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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: Welcome, church family and visitors. We always enjoy being with you. And today, know that God made you unique on purpose for a purpose, and that purpose is so good. Thank you again for being here. We love you.

BS: We really are so glad that you're in the house today or watching on television, and we're going to pray that this just ends up being a life full of joy, full of goodness, and that you leave this building or turn your television set off full of joy, full of life.

So Father, we thank you for calling us here and we pray in Jesus' name that you would help us, Lord, to keep our chin up and to see, Father, where you're taking us; to see the big picture. Lord, we thank you that you love us just as we are and not as we should be. Lord, we thank you that even now you look at us and you say that we're not what we do, or what we have, or what others say about us, but that we are your beloved sons and daughters. Lord, we thank you and we love you, 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 – 1 Kings 17:12-15 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, 1st Kings 17:12.

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread – only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son that we may eat it – and die." Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'" She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

Church family, stretching in our generosity opens the door to God's miraculous abundance. Amen.

INTERVIEW – Anne Beiler (AB) – Bobby Schuller (BS)

(VIDEO ROLL IN: Anne Beiler is the founder of the world famous Auntie Anne's Pretzels. However, Auntie Anne's would have never started if it wasn't for the trauma and pain she'd experienced in her life. Her new book *The Secret Lies Within* tells how she found purpose in her pain. Please welcome, Anne Beiler!)

BS: Anne! Thank you so much being here today. I have to tell you, how many of you have had an Auntie Anne's Pretzel and just love it? Me too. Very proud. Those pretzels are amazing. I'm not sure what you put it in it. I think it's a big secret.

AB: Every pretzel is rolled with love.

BS: Yes. Is that what you call butter?

AB: That's right.

BS: Awesome. Anne, thank you for being here. Now you're finally writing this book and it's really a very personal book, isn't it. It's coming from your heart in a deep place.

AB: Absolutely. I've lived many years, had great success but I also had great struggle. Growing up on the farm as a little Amish girl, I was taught pretty much that life is good, and God is harsh. And I was confused, but after seven decades of life's experiences, I know today that life is hard and God is good. I don't confuse the two anymore.

It's Not Stretching if it Doesn't Hurt

So I was really not prepared for the tragedy that my husband and I experienced when our 19-month-old little girl was killed on our farm instantly. And when Angie made her ascent into heaven, I began my gradual descent into a world of spiritual confusion and emotional pain because I thought that life is good, God is harsh – why did He allow this to happen to me? And I went into this real dark place and stayed there for a long time. Right soon after her death, then I went to my pastor for help and he took advantage of me in my first meeting with him and I stayed because of the secret that I kept, I stayed in that abusive relationship for seven long years, and the grief of Angie was deep, but the despair of my abuse was even deeper and I could hardly bear it.

BS: I can't imagine that where you lose a child and then you go to a minister, somebody who's supposed to be a symbol of goodness, trust, and he takes advantage of you in this way. I mean you must have been feeling all sorts of horrible stuff on the inside: shame and fear and confusion and all of this stuff.

AB: Yes, just pain, blame and shame, and confusion for sure. And I stayed there because I really believed the lies that Satan really told me every day is that you're unlovable, you're unforgiveable, and you're unchangeable, and if your husband ever finds out about this, he will divorce you. So when you can't share your secrets, you stay in this place of darkness that eventually destroys you.

BS: So what happened for you? I mean the book is called *The Secret Lies Within*. It's a great word play, I mean, but for you, did you tell your husband, and what was that experience like, and did you tell a friend? Isn't it crazy how when you're going through a difficult time, there are so many things that keep us from being honest about our depression, our fears, our struggles, our losses.

AB: In our pain we believe many lies, I really believe that. And through the years, the good news is that when you're in this kind of pain, this darkness, every time you talk to Jesus, He's there, He hears you and He cares. And that's what I did for seven years. And the three things I learned during that time was the bedside prayers, three types of confession: bedside prayers, the journaling, which I began, which David, how many songs did David write? We love David because he was real, right? And then the third type is the one to another confession found in James 5:16. At one point God said to me get up off your knees and go tell your husband what's going on in your life. I really want to just stay on my knees.

BS: That must have been really scary, too.

AB: It was so scary and I believed that Jesus would deliver me, but He said get up off your knees. And when I did, I began this journey of the James 5:16 model: "Confess your faults one to another." That was the beginning of my freedom and that was the beginning when God began to redeem, not only my life, but my marriage, my family, and then Auntie Anne's was a part of that redemption plan, which is unbelievable to me.

BS: So Auntie Anne's came out of that..

AB: Yes.

BS: ..that whole..

AB: Out of our pain..

BS: ..deep, difficult.. yes.

AB: ..our purpose.

BS: Your pain became your story.

AB: Yes, absolutely. And then God gave me, through a simple pretzel, He gave me a platform to share my story for God's glory. And you know what Bobby? God's glory is becoming my story. I love Him so much for His redemption.

BS: Well we appreciate you so much and what you're doing for anybody. It's so interesting because the church should be a place where when we're going through a difficult time, we can be honest with what we're going through and be surrounded by people who love us. And I think the church is changing, but very often for some people, church has been an experience of shame, of rejection, of isolation, judgment. And that's not at all what the scriptures represent or what Christ represents is forgiveness, love, loving us right where we're at. He's not in a hurry for us to change or be different. He loves us just as we are, not as we should be, and that's your story, isn't it.

AB: Absolutely. And I love the fact that God has taught me how to bring all of my deeds into the light, going to a light as He is in the light. And as I do that, then I have fellowship with you and the whole body of Christ and others, and then His blood cleanses us from all sin and that's how I stay free today. I use this ongoing confession – bring all of my deeds, and I share my life whenever I need to, and that's what keeps me free.

BS: Well Anne, thank you. Thank you for your pretzels..

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AB: Yes.

BS: ..which are delicious.

AB: You're welcome, you're welcome.

BS: And thank you so much for being vulnerable and honest to share your story with people. We know that a lot of people around the world and in this church are being touched deeply and encouraged because of what you've said to us today.

AB: Thank you, Bobby.

BS: We thank you and we love you.

AB: Great to be here.

BS: God bless you.

AB: Thank you.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Friends, will you hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord? Let's say this 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. Amen!

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "It's Not Stretching if it Doesn't Hurt"

Well recently I got a text from a friend, I think this is called an intersectional graph. I don't know. But he sent this to me to basically prod me and tease me. This is what do bank robbers, DJ's and preachers have in common? And as you can see on the graph, bank robbers and DJ's – everybody on the floor. DJ's and preachers – are you with me. Preachers and bank robbers – give me your money. And what do all three have in common? Put your hands up.

Look, I grew up in the church, and have been surrounded by so many denominations, styles of preachers and thinkers, and I can say that one of my greatest concerns when preaching the gospel, especially when it comes to generosity is all of the baggage that comes with preachers in general. Let's not even get into televangelists, shall we? I mean there is such a messed up history by leaders in the church who have used money for their own whatever – benefit. And sometimes for me, that makes me feel like if I want to reach people on television or people in this church, I can't talk about generosity because it'll put this big shield; this big wall will go up, and people will think well I just want your money. And I want you to know that that's something that weighs on me.

And so first I would say that in this church, this church actually votes on my salary, so if more money comes in, I don't get like a raise or a bonus or anything. I don't like get more money. The reason we want people to give is because we can reach hurting people; we can do better music, we can have a larger and better campus, we can feed more people. So so much of the money that we get, most of the money that we get, all of the money we get is used to help hurting people.

I just believe in the gospel and that's why I force myself every single fall to do a series on stewardship. And if that's you and you're watching but you think, oh Bobby just wants my money, today when I talk about giving, give to someone else. If that's something that's hanging you up, give to someone in need. Give to another church. Give to another organization that you do trust. But be a giver and you won't regret it. Being a giver, being a generous person is key to a happy life and its key to being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

So we're getting into a stewardship series, and the reason we Christians call this stewardship is because we really aren't kings, we're stewards. Reminds me of, I don't know if you've seen Lord of the Rings. Actually, if you haven't seen Lord of the Rings, I am super jealous of you because I wish I could just sit down and watch Lord of the Rings for the first time again. It's that amazing. It's that good. But there is a scene in Lord of the Rings or in the books Lord of the Rings where Gandalf arrives to Gondor, which is this sort of capital city of the humans, and there is this steward, and the steward sits on the little throne just below the big throne. And the steward's job is to sort of lead while the king is gone. And Gandalf, the wizard is bringing with him the guy who's supposed to be the king, Eragon. And there's this bitter exchange that goes between them. The steward says I know about Aragorn. I know who you're bringing. And he says Gondor is mine! And Gandalf says to the steward, authority is not given you to deny the return of the king. And the steward says Gondor is mine!

And the reason I'm nerding out like this is because I think that we forget sometimes that we are sitting in the steward's chair, not on the throne. That everything we have, whether we're rich or we're poor, if you are a believer, you have claimed that everything you have belongs to God.

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You died in your baptism. You attested to this idea that in your baptism you died with Christ so that you could be raised with Christ into new life. If you claimed that, you took the crown off of your head, and you gave it to Jesus and you said Lord, everything I have is yours. And when that happens, we become stewards – not queens, not kings, we become stewards where we steward God's money and God's stuff, everything we have is His. When you were baptized, you gave Him your heart, your body, your everything.

And this is what it means, in fact, to truly trust your life to God is to let go and to trust that He is better at these things than we are. So we do; we steward and we trust it to the Lord. And I think that very often, as we do that, we actually become more blessed. We actually have more in our life. We have more given to us. But God will always do things to stretch us, not only in our giving, but in all aspects of life.

You know, stretching is so good for you, it really is. And I remember when I was a kid I took this thing called Tai Kwan Do, which is a Korean style of martial art, and I think it worked well for me. I would say I probably learned more about fighting from hockey than I did Tai Kwan Do. In hockey they say just pull the shirt over the guys head and knee him in the nose, and that was very effective.

In Tai Kwan Do, I had this great coach, his name was Master Miley. He taught me and my brother and my step mom, and we knew him for years, and he was always pushing us to be champs. And I remember there was this thing where we would stretch, and I wouldn't go very low, and I didn't like stretching, I hated stretching, and he goes "Schuller! Go deeper into your stretch!" And I was like Master Miley, it hurts! And he said, "Schuller, it's not stretching if it doesn't hurt a little." It's not stretching if it doesn't hurt a little. And this is how our giving should be, this is how our discipleship should be.

Stretching is good for you, by the way. More and more they're saying that stretching is something we should do for our personal health. When you stretch, it opens up your body. When you stretch, it makes you stronger. When you stretch, you become more flexible. There's some evidence that shows you'll live longer, and especially you'll sleep better. This is true when we stretch in our generosity. When we help people who are in need, when we give to our charities, when we use the stuff we've got to help people in need, especially to the point where it stretches – it doesn't tear, but it stretches – it's good for you. It's going to make you more flexible. It's going to make you healthier. It's going to make you stronger. You're going to live longer, and you're going to sleep better.

So I want to say to all of you who give, and many of you do, are just so generous to people in need, to this church, to other charities, I want to say I believe that any generous person I brought up here, if I put a mic in their face and asked them, almost every single person would say I've never regretted being generous. I've never regretted giving to someone in need.

And so that stretching thing leads me to a famous story in the Old Testament, the story of the widow of Zarephath. This is a famous story where she has the sort of never ending jar of oil and bin of flour, and it's a miracle story that comes from Elijah.

Well it begins like this. The book of Kings is a story about the kings of Israel, and it shows how most of them were evil. I think there was eight good ones, but the rest, I think it's 32, were all pretty much bad, and they get worse and worse and worse. And probably the very worst is Ahab, and this is how the story begins.

Ahab, who is the king of Israel, it says according to the word, that Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. Well what did Ahab do? Ahab married a woman from Sidon, famously known Jezebel, who brought with her two gods: Baal and Asherah. And when they married, Jezebel began training the Israelite people to worship Baal and Asherah. In fact Ahab himself built a temple to Baal and put Asherpoles around. So if you're not familiar with these pagan gods, Asherah is the Hebrew word probably for Astarte, who's a little more well known, and she is the goddess of fertility, lust, sex and war. Imagine what worship of Astarte would be – a goddess of sex and war. I mean it's not good images that come to mind, and probably not stuff we should talk about in church. And alongside her was the god Baal, who is the most famous and evil of the pagan gods. Baal, of course, appears constantly. Baal is also the god of fertility, rain, dew and thunder, and Baal often functions in the Canaanite pantheon as sort of like a Zeus type figure where he's like a god but he's like the king of all the gods. And Baal almost always takes this form in the ancient world. This is a picture of what happens with the golden calf, for example, when Moses is on the mountain and as Aaron says, a bunch of gold falls into a fire and this cow came out.

Here's an actual image that's about two thousand years old of a Baal idol, and worship of Baal almost always.. you're like why is this so evil? Why is worshipping other gods so evil?

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And we forget that what the contemporary readers of this book knew was that Baal worship meant sacrifice of children. It meant the abuse of the weak. It meant turning your back on the poor. And this idol, because it was a symbol of fertility, of lust, of getting everything, of greed, this symbol would be in front of usually farms, markets, and places of prosperity.

And one of the most amazing things is that for thousands and thousands of years, this weird image of a golden bull in front of places of prosperity, in front of markets, and farms as a symbol of taking everything and having everything has existed throughout time, and finally was phased out around the industrial era, and I'm so glad to say that finally this image is gone. This is the raging bull in front of Wall Street, which actually appeared out of nowhere. The artist who made it didn't get permission to put it there, it just in the middle of the night in 1987, he just came and dropped it off and it's been in New York ever since.

And I ask this question, I love the spirit of industry, I love the American spirit of building and making and of business, and all of these things, it's amazing. But I also love the American spirit of generosity, of helping the weak, of caring for those who are in need, and what this bull symbol does for me when I see it is it highlights all the stuff I hate about Wall Street, while forgetting all the things I love about it. This is an image of lust. Give me more. Take, take, take. And isn't that the problem we have with Wall Street? Nobody has a problem with businesses being trade and people making money and businesses thriving and jobs being created. That's a wonderful thing. Anyway, this bull is starting to appear all over. They just built one in Shanghai, I think they just built one in Amsterdam. Who knows – a Baal will be coming to a town near you very soon.

To me, I think that for all of us, we should make money and thrive and succeed and live in abundance, but for the purpose of helping people. For the purpose of leaving a legacy. For the purpose of building and lifting up the next generation. And I'm so glad that I serve a church that believes in that, that really does, and you're one of those people. And I want to make sure that we never allow Baal to sit at the throne of our heart. That it's never about me. That although I want you to fulfill your dreams and do amazing things, and make money, I also want you to experience the joy of helping people in need; the joy of being generous to charities that you love, and the joy of using your money to make your city, your town, your world a better place. It's an amazing feeling and if you've never done it, I want to encourage you to stretch yourself to do that.

Anyway, so Baal is the god of prosperity; he's the god of rain, and the god of dew, and because Ahab has been sacrificing children and turning his back on the poor, and raised up this temple to Baal, God raises up a prophet to judge Ahab, and this is Elijah. He's maybe the most important prophet, other than Moses, in the Bible. I mean he's so key, he's the messianic figure, and he comes in and says to Ahab, Ahab! Because of the evil that you have done, listen, God will remove all rain and dew from Israel. Because you've bowed down to the god of rain and dew and not to God, THE God is going to remove rain and dew. And from that point on, the whole land becomes dry and for three and a half years, there's no rain, and all the farms die, and incredible famine and hunger comes to the land, and Ahab continues to kill children and bow down to Baal.

In this time, Elijah, because the land is becoming difficult to live in, God says to Elijah, there is a widow.. this is what's great.. I have directed a widow there in Zarephath to supply you with all that you need. And what I love about this story is that that widow has no idea.

When God says this to Elijah, that widow is incredibly poor and struggling, and the idea that God's going to use her to supply the man of God with what He needs is awesome.

Elijah travels up to Sidon, which interestingly is the home of Jezebel, who brought all of this stuff, and he goes to the city gates and he sees this woman. She's clearly struggling, her face is gaunt, her fingers are boney, and yet she's young and beautiful, but tired and hungry. She's gathering up sticks, and as she's gathering, the man of God approaches and he says to her: woman, would you get me some water? And yet because of her culture, she believes its right to welcome a stranger. She looks at him and she says okay, I'll get you some water. And so she begins to kind of walk away, and as she's walking away very slowly to get some water, he says wait, woman, also, please bring me some bread. I'm hungry. And with that she sort of doesn't know what to do. Finally she looks up at the man of God, she says: I can't do that. I've only got a small handful of flour and an ounce of oil left, and I'm planning to make one more loaf of bread, and then my son and I are going to eat it, and then we're going to die because that's all we have left.

And what I love is Elijah's a man of passion, and he looks at her and he says.. it's funny because I've read this story over and over and over this week. I even read it in Hebrew, and when I heard Hannah read it, I noticed something that I hadn't noticed the whole time.

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You know what the first thing that Elijah says to her is don't be afraid. He comforts her. And then he says: give me the bread. Can you imagine that?! Can you imagine that? My son and I are going to eat this bread and die, and he's like can I have it?

He says don't be afraid, make me some bread and then there will be some left over for you. And the most amazing thing is this woman does it. For those of you who are parents, can you imagine having a child, a little kid who's starving – what that feels like? I remember going on missionary trips and seeing starving children with their mothers or fathers, and I couldn't imagine what it would be like to be totally helpless as a parent and your kid is saying to you: mommy, I'm hungry. Mommy, I'm so hungry. Do you have any food, Mommy? I'm so hungry it hurts. My stomach hurts. And this woman, who is herself starving, and her son is starving, she sees something in the prophet, and God is tugging on her heart to be generous in the most unbelievable way, and she had faith. And she gave him her last bit of bread, and even though she was a Gentile, and even though she was a pagan, God saw her faith and He accredited it to her as righteousness.

And from that day on, she had all the bread she needed, she had all the oil she needed, and Elijah moved in her house, and there was this magic bowl of oil and bread. It just never run out. Every time they went to it, there was more flour, and more oil. She didn't know that when God said I have directed a widow there to supply you with you food. She didn't know that God was going to work a miracle in her life, and that wasn't the first bit of provision.

So Elijah's living there for years now, and still, it never runs out. And one day, her son, that same son that was starving and now has a little fat and he's feeling good. That same son, one day, he begins to get sick, and he's come down with something, and nobody seems to know what's wrong, and he's getting worse and worse. And finally one day, that little boy dies. And Elijah goes downstairs and wonders what the commotion is, and with tears in her eyes, she looks up at Elijah and she says man of God, why have you come here! Have you come here to remind me of my sin? Have you come here to kill my son? Elijah doesn't even respond. He sees the little boy, he bursts into tears, picks him up in his arms, runs up the stairs, lays the little boy on the table, and the thing I love about Jews, they don't pray like Christians. We pray like Lord, if it be thine will, upon thy throne, wilt thou heal this little child unto thee?

That's not how Jews pray, man. The Hebrew word actually for this type of faith is chutzpah. Elijah looks at God and he says Lord, what have you done!? Are you going to kill this little boy? Are you going to allow this little kid to die? Lord! And Elijah just is shrieking and weeping over this boy. And he lays himself over the boy three times crying out to God.

This number three is really important, by the way, in a Hebrew context. I remember I had a rabbi tell me anytime you see a number in the Tanach, in the Jewish Bible it's there for a reason. The number one always points to: can you guess? Just guess. God? One is God. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Two is a symbol for the law because Moses brings down the law on two tablets. Let me see 12 is the symbol for the 12 tribes of Israel. Ten is the symbol for the Ten Commandments. Forty is the symbol of completion. So all these numbers are meant to invoke deeper meaning.

What's the number three? Anybody want to guess? As Christians, we're tempted to say like God or Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But in a Jewish context, three is the symbol for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Three is the symbol for covenant. And what's so amazing is that this boy is a Gentile.

He's not a Jewish kid, and yet Elijah is laying himself saying God, remember your covenant with me. He's saying to God: God, don't do this to me! Don't call me here to this widow to be her provision, and let her son die. Remember the faith that she had giving her last loaf of bread to a stranger so that he wouldn't die, knowing that her son might. Remember that faith! Heal this boy!

And that third time shrieking, crying out to God, his chest begins to move, his eyes wake up and that becomes the second miracle. It's the first time in the Bible that there is a resurrection story that somebody is raised back to life. And I love this story because we don't know what the woman's sin is or what shame she's feeling. We know she's not Jewish. We know all is that she just saw someone in need and gave her sons bread to him in faith, and God blessed her for it. He's a good God.

And I just want to show you that very often sometimes in life, see her provision for the prophet was her provision, too. Her provision for the prophet was God's plan to save her son and to do this amazing thing in her life. And very often when God stretches us to give, when God stretches us to do something for people in need, very often that becomes the thing that opens up abundance in our life. I remember when pastor Robert Morris who was a pastor at Gateway in Dallas, a great church, he used to be an itinerant preacher, and so he always relied on the generosity of other people, and he never knew where money was going to come from.

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It was like Eastman I talked about last week, where you get donations from speaking at churches and from books and things like that, so you kind of always piece it together. And he usually had an outlook of where he was going to be financially based on how many churches he would be invited to. So he gets invited to this one church, and it's the only church he has all month. And he's asking God, Lord, how am I supposed to get through this month and put food on the table for my family? And so he goes to this church, and in the service, there's a missionary who gives a testimony about what she's doing or something, and God puts it on his heart: give whatever money you get as a gift tonight, give that to the missionary. Well the funny thing was when the service was over, the church took this great gift together, and in this case they actually did give it to Pastor Morris, and the amazing thing was it was the biggest donation he had ever gotten, and it was all he needed to get through the month. And he was so excited and elated, and then he remembered: God told me to give whatever I got tonight to that missionary.

And in this amazing story, he signs over the check, he gives it to the missionary, and later that night, there's somebody at the table when they're eating together, there's this man in a suit he had never met before, and the guy says Robert, how much money did you get tonight from the church? And he says oh it was a fair amount. And he says well do you have the check? And he says no I don't have it with me right now. He goes well where is it? And then he says he lied. He goes oh it's in the car. And he says the man leans over and he goes – it's not in the car. He goes I know you gave it away, and God wanted me to give you this. And he handed him a check for ten times what he had given to the missionary.

So two things in your giving: always use wisdom. I'm telling you to stretch, not to tear. I went to Oral Roberts University. I've seen people do some crazy things and not all of them were wise. So use wisdom. But also, learn in your giving to start listening to the Lord the way Pastor Morris did when he felt God say give whatever this thing you're going to need tonight, give it to the missionary. I want you to start practicing that, just dip your toe in the water and begin listening for needs of your neighbor, needs for people who are struggling, maybe at your job or in the neighborhood you live, and watch how God brings your generosity to life.

Father, we thank you and we love you, and I just pray your abundant blessing over everyone under the sound of my voice. Lord, we love you and we thank you, and we give back what we can. 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.