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## 2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-2

### 2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Lord, I thank you for the things you taught me this week through this passage. I just enjoyed it so much. I pray that you would give me the right words. Help me to remember the things I planned to say and I pray that the message you have for these folks would be the right message. Lord, speak. Use your Spirit's power here to communicate. We're thankful, we're grateful people for what you're doing. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

It's actually an amazing thing I think we do here on Sunday mornings because the word of heaven, God's word, gets into our hearts. There's a lot of moving parts that make that work. I want the Lord to speak to me in the course of the week. As I'm just searching the scriptures and studying it and looking at what it has to say, the Lord speaks to me in a practical way. Not in an academic way, although I'm doing a lot of academic research and study in order to prepare the text and the message. I just want the Lord to speak to me in the first part of my week and then I start to package it in a way that I think might be a most appropriate, helpful, create slides and so on that might engage you so that you can experience God's word in a powerful way.

But I'm not the only moving part here. God's working in each one of our lives, your lives because you're listening to God during the week and God's speaking to you. And then we come here on Sunday mornings and we worship, give, fellowship, and share with each other. In the midst of that, we're ready for something very important and valuable.

I share that because in our verse today the very first word in our text is the word *sunergos* (translated *coworkers*). We get our word synergy from the word *sunergos*. It's kind of the basis for the word synergy. Synergy has this idea that we can accomplish more together than we could as individuals. So God calls us coworkers.

We could all sit at home on Sunday mornings and we could watch some great preachers on TV. There's some really good ones. We could listen to worship music that's fantastic on the radio and we can experience God in the midst of that. But something happens when we come together. Something powerful takes place that's synergistic, that's greater than we could do individually. So the experience that we have on Sunday morning is powerful.

So your investment of time to be here on Sunday mornings I know is something that is valuable for you. You could be doing all kinds of things, paying your bills, working on your taxes, getting some exercise, all kinds of things this morning. But you chose to be here, which makes a statement about you. Because you know something takes place in the midst of our time together that is powerful. It's synergistic.

I thought about preaching a whole sermon just on these first two words or first word *sunergeo* here. But I decided I would just move on from there because I think there is so much good stuff there. We are going to take just these two verses, though, this morning because they're very powerful and trust that God will do something deep inside of our hearts. Not only will the word of heaven speak into our hearts, but will actually take it into our practice. So the way we live this week will be different than the way we lived last week. Because God is changing what we believe. He's changing how we operate.

Stand with me, would you, as I read these first two verse from 2 Corinthians 6. We stand in honor of God's word. You might have your Bible open to these verses yourself, but there they are on the screen in case you don't have your Bible with you.

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 says – *As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. Don't waste God's grace. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*

You may be seated.

So don't waste God's grace. What is God's grace anyway? When we start thinking about God's grace and what it is and the challenges we experience, we often define God's grace this way: unmerited favor. I supposed that's a good dictionary definition. That might be where we start. We probably all heard that God's grace means unmerited favor. But that's like saying Niagara Falls is a stream or the Grand Canyon is a ditch. It just doesn't accomplish what it means. Sometimes we dissect things, we lose something. If you're in biology class and you dissect a frog, you have to kill it first in order to dissect it. I think we do that sometimes with a word like grace. It is so big and so powerful. So I don't want to define it today.

What I want to do is show you some different kinds of grace. Illustrate it so you can see how great it is so you don't waste it. That's my goal as we go through. I want you to feel empowered when you leave, inspired that you have something that God has given you and you don't want to waste it. So I want to start by talking about grace and show you some different kinds of grace as we look at God's word and what that is and what it means.

God's grace comes in various forms. I think we have to start with God's saving grace. That's the grace that allows us to come to Christ and receive Him as our personal Lord and Savior. So if you're here today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you want to make that decision. That is the decision that not only gets you into heaven and gets you into the kingdom, but it's the decision that gets you into all this experience right now. Eternal life doesn't start after you die; it starts right now. When you accept Jesus Christ into your life, you experience amazing things.

But I don't want you to think God's grace is just the gift that God gives to us of Jesus Christ. Because really what happens with God's grace is that He empowers us to even be able to respond to Him. Sometimes we say, "I came to Christ." I think that may be giving us a little too much credit because what really happens is God draws us. He gave us His Son as a gift and then

He draws us to Himself. If you look back on your own spiritual pilgrimage, you can see that God drew you to a place where you come and you say, “Yes, I want to accept Christ. I want this. This is what I want.” And then God comes into your life and He just changes who you are and He gives you that grace.

Other kinds of grace we’ll talk about in a minute, but let me show you a scripture that uses the word grace in this way from God’s word. He says – *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves (so don’t think it’s you that did it all), it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

We all come to the cross kneeling humbly. We come not because God should be so grateful to have me on His side; we come to God because He’s done something in our hearts. We bow before Him and we need Him. It’s in that needy moment we recognize what God is. It’s saving grace. It’s powerful. It changes us. We get into the kingdom that way and begin to experience so much more when we do so.

Then there’s common grace. It’s another kind of grace. It’s a grace that everybody experiences whether Christians or not. Tim Brown was praying in our worship time. We have a prayer group that meets beforehand and as he was praying he prayed all kinds of common grace things. “Lord, thank you for the sunrise that we see in the morning. Thank you for the rain that waters the ground that we have.” That is common grace that believers (Christians) experience, but nonbelievers experience too. God gives grace to everybody. So when you take a breath, that’s God’s grace. You don’t have to be a Christian to receive that. God gives His grace regularly to lots of people, to everyone. That’s common grace. Because it’s common. Everybody receives it.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says it this way: *He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* You see the common grace. Everybody gets it, He says.

I don’t have time to go into this right now, but you should write that verse down and look at what He’s trying to illustrate because that’s only an illustration of His point. His point is this on the Sermon on the Mount: You should love your enemies. What? You should love your enemies? Why? Well because God gives His grace, *He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous.* God just loves everyone. So we shouldn’t pick out the people we’re going to love based on what they give us. We should give them common grace, common love. We should love our enemies.

He says *pray for those who persecute you.* All of that is in Matthew 5 right around verse 45. He calls on this concept of God’s grace as this illustration of what we should be like. We should share that with the believers, unbelievers. We give grace to people because of what God has done. That is common grace. It’s a beautiful grace that we must understand. It does something to us.

The third kind of grace I want to talk about is this daily grace that we receive in order to live lives. We each experience our challenges. Those might be health challenges, relational challenges, financial challenges, emotional challenges. I don’t know what your package is. We

all get a package of them, right? We're trying to work with those and we need daily grace every day that empowers us to do what we need to do.

Let me show you a scripture that illustrates the daily grace. It was Paul who prayed, "Lord, take this thorn in the flesh away from me," and God's answer is no. He says – *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

I would suggest this grace is like the energy that keeps us going. It's just God's grace to be able to deal with the challenges that we're going to face. Some we face every day, the same ones. You know you're going to face the same challenge tomorrow because it's part of who you are and part of where you are right now in your life. It's part of your challenge. Some of them are surprises. We don't know what's going to happen the rest of the day or tomorrow. But we know God and He's the one who knows today and He knows tomorrow. He gives us the energy to deal with those things and that's big. I need that daily grace every day to do what I need.

This is special grace in the sense that it's not like common where it gets to everybody. This only comes to Christians really. Because they're the ones who are opening their hearts up and saying, "God, I want your power, I want your energy in my life. I want you to help me deal with this in my life." Now sometimes God gives that to people who are not Christians as He's drawing them to Himself, but the point is this is something that we have as Christians that we can take advantage of.

Remember we're coming in a moment to don't waste it. So you want to know what it is you don't have before you can think about wasting it. This is something really powerful, God's daily grace that we receive.

It's not all about us and that's why we come to this last kind of grace that I'm mentioning (there's more kinds of grace than this, but this is the next one I'm going to mention here). This is the pass-through grace. This is the grace that you give to other people. Notice the verse in 1 Peter 4. Peter says it this way: *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.* Notice various forms. There are a lot of different forms. So as you receive the grace, it comes into your hands and as it does work itself out, it comes to other people based on your gifts and your talents and your abilities and so on. So you have certain gifts that he's talking about here that God wants to use.

If you use that gift... Let's say you have a gift of encouragement. You go up to someone and you encourage them with some words. God's grace can flow through you in the midst of that. You're a steward of God's grace. It flows out of you in that gift. Or maybe you have the gift of organization. So you bring into your situation that gift and God's grace flows through you into organization. Or you maybe have the gift of hospitality. There could be a host of different things represented here. There's lots of forms of this, so the point is this idea is this grace flows through us. It's pass-through grace that we're able to share with others.

Those are four different kinds of grace that I wanted to point out today just because I want you to see how big this thing is that we have that God has provided for us. It's huge. Jerry Bridges says it

this way in his book *Discipline of Grace*: “On your best day you’re never good enough to be out of need of God’s grace. And on your worst day you’re never bad enough to be out of reach of God’s grace.” It’s there all the time. It’s coming in. It’s helping us. Sometimes we don’t recognize it, but it’s there. It’s big. God wants us to enjoy that grace, He wants us to know what it is, and we don’t want to waste it.

Notice in the verse we’re looking at today it says – *As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.* You’re already receiving it. The question isn’t whether you’re going to receive it or not. If you’re a coworker of God, you’ve asked Jesus Christ into your life, you’re one of His children, and so on, then you’re already receiving it. Notice it doesn’t say receive it. It says you’re already getting it. You’re receiving it. It’s being poured out to you regularly. It’s flowing. Don’t just waste it. Don’t take it for granted.

In Israel’s history there’s the sad time in which they didn’t follow the Lord’s direction. As a result, eventually Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. It was a very sad time for Israel. Jeremiah was the prophet at the time. Jeremiah was this prophet that talked about if you sin, bad things happen. We’re sad about the bad things that are happening, but we’ve got to repent and turn back to the Lord. But he was also the prophet who said God is great and we can trust in Him even when things aren’t going the way we’d like.

Jeremiah wrote two books in the Bible. One is his name called Jeremiah. The other is Lamentations. You don’t read it very often because it’s kind of a sad book. It’s a lament. It’s Lamentations. In fact the book of Lamentations is really five songs. That’s all it is. Five different songs. But it’s really a majestic Hebrew work of art.

In Lamentations 3 there’s one of the songs. If you look in your Bible in Lamentations 3, you’ll see that’s it’s divided up into three verse segments. Three verses, then a space, then another three verses, then another space. Because every three verses switch to a different letter of the alphabet. The first three verses each start with the letter *A*. Which is *alef* in Hebrew. The second letter is *beit*. And *gimel* and *dalet* and so on. So each of the verses start with *alef* and then *beit* is the next three verses. So it’s this acrostic kind of a poem about what God is doing and what God wants to do. It’s just a beautiful one.

I want to take you into the song down to the eighth letter, which is *cheit*. It’s a guttural sound when you pronounce it. When you get to that particular letter, the first word in the three verses is *chesed*. *Chesed* is God’s love, His never-ending love, His covenant faithfulness launching us into three verses that are all about this. If you get the picture, these people have suffered because they’ve messed up. That’s why they’re suffering. That’s why they lost Jerusalem. That’s why it was captured. They’re in captivity now. They messed up. So if you ever thought, “Oh I can’t be in a place where I received God’s grace because I messed up,” you need to read Lamentations because it’s a passage about God’s faithfulness and how He wants to care for us and He wants to bring us His grace. He just wants to pour it out into our lives.

This is Lamentations 3:22-24. The three verses that use that word *cheit* to start each of the words in those three verses. It says this: *The steadfast chesed... The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your*

*faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."* That's grace! It's new every day. It's available to us. It's this big picture that God wants us to enjoy. It's this big thing that He calls grace.

In the New Testament Jesus told a parable to teach us this idea not to waste the grace. Don't waste the grace. He didn't use those same words, but He told a story about a landowner who wanted to go on a trip. While he was gone on his trip, he wanted to give his money (his wealth, the Bible says) to three different stewards. Three of them. This story is in Mathew 25 if you want to look at it. There are three parables there illustrating the kingdom and what it's all about. We're going to take the second one and look at it. It's the parable of the landowner who gives money to these stewards.

So the first one gets five bags of gold to work with, the second one gets two bags of gold, and the third one gets one bag of gold. You know the parable about how the one with five goes invests it. We don't know how long the landowner is gone, but when he returns the guy with five had five more, so now he had ten. So now the landowner says, *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things. Come enjoy the presence of the Lord."* So there's this beautiful parable that talks about the five, the two, and the one.

Now usually when I'm thinking about this parable, I imagine myself being the two. Because there are people who have more than me and there are people who have less than me. So I can't say, "I wish I had five like that guy had. If I had five I would be much better in my life." I can't do that because God's given me two because God knows that I need two and I can manage two. I'm a two-talent person.

I use the word talent there because bags of gold is how it's translated in the New International Version, but the Greek word is *talenton* which means talent. So I'm not talking about the talents we use like playing the piano or something. I'm talking about it's money in the passage.

When I look at my life and evaluate it, I say I'm a two-talent person. I've got something. But I'm not as good as the five talent person who's got five. So I use the parable to say I can't be worried about the five talent person, I need to focus on what I have. It's just between me and God. I can't be comparing myself to anybody else. I just need to do what I need to do with my two. And when I look at the one talent person, I can't say, "I'm better than him. I've got more than that guy." I can't do that. God gives me two. I need to deal with my two and I need to focus on the Lord. That's how I usually look at the parable and I think that's a fair way to look at it.

But I think when Jesus was telling the parable He was trying to illustrate to everybody don't be a one person. Imagine yourself being the one talent person. Because the one talent person gets one bag of gold and the Bible says he takes it and he buries it. So when the landowner returns from his journey, the landowner has everybody report back and the guy with one says, "Oh I thought you'd be so upset if I lost any of your money, so I just buried it in the ground and I brought it here." The landowner was mad at him. He said, "You should have taken it to the bank. You could have gotten a return on investment. Your ROI would have increased a little bit." And of course your ROI is partly dependent on time. Right? So if you put it in the bank, you could have

gained some interest on that based over time. And he didn't do that. He buried it in the ground. He wasted the time where that bag of gold could have been earning something or been used.

What Jesus I think is saying in the parable is don't waste what you have, what I've given you. The landowner gives us this grace, He gives us each the grace that we need in our lives. Don't waste the grace is the message He's trying to share in there. You have it. Don't let it just fall through your hands. Don't lose it. Don't take it for granted is what He's saying.

Let's imagine this a little bit differently just so you experience the grandness of this grace that we have. Imagine it's like a freeway. Grace is like the freeway that allows us to move faster or easier in life. Most everybody else is on the streets. They're hitting the stop signs, the stoplights, the traffic, and so on. But those who get this grace thing get on the freeway. So if you think about saving grace, it's like the onramps. Saving grace is the onramp onto the freeway where we get to know what it means to become a Christian. We have access to this pathway of grace that God wants to give us. When we're there, it's just a different feel than it is down in the grind with all of the stoplights and stop signs and traffic and so on. Now we're experiencing the highway that God wants us to enjoy.

When we're there in our lives, when we understand what saving grace is, we develop inside of us a commitment. We walk away saying, "Yes, I'm committed to this. This is what I want. I want Jesus Christ in my life because that's the grace I know I need."

Then there's the common grace. If you're on the road, I imagine this common grace to be looking and watching the things on the side of the road. Just enjoying driving on the road, enjoying life. I think many of us are so busy we don't get to enjoy life. We're not thankful about the things that we see right around us. I think that's what common grace does. It makes us thankful for what we have.

Yesterday morning I was driving through Iowa to teach a parenting seminar forty-five minutes away. As I'm driving and the sun's coming up in Iowa, you know what you see in Iowa on the side of the highway? Corn. I'm telling you that's all you see. Farms everywhere. It's really interesting. Because you're driving along, there's another farm and every farmhouse has a silo next to it. You just don't see that in New Jersey. I drive down Route 1; I don't see a silo anywhere. It's really interesting to me to drive along the road and see things.

Last week I was driving in Alabama on Saturday to get to the church that we were speaking in then. Alabama is completely different than anywhere else in the world, I think. It's a beautiful place.

This week I'm going to be going to Denver. I'm looking forward to that because when you're in Denver and you're driving along the road, you know what you see? Snowcapped mountains. It is amazing. We do not have mountains in New Jersey. In the west they have big mountains. When you're driving along the road, the highway in Denver, you see those mountains just all around the city. It's just a beautiful picture to look at those things.

When you're driving down the road of your life every day, there are beautiful things that are available to you as a result of common grace. Common grace makes us thankful. Saving grace helps us to be committed. Common grace makes us thankful. Daily grace is that grace that we need just to stay on the road, stay within the lines, put gas in the car. It just keeps us moving on the path. That daily grace is so valuable for us.

There's this worship experience, it seems to me, that we have in the midst of that daily grace, but it's also I think we take grace risks. You see if you've got talents you're putting out there to invest, it's a risk. Did you know you can take grace risks in your life today? When you go out and you talk to someone about the Lord and you know that God's grace is abounding all around us, then you share a message about God with someone, there's grace there that God can use in just a cool way.

I think everybody ought to go to Alabama. That was my conclusion after last week. Everybody ought to visit Alabama. It's such an amazing place and everybody is so gracious there. They're just thoughtful. They open doors for you. They say, "Hi," and you wonder, "Do I know this person?" No. Everyone just says "hi" to each other.

I was staying in an Economy Hotel and I went down to eat some breakfast at their kind of breakfast place that they had. They had wrapped cinnamon rolls and stuff. I don't eat that stuff. But I walk into this room and the hostess says, "Oh. If I would have known you wanted oatmeal, I would have made you some great oatmeal." I didn't know there were different kinds of oatmeal. I thought oatmeal was oatmeal. But she was going to make me some great oatmeal. "Would you like me to fix you up some eggs?" she said. They even talk different down there. That meal experience that I had in that Economy little kitchen was a great breakfast – not because of the food, but because of the woman that was just displaying this grace in the room.

Here comes an old man into the room and he sits down. He gets his food, he sits down, and he starts praying out loud. Everybody in the room could hear what he was praying about. I'm going, "This is cool. This is kind of what heaven is going to be like." So I go away from that experience saying, "Wow. Everybody ought to visit Alabama." There's something about being in Alabama that helps us deal with that daily grace that we experience.

God gives us that grace to deal with our lives every day. There's that pass-through grace like that woman had in that kitchenette area. We need that. So when we have the ability to say this to someone or greet someone or "I'll pray for you" or take an interest in someone or bring something into someone's life, we are bringing to them the very grace of God.

So take those ideas and put them back into our passage for just a moment. The passage that says – *do not receive God's grace in vain*. In other words, don't let it fall through your fingers. You're receiving it already. Don't let it fall through your fingers.

How do you waste it? How do you waste God's grace? Well I think you can waste God's grace by sinning, of course. Getting off the highway of life that God wants us to be on. We resist God's grace or we take it for granted. Those are some of the ways. But I think one of the ways that we

miss out on God's grace is "not now, not now." We become so self-focused and we kind of deal with life our own way and "I'll deal with grace later. Not right now."

That's why verse 2 is so powerful because it says – *For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.* It's for now. This idea of grace is so big and you have it. It's not like you have to go get it. God is already pouring it out on you. He's pouring it in a way that's just amazing. He wants you to receive it and enjoy it.

When we lived in Kenya we learned a lot about living in a third world country. We lived in this village for a little while when I was visiting one time. In that village they didn't have running water. What would happen is that the children or the women, it was their job to go down with their big five-gallon drums and go down to the river and get the water out of the river. This was the same river that the cows were washed in, that they would wash their clothes in. So the water was not all that clean, obviously. They would bring that water back up and they would carry it on their backs. They would have a band around their forehead and the band would go down to the container to the forehead and they would walk like this and carry the water up the hill. It was fascinating because you could see it everywhere. They were getting the water. That's what they do.

So at one point I said, "I want to try this." So I stopped one of the kids and I said, "I'll carry your water for you." Oh they laughed that a white man would consider doing such a thing. So they helped me get the water on my back and put the band on my forehead. I'm walking and pretty soon I have a parade of kids that can't believe that this white man is carrying the water up the hill to this house. Then you take the water into the house and put it there.

Here's what happens when you use water when it's like that. It's so sparse then you're really careful about what you do. You don't take showers. You don't get showers in Kenya in these villages. What you do is you get two buckets of water. The one bucket is about one gallon of water you kind of get wet and soaked up with. Then you get the other gallon to get rinsed off with and hopefully you get all the soap off. Then that water that is caught is taken out and they water the plants with it. So nothing is wasted when it comes to the water that people use.

Now we don't have that problem in our country. There's water all over the place that we can use. So we don't have to conserve water most of the time. We can use it. So we take it for granted. I think that's the case with our grace sometimes. We take it for granted because it's all around us. We have too much.

The passage is reminding us that when you receive God's grace, don't just take it in vain. Use it. It's a treasure. It's a valuable thing. You have it already. You're receiving it. Don't waste the grace. Don't waste the grace.

Let's stand. Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you that you've given us so much, much of what we don't even realize or aren't even grateful for. Sometimes we even become entitled or demanding. Lord,

teach us how to be grateful people, committed to you, and ready to use this grace that you've entrusted to us. Not only for ourselves daily, but also to bless other people as we come into contact with them. Reveal opportunities and make us so aware of the precious nature of your grace that we can enjoy. Lord, we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.