that God gives to us. It’s a “yes” in Christ, and so through Him the “amen” is spoken by who? By us to the glory of God. The promises are “yes” and our word is “amen”.

I know in our church we’re learning to be a little more expressive in our worship. But when somebody says, “Amen!” I know that’s like “sic ‘em” to a dog. I’m ready, yes, let’s go because we’re on right track here. Amen? Yes! Okay. We’ll work on that a little bit.

Now what we’re seeing here though is in the promises of God there is a yes that God gives us that there is a promise stamped on in our life and then there is this “amen” that comes from our heart. The “amen” is this “I agree”. The amen says “may it be so.” That’s the idea. Or “I agree with that.” So there’s this very powerful statement that yes, I agree with the promises of God.

God loves to say “yes”, but I want to address the very important question today that maybe some of you are feeling that you feel that maybe God has said “no” to you. You want something really passionately and for some reason it isn’t coming about. You feel like “God, if you just understood how important this is to me.” So you plead with the Lord, “Lord, maybe you don’t understand this. This is really important to me. Let me tell you how important it is to me.” So we come before the Lord, “Lord, this is something I really want,” yet it doesn’t come to pass. At that point where you get to that place where “God, why aren’t you giving me what I want?” you’re at a very important point in that moment. You’re at a point where you’re either going to give up the desires or you’re going to give up the Lord. There are people who actually leave the faith because they don’t get what they want. So they end up saying, “Well God must not love me because He didn’t give me what I wanted.”

That point is a really important point that we must understand. Because it’s in that point that we are able to move from our desires to the desires of God. Sometimes the desires we have need to be adjusted for whatever reason. I can’t explain why God is doing what He’s doing or the things that are going on, but I do know that He is working and He is good and He’s got a plan and things are going forward. Sometimes my desires aren’t in line with that and I must give those up, so that point is a very important point in our lives. Our God is faithful. He has promises that He gives us. I want to hold onto those promises, but the promises aren’t promises like, “I’ll give you whatever you want.” I’ll make you feel good.” Those aren’t promises of God. Sometimes we experience suffering and challenges.

There are lots of promises that God does give us. He promises that He hears us when we call. He promises to be near us. He promises to be faithful. He promises that this hurt will end. He promises that when we seek Him He will transform our hearts to desire more of Him. He will not leave us in the misery of our disappointment because He has not finished the word He started in us. He will assure us of His love as we invite Him into the struggle we feel.

God has made these promises that become these pillars for our faith that we can rely on, but they sometimes coincide with our desires. We have to be willing to leave our desires and follow the plan that God has for us. Wow. That's big. Because just because you want something doesn't mean it's the best thing for you. When things don't happen the way we like, it often creates space in our lives for more of God and His blessings. When things don't happen the way we like, it often creates space in our hearts and our lives for more of God and His blessings. Because God is maneuvering and He's changing and He's working deep inside of us in a strategic way.

Maybe you've seen the little booklet *365 Promises of God*. One for every day of the year. There's a man named Herbert Lockyer. He's written a number of these books that analyze the whole Bible and take all of this or all of that. He's identified promises in the Bible. He's identified 7,457 promises in the Bible. I did not check him. I did not count them to see if that's actually what's there. But that seems to be a lot of promises to me – 7,457 promises is a lot of promises.

As I was thinking about it this week, I was just thinking about some of the promises that God gives to kids. I just love children. Here's five promises that God has for kids. One: God will love you forever. Two: God will comfort you. Three: God will never leave you. Four: God strengthens you. Five: God sends His angels to protect you. I love that. God has promises for kids and I think we should teach our children the promises of God so that they have something they can rely on and God can use them in a great way in their lives.

But do you see the word up in the upper left hand corner there? The top is Hebrew, *chesed*. The bottom is the transliteration. We don't know really how to spell it. It's a Hebrew word, so we can spell it however we want. It's h-e-s-e-d. They put the *C* on because it's a guttural sound – *chesed*. And we don't really know how to translate this word *chesed*. Because it means something to do with the faithful of God and His mercies and based on some form of commitment that He has.

This is the commitment kind of love that God has. It's illustrated in the story of calling of Abraham in Genesis 15. In those days they made covenants or commitments. If you want to enter into an agreement of borrowing money or selling of land or something, you'd enter into a commitment or an agreement. Those happen in different ways. One of the ways you do it is you take off your sandal and you'd exchange sandals with somebody. I don't know what that's going to do for your pair of feet or shoes or whatever, but that's one way they do it. Or you give something to someone that is of value that you have as a collateral that really represented not so much something of value, but your word. So your word was stamped with some kind of a contract if you made a commitment.

But if there's a really big commitment that two people were going to make together, then they would do something like this. You'd take an animal like a goat and you cut the animal in half. You put half over here and half over here and you'd walk through it and agree together, shake hands that we're going to agree and if one of us violates the covenant, may we be like this animal that has been split in half. That's how they would design or ratify a contract or a covenant.

Beautiful story in Genesis 15 where God says to Abraham, “Abraham, I’m going to make your name great. I’m going to give you descendants that are as great as the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore. And then it comes time to ratify the covenant. So I want you to take a heifer (which is a cow), a ram (which is a sheep), and a goat and I want you to split all three of them in half. Put half over here, over here.” That in itself must have taken some time for Abraham to do that, to butcher three animals. “I want you to take a pigeon and a dove and you don’t have to split those, just put those on the other side to create a path between them.” Obviously this is a very important covenant that they would walk through so they would ratify the covenant.

But here’s what happens in the story in Genesis 15. At the end of the day, first of all Abraham is trying to keep the birds of prey away, it says in the passage, but at the end of the day God puts Abraham into a sleep. It’s dark and God Himself like a torch walks through the path on His own back and forth. You know what He’s saying? He’s saying, “There is no commitment on your part, Abraham. This is an unconditional covenant that I am making with you. I will be faithful to you no matter what happens in your life.”

There are some of God’s promises that are conditional. Deuteronomy shares those. If you do these things then this is what will happen. But in this case there’s this unconditional covenant and this represents the *chesed* of God. The compassionate commitment, love that one might have before God that God has for us. It’s just so amazing. Talk to any Jewish person today and ask them about this word *chesed*. What does *chesed* mean. They might have a hard time explaining it, and often they explain it as compassion that we have for others now, but it’s based on this sense of covenant faithfulness. That’s the best way that I can imagine translating it. It’s a love that most people don’t understand today. A lot of people don’t have that kind of covenant faithfulness even in a marriage relationship today. Very powerful to understand *chesed* and that’s what we rely on when we come before the Lord and understand who He is and what He does.

Let me show you some places where *chesed* is used. Psalm 26, a Psalm of David. He writes these words: *Vindicate me, Lord, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered. Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your chesed.* I have always been mindful of your covenant faithfulness, your relationship you’re initiating with me, all those things. It’s translated here *unfailing love*. Kind of a weak translation, but how are you going to translate such a word that has so much in it? So they translate *unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness*.

Here’s another psalm. You’ll recognize this one. It’s Psalm 23. It uses *chesed* in this psalm as well. *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and chesed.* This is this covenant faithfulness, this love that God has that brings us into line with His faithfulness into your lives. It says it *will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*.

This word *chesed* is what Paul is referring to, I believe, when he’s talking about this “yes, yes,” “no, no”. God ratifies all His promises. He does everything that He’s going to say and those promises are very important for us in our lives. We trust in Him, we enjoy Him, and we must rely on Him.

The problem happens with the promises of God when your desires get in the way. When our desires start to creep up and they start to become so important to us that we aren't flexible enough to go with God's plan, then we end up feeling disappointed with God instead of allowing God to turn that situation into something really good in our lives. Flowing with God and His plan is far more important than getting our desires. When we get our desires going, we can be rather demanding, can't we? We can start telling people what we're going to do and we start becoming harsh with people, and the demandingness that we have creates a problem for relationships as well.

I like the story of the Captain Billy Fitzgerald of the USS Marshall aircraft carrier. It's late at night and there's a blip on the screen of another boat or whatever and a light they see out in the distance. So the captain says to the radioman, "Tell them to divert course." So the radio guy gets on the radio and he says, "Please adjust your course fifteen degrees south to avoid a collision." Pause. A few seconds later: "We suggest you divert your course fifteen degrees north to avoid a collision."

Well the captain is rather irritated at this point. So he says, "Give me the radio." He says, "This is Captain Billy Fitzgerald of the USS Marshall, the largest aircraft carrier in the U.S. fleet and I demand that you divert your course fifteen degrees south to avoid a collision." And he waits. A few seconds later the answer comes. "We're a lighthouse. Your call."

Now I want to suggest that sometimes we start pursuing life with such strong desires that we end up crashing, we end up hurting ourselves, and we end up hurting other people. We think we're justified because we're so big and we're so important. Our desires are good and they're right and they're heading for a problem. I just want to suggest that relying on the promises of God, having a flexibility in our desires is really important.

That's why I love the verse in Proverbs 3:5-6 that says – *Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will direct your paths.* Wow. *In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.* Or often translated *he will make your paths straight.* We have to be careful about our desires. They get in the way. But that doesn't mean that the promises of God are not true.

So Paul is defending God. He's kind of getting riled up here a little bit as he's defending God in this passage and he's saying, "God keeps His promise and His favorite word is 'yes'." We can trust in the promises of God. We just need to be careful with our own desires or we get ourselves in trouble.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, it is with honor that we serve you. We know that sometimes we're just grateful that you do not give us what we desire because we look at our lives and we say, "Boy, if we would've gotten what we wanted, we would be in big trouble." Lord, we thank you that we can trust in you, that you're larger, bigger, stronger than we can imagine. I pray that you would give us the ability to relinquish our desires and to trust you in our lives. Lord, I ask that you would be

blessed in each of our hearts today and as we just reflect on you now we ask that you would do a ministry in our hearts and lives. In Jesus' name, amen.