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GOOD MORNING – Bobby Schuller (BS) and Hannah Schuller (HS)

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

HS: And welcome church family and visitors. It is such a joy to have you here. Today, we hope you leave knowing that God's delays are not God's denials. He is at work in your life. Thank you for being here. We love you.

BS: And what a joyful feeling there is in the house today, isn't there? There's just so much energy and life. It's so encouraging to be here on Sunday morning's with you all. I just love the feeling of being here. We're so glad all of you on television, wherever you are, are joining us, we're so grateful to have you here. And we just believe, you know, it's so easy in life when you're waiting for God to do something in your life, or to move in that waiting, to feel discouraged. We want you to feel encouraged today. We want you to be full of heart, full of life; we want you to leave here ready to take on the week and our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will do that good work in your life today.

Let's come to Him in prayer: Father, we thank you in Jesus' name that you love us just as we are, not as we should be. Thank you, Lord, that you've forgiven us, renewed us, called us, equipped us. Lord, we are here because we believe if we're alive, we are called to do something great for you. Thank you for this church of dreamers, and Lord, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen. Turn around and shake the hand of the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

SCRIPTURE Daniel 10:4-6, 12-14 – Hannah Schuller

You may be seated. In preparation for the message, Daniel 10:

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me for twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to you and your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.

God is working in your life even if you don't understand the timing. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER – Russ

We want to come together and we want to pray for those who are waiting.

Heavenly Father, thank you for today. Thank you for this glorious morning, Lord. We lift up your name and we proclaim it through music and the spoken word and scripture. And Lord, it is such a blessing to be here. And we come to you and we confess that we are not so good at waiting. That waiting is not our strong suit in life, and we want things when we want it. But there is so much to wait on, whether it be that medical news that we have the test on Friday, we don't get the result till Monday. Oh, what a long weekend that is. Lord for applications, even for new relationships, not knowing do I call, do I not call, when's the right amount of time. Seems like we're always waiting and waiting can be so discouraging, but we know that it is your timing that matters, Lord. It is not our timing and that we can trust you, we can depend on you, we can rely on you that your timing is perfect all the time.

God's Delays are Not God's Denials

Lord, so whatever the issue may be, I know there are people here, there are folks watching on TV who are waiting on something, Lord, they're having anxiety and we speak against that and we just proclaim your mighty name, and pray for patience and wisdom. And we remember the sacrifice that Jesus made, how He had to wait, how He had to make decisions, how there was uncertainty for Him. And He is the one who taught us these words, saying: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, amen.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Friends, will you hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving. Let's say this creed together: I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "God's Delays are Not God's Denials"

It was interesting when Russ was talking about waiting for a medical report, it immediately made me think of a time when I had been having some blurred vision and some other strange side effects, and so I went to see a doctor. Hannah made me. Just kidding. You know men who are married live longer cause their wives make them go to the doctor.

Anyway, so I went to the doctor and put a flash in my eye and kind of looked and did a couple of things. He says 'you know you might have a brain tumor. I'm going to have you get an EEG.' I was like what? Or cat scan. So I went and got a cat scan, it cost me \$200, and I was like when do I find out if I have a brain tumor? They're like, 'oh, it should be no more than three or four weeks.' We'll let you know as soon as we get the data. I said like three or four weeks? And so I remember waiting three weeks to be like do I have a brain tumor? I was like thinking about who's going to watch my kids if I'm dead. Anyway, I was fine. Nothing. No brain tumor.

But that's a weird.. nothing happened, I was fine. Apparently I need to drink more water. Anyway. But I remember that feeling of kind of that in-between, that feeling of waiting. Is God going to come through for me? Is this medical thing going to be bad?

And I want to talk about how especially in our dreaming, in our goal setting, in our work, in our families, our relationships, it can be very hard sometimes when we feel like it's just taking forever for our dreams to come through, our work or our vision to come through. And I want to say two things today – God's delays are not God's denials, and God's decrease is not God's demotion.

First on this first one, very many of us when we're saying like why is this happening, I want to quote two family members. The first is of course my dear old Grandpa Schuller. It was one of his famous quotes. He said: "God's delays are not God's denials." I have a crusade, by the way. This quote is very often plagiarized by other pastors, so I'm on a crusade anyway. So he said God's delays are not God's denials.

And there's a lot of wisdom we can learn from that and many of the other things he said, but that was really helpful for me in times in life when I'm in that in-between period. Maybe some of you are there right now. You feel caught in that in-between. You're just like how long, Lord, is this going to wait. And then there's another person in my family, Haven. I remember when.. a long time ago, not a long time ago, last year, Haven was feeling discouraged in school. When she first started school, she loved it, and I always drive her to school in the morning, and we started doing this thing where we would cheer each other on, encourage each other with these sayings, and we had this list of things, and it just sort of grew over time. So I would go 'we're going to be,' and she'd go 'positive!' That kind of thing. And I'd go 'because knowledge is power!' 'Because leaders are readers!' 'If you can dream it, you can do it.' That's Walt Disney, by the way, not Dr. Schuller. And then we'd go 'honor Jesus with your life!' And then we'd get all excited.

But the last one we always said, and this is one she invented, I thought was great, she said 'if it's great, it's worth the wait.' Classic Schullerism. There it is. Another Schuller with a pippy line.

God's delays are not God's denials. If it's great, it's worth the wait. Patience is a godly thing. It's good to remember that God is not a microwave, He's not an over-the-counter, fast food type of God. We serve a God who does things slowly, and He does things well and He does things in His timing. And when we feel frustrated, I want you to know that we never know why a lot of these things happen, but we can trust that ultimately God will get through to us.

God's Delays are Not God's Denials

I want to look at two stories today that show these principles that His decrease isn't always bad, and His delay is not always bad.

One of my favorite stories is in the book of Daniel, Daniel chapter 10. I've cited it before, but Daniel's an interesting story because he begins as a young man being carted off from his hometown in Israel to Babylon, where he ends up in the service of the Babylonian king, and over his life becomes more and more promoted. If you study the history of Babylon, it's a really fascinating civilization because they have this group of.. they were like wizards and sleuth sayers who on the one hand, they were real scientists who did actual chemistry, they did real observable science, they did engineering, but on the other hand, they were like pagan sorcerers. They did magic and bone readings and things like that. And so it was just kind of an odd group. And Daniel, as he becomes wiser and wiser doing God's work, is put in place as an orthodox godly Jew, he is put in place over these wizards and sort of leads them. And so it really makes the book of Daniel a fun book to read. If you're wondering who Daniel is, he's the guy from Daniel in the lion's den, and his friends are the one from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. And his story is just one that's full of visions and miracles and God's power.

Well eventually, after Babylon is actually conquered by Persia, poor Daniel has lived through two wars, brutal wars; friends have died, homes have been destroyed, and now he's an old, old man. He's honored, he's revered, he's probably wealthy, he probably has an entourage with him. And as an old man, he has this vision of the worst war. It's like a third war. And he doesn't know what this means and it terrifies him. And he cries out to God as he always has, only this time he hears no answer. "God what does this mean!?" No answer. Nothing. And because he doesn't understand what this war is, and when it's going to come, and why he was shown to see the war, he cries out "God, reveal to me what this is!" Still nothing.

So Daniel, in almost a very Jewish impassioned protest just begins to fast and mourn, and he covers himself in sackcloth, and he chooses not to bathe. That's a way to protest, huh? Decides not to use any lotions, and just for twenty-four days, he goes with no food, just water, and every day just feeling frustrated. Why? All this time, God has always come through for me and now He's not. Where is God? God, where are you? Still nothing.

Finally, one day on the twenty-fourth day of his fast, he's standing down by the water with his group of men, servants probably, and probably students, and for whatever reason, they're down by the water and all of a sudden an angel appears before Daniel. And it says his voice sounds like a multitude. So imagine a sea of people all speaking at the same time. That's what the angel's voice sounds like. And his eyes are full of fire. And he goes "Daniel!" like this, looking at Daniel. And the men with Daniel can't see the angel, but they are completely overcome with fear and dread. Some of them fall to the ground in a fetal position. Others flee and run away. And Daniel, looking at the angel, as an old man who hasn't eaten in twenty-four days, passes out. Just falls on the ground.

And the angel comes and wakes him up, and says 'stand up.' You can see that Daniel is exhausted. And he almost addresses this hunger thing. He says 'I know you've been praying to the Lord. I know you've been fasting. I know you've been waiting. I know you're frustrated. But the Lord, on the first day you prayed to me, sent me to you, except that the prince of Persia,' which is probably a reference to an arch demon or something, 'stopped me. And the angel and I began to fight. I was struggling to get through so I could come to you to relay God's message. And I wasn't even able to break through until the angel Michael came and assisted me, and I've just gotten through to give you this message.' And he tells him, effectively, that the vision he had was actually a prophecy of Greece, Alexander the Great is coming. That's a different thing altogether.

The main thing we learn is that the spiritual world is just bizarre. This is just weird. I mean as a reformed guy reading this, we are the frozen chosen. We are academics. We've sorted it all out. And when you read that: some angel couldn't get through because it was some demon and then another angel had to help him, you just kind of throw your hands in the air and just go I don't know. I just don't know. All I know is I can trust the Lord.

Reminds me of actually once when I was sitting in the airport for EL AL to fly to Israel, I was sitting with two rabbis, and I asked them about Calvinism, which they didn't know who John Calvin was, but I asked them, I was like if you take this to the extreme, like did God want me to lift this pencil, and did God want me to sit here with you, and did God have everything organized and everything planned like clockwork. And these two rabbis in classic fashion, they look at each other like what is he talking about. And one of them looks at me and he goes "who can know such a thing?"

God's Delays are Not God's Denials

As a kid in seminary, that was really helpful for me. And that was.. it really was. And that's such a Jewish answer with a question? It's like who can know? What can we know? We can know that God's delays are not God's denials. That God has things behind the scenes at work for your life. That you can trust Him. You don't need to worry, you don't need to be frantic, you don't need to be scared, God's got this. He's got it under control. He's got the whole world in His hands. Including your life! You're going to be okay.

Now I just want to say God's delays are not God's denials, and every Sunday, if you're here at church, we gather and we say these two phrases: I don't need to hurry and I don't need to worry. I don't need to worry, I don't need to hurry. You know why? Because God's not hurried, God's not worried. He's not worried. He's not worried because He doesn't love you. He does love you. He's not worried because He has all the power. He's got it sorted out. It'll be fine.

And so in the meantime, enjoy your life. Don't spend it worrying and spinning your wheels and feeling frustrated and feeling angry, embittered and jealous, self pity, let it go. And certainly don't hurry. Hurry is always a position of weakness. Think about it. When you're in a hurry, you can't be compassionate to your neighbor, when you're in a hurry, you can't be loving towards your spouse and kids. You're unaware of the needs of those around you. If you want to walk with God, you need to walk at a walking pace.

So God is not hurried because God is never in a position of weakness. That's just how He does. That's how He is. So God's delays are not God's denials, amen? Let that encourage you, if you're in that waiting place.

So God's delays are not God's denials, and God's decrease is not God's demotion. Sometimes we think, very often, if I'm losing money, or I'm losing some maybe relationships in my life that I don't want to go away, or something's changing in my life and I don't like it, we think is this God punishing me? Is God demoting me? Am I losing my status in the kingdom of God? And I want you to know that none of those things are true. That God's decrease is not God's demotion. In fact, very often for God, decrease in your life will often come before promotion. And I could name a lot of stories in the word of God that show that exact thing, but my favorite is the story of Gideon.

Now Gideon is a judge in the book of Judges, but not a judge like we think today. When we think of judges, we think of a guy with a white wig on, and a gavel, and he's shouting at Mr. Toad's Wild Ride or something. Order! And that's not what a judge is. A judge is.. think of a war chieftain. It comes from the Jewish word for justice, and the justice in this time is usually in terms of war against evil men.

So they're chieftains, right? And there's this guy named Gideon, and the Bible says, listen, this is important: he is the weakest son of the weakest clan of the weakest tribe of Israel. He's probably the youngest. Sounds a bit like David, actually. Weakest son of the weakest clan of the weakest tribe. Then he is the one God is going to choose to defeat the Middeonites. Now the Middeonites are a camel back.. think of like horse rider type raiders. They sort of look like the Hebrews.

They're also descendants of Abraham, so racially they're very similar. They're hard to distinguish from Jewish people, and this is going to be important in the story. And you find that these guys are coming into Israel raiding farms, pillaging villages, and now for seven years, God's people have been hiding up in the hills. And a prophet had revealed to them the reason God had allowed these camel back riders to come in and invade is because God's people, who are supposed to be a foundation of justice and goodness and righteousness, are bowing down to Baal and Asherapoles, and even sacrificing children, which is so outside of what God's intent was for His new city and His covenant people.

And so God allows them to be in this sort of time of persecution, and He raises up Gideon, and Gideon takes his dad's Asherapole and his altar to Baal and uses it for wood on an altar for Yahweh God. And these people, they get all upset. His own people, Jewish people. Why would you do this? And his father comes and defends him. And it turns into this great story where Gideon, this guy becomes.. picture William Wallace. He is going all around, and he starts raising up these tribes, and raising up men to kick out these Middeonites and protect our hometown.

Eventually he raises an army of thirty-two thousand men to defend his hometown; a militia army, rag tag guys, and they arrive to the Middeonite army, there's this face off and a river in-between. The Jewish army looks down at the Middeonite army, and the Bible says that the Middeonite army was so grand that it looked as though the men were locusts covering the land. Has anybody here lived in the South before? There's a lot of good things about the South, there is; the food in particular, hospitality. But there's one bad thing about the South and that's the bugs.

God's Delays are Not God's Denials

I remember a friend of mine from Oklahoma sent me a picture of a gas station pump covered in grasshoppers. So it was still in the shape of a pump, but it was grasshoppers. It was like somebody took grasshopper paint and covered this thing.

And this effect happens in the Middle East where you have grasshoppers just covering everything. And it said that the amount of their camels – think of a camel as like a tank in today's standards. The amount of their camels outnumbered the sands in the sea. We're going to pick an arbitrary number – a hundred thousand men are down on the opposite side of the river, and Gideon is facing them with thirty-two thousand men. And God has promised them that they're going to win this war. So Gideon goes before God, and asks for what? More men! I need more men. Lord, its three to one. If I'm going to win this battle, I need more soldiers. And what does God say? No you don't. No, you don't. In fact, you need less.

So He tells Gideon if you're going to win this battle, listen to me: go before your men and tell them any one of you who is afraid of this battle, to fight the Middeonites, you may leave with honor and go hide in the mountain. He makes this declaration before his army and of the thirty-two thousand, twenty-two thousand leave.

Now he's down to ten thousand and he's like God, it's ten to one! I need more men. And what does God say? No you don't. Next thing I want you to do, go down to the spring and I want you to have all the men drink from the water and some will drink like true honorable gentlemen, and some will drink like dogs. Choose the dogs. So look what happens. So he watches these ten thousand men, and they go before the water, and the way to drink like gentlemanly, as a soldier, you kneel by the water, you go on one knee, you never use your left hand for anything, and you scoop with your right hand like this, and you drink like this. This is how you drink. And he said, but some with their spears and shield in hand, will actually go down like this and drink out of the water like that. And he's like the guys that drink like that one, pick those ones.

Now it was interesting because I actually went to the very spring in Israel where this story happened, and the guy who was there was both a rabbi and an archaeologist, and he said you know what we discovered is that in the ancient days, the veteran like commando style soldiers, one of the things they drilled into them is never put your weapon down when you're in the field. Unless you absolutely have to, you always hold on to your weapons. And the reason they drank out of the water like dogs, is because they were holding a shield in one hand, and a spear in the other. That even to do something as petty as drinking from water, to put your shield.. you just never do that. And that is because if there's a surprise attack, you're ready to go.

What was God doing? Look, the three hundred that were left were the real warriors. He got rid of everyone except for.. I mean these guys were tough as a coffin nail. I mean hard as marble. Cold as ice. They were stone cold killers! That's who was left! Men of war. Three hundred solid men. And these are the ones that Gideon was supposed to fight with.

So they take these three hundred guys under God's command, breaks them into three groups, and now he finds out, actually, that there was this dream that this army was having that a loaf of barley bread was going to roll into the camp and knock over all the tents. The reason the imagery is like this is because the Hebrew people were farmers and the Middeonites were hunter gatherers, so the idea of a loaf of bread, they believed that this was some bad omen that the Hebrew people were going to come through and win.

And so there's all this talk and chatter about this dream that everybody's having about a loaf of bread that's going to roll into the camp, which is a funny image to me. Anyway, Gideon's group of three hundred men in the middle of the night, two in the morning, just at the changing of the watch, they break up into three groups of a hundred, they're carrying pots with torches on the inside, and they're carrying with them these battle horns that are also used for worship called a shofar, and they surround the army in the middle of the night. And this army of a hundred thousand people is on pins and needles.

Now real quick, how many of you went to a big college? Twenty thousand, thirty thousand people? Now if you're ever at a big college of thirty thousand people, most of the people you meet, you've never seen in your life. It's like a little city. I went to a high school of two thousand and I saw people every day I'd never met in my life. Imagine being in an army of a hundred thousand. You do not know most of the people in that army. Aside from the fact that you and the Hebrew people are very similar looking, this creates a catastrophe for the Middeonites. They surround the army, and they begin blowing these horns.

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So these guys wake up in the middle of the night surrounded by war cries. The torches come out of the pots, the pots shatter on the ground, flames erupt surrounding the army, and these mean lean fighting elite guys start charging and just killing like crazy. And the whole place goes frantic and everybody starts killing each other. All of these soldiers begin fighting and killing and all this stuff. Most of the army's destroyed, and whoever's left runs away. And as far as it looks, none of the three hundred men that were following Gideon even die. Isn't that incredible?

And the thing I want you to hear from this is Gideon's way was the Middeonites way. Let me say that again. Gideon's way was the world's way. More is better. More soldiers. More soldiers. I need more. But the very thing that Gideon wanted from God was the very thing that led to the destruction of the Middeonites. What they thought was strength in numbers, was actually the thing that destroyed them. They were bloated, encumbered, they had hubris, they were totally disconnected from each other. What did Gideon have with his three hundred men? Lean, tough, guys who all knew each other by name. They were friends, they marched together for days. See that's the difference.

And that's what we learn. So often in Jesus' way is that more is not always better. God's decrease in your life is not always God's demotion. Sometimes God is decreasing things in your life because He wants you to be fit for whatever's about to come. He wants you to be ready for what's just around the corner. In fact, I just want to proclaim over your life that even now if you're experiencing decrease, to get excited because it means God's about to do something great in your life. I just believe that for you.

I'll just close with this story. It's interesting how we as American's feel so safe when we have more money, more stuff, more luxuries, and yet all of those things, God gives and takes away all those things. And I remember when we first planted our church at the Gathering years ago, we wanted to dedicate our church to God. And the way were going to do that was by giving away all of our tithes and offerings to the poor the first year that we met. And we basically decided to put God to the test and see, all right, you said if you give ten percent of your money, that you'll open up heaven, we're going to give away a hundred percent of our money and see what you can do with that. And God really did bless us. But that's not the point of the story. Because of that, we created a church that was very geared towards helping those who were in need. And one project that we would do is clean houses of hoarders. There was a guy loosely affiliated with our network, an older gentlemen, his wife had had a heart attack and the fire department came to bring her out of the house, and when they got there, they couldn't get to her because the house was so full of trash, old mail, newspapers, things like that, that they weren't able to get the gurney to her. And so when they finally were able to clear stuff with axes and things and get her out, they condemned the house and wouldn't allow our friend back into his home.

So his group of friends who knew us, said would you help us clean out this house so so-and-so can move back into their home? And man let me tell you, I wish I'd had a camera. This was crazy.

We went in, I think he grew up in the depression and I totally understand when people feel this fear about having more, but he'd never throw away mail or newspapers or anything, and it had all clustered along the walls, all the way to the ceiling, and through the years and years that he'd lived there, it all kind of melded into each other, so that there were like hallways through trash that you would do to navigate the downstairs. The whole upstairs was completely overrun. There was a beehive up there. They wouldn't even go up anymore so they slept on the couch.

And so like there was like 15 of us from the church, we just began cleaning it out. And I remember like when you pulled the paper off, it didn't come off like papers would shuffle off, it broke like Styrofoam. It'd just go like this and you'd just have a cube of whatever. And it was always like a fortune cookie – you never knew what you were going to get when you pulled it out. Some of them had ant colonies, other had cockroach colonies. There was a snake nest underneath the sink, there were raccoons. And it was just gross and it took us forever. We cleaned it out. Anything that was.. no matter how dirty or whatever, anything that was remotely salvageable, we left it there. We just threw away the trash. And then we cleaned up, repaired, painting everything. So we spent hundreds of hours, thousands of dollars fixing this guys house as this gift. And we thought wow, he's going to be so glad. And when he got back, and he looked at his house, he just went no!

And for me, my heart really went out to the man because I saw in this friend of ours, I saw something in myself. What was really dangerous for him and could have caused people to get sick and made his house unlivable was something that he held onto, and I thought Lord, in what ways am I holding onto material things in my life thinking they're going to save me or help me when the test really comes. In what ways am I encumbered?

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Now we live in a world where God blesses people and God gives and He takes away. I don't think God wants you to be poor or anything like that, but there are seasons in our life where we experience decrease, and we think we're under a curse or punishment; it's just not the case. It's not what we see in the scripture. What we see is the opposite is that very often the way that God wants to get us where we need to go is through decrease, is through cleaning out some things in our life.

Maybe you just lost something in your life or lost something that you treasure, something that's valuable to you, and you think how can I go on? I want you to know that you still have great things ahead of you. You want another Schullerism? Don't focus on what you've lost – focus on what you have left. God has something great in store for you. I want to promise you that if you continue to live and endure the space of not knowing when I'm going to get there, or why I'm experiencing decrease, when you cross that finish line, you'll look back on this day and you'll be glad you endured. And my friend, you will endure. We believe in you, God believes in you, and we are on your side. So we just trust that the Lord, who is a loving Father, has our best in mind.

Let's pray: Lord, we thank you that God's delays are not God's denials. Lord, that your decrease is not your demotion. We thank you that your ways are not always our ways, and that we can trust you, God. I pray, Father, just abundant favor and blessing over those who are in our life. I pray for health and financial blessing, but more than that, help us to be more and more like Jesus so that when we face sickness, and we face poverty, we face loss and difficulty, Lord, that it only makes us more like you. It actually helps us to become more joyful, more loving, more compassionate, more empathetic, stronger, and Lord, I pray for that. Thank you for your blessing, and we love you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift His countenance upon you and give you His peace in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.