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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 in be glad in it.

HS: Hello visitors and church family. We are missing you. Although we are still not meeting together under the same rooftop, we are meeting together under the same powerful name, the name of Jesus Christ. Thank you for joining us. You are so loved.

BS: Let's open up with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much that you love us and that you're here with us, and we think about all of our friends and family and people that are all over the place just sheltered in place and still wanting to get out, and we think about all of the tension and arguing and all that's going on, we pray for a sense of peace, sense of grace, and especially a sense of wisdom. Lord, we thank you and we love you. We pray that your Holy Spirit would be present with us today and we want to lift up the name of Jesus. It's in His name we pray, amen.

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

### SCRIPTURE – 2 Timothy 2:1-7 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, 2nd Timothy 2:1-7:

You then my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hard working farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Church family, we are called soldiers. We are called to persevere in spiritual warfare and this is who you are. Amen.

### INTERVIEW – Karrie Garcia (KG) – Brendon Harvey (BH)

{VIDEO ROLL IN: BH: Hi, my name is Branden Harvey and I'm the founder of Good Good Good where we celebrate the people, ideas and movements shaping the world for the better.

VO: Branden Harvey is a storyteller and creator who founded Good Good Good, an organization of people fighting against fear and hate, while looking at the good and how we can become better. Part of Good Good Good is goodnewspaper, a quarterly printed newspaper dedicated to telling only the good stories that are happening all over the world.

BH: That's what we do at Good Good Good. We help people feel less overwhelmed and more capable of doing good in the world.

VO: Please welcome, Branden Harvey.}

BS: Branden, hi! Welcome! We're so glad that you're with us this morning. What a strange situation this is.

BH: It feels so weird to be on this screen but I'm honored to be here, Bobby.

BS: Yes, you are a giant, by the way. It's like if you could actually stand in this building your head is about four feet tall. It's awesome.

BH: You're about this tall on my screen, but I'm honored.

BS: That's great. Well welcome, we're so glad that you're here. And what a great thing it is to have.. I mean would you consider yourself a journalist? I was going to say a positive journalist or something like that.

BH: Yes, my background was in the world of humanitarian photography and that was kind of the world that I lived in.

## You Are a Drafted Soldier

BS: Well its so, so awesome and I love this idea you started Good Good Good a few years ago. What was the thing that inspired you to do this?

BH: So I had the beautiful opportunity of as a part of my work as a humanitarian photographer, traveling around the world seeing all of these incredible non-profits doing incredibly impactful work, working in communities, saving lives, making a difference, and I'd come home and I'd realize my friends don't know these stories. The rest of the world doesn't know these stories, and you turn on the news and I'd see the country I was just in and I would just see the bad news. And they would go to commercial break before they get to the good news, and then I'd come back from the commercial break and the good news never came. And I was like well, maybe I can help tell some of these stories.

BS: It's interesting because in this era of COVID-19, I mean it's hard to think about there being good stories, right? People getting sick, people dying, people going out of business, families being separated. There's never been more bad news. And you almost feel like the news media is kind of relishing it because I mean the way the news cycle tends to work is that you're always looking for.. they say if it bleeds it leads. And I've listened to lots of podcasts from producers of news media and things like that who kind of are struggling because there is kind of that part of it and so here you are, you're saying well, in an era where everything is bleeding, it's like the world is inverted. What's that like for you in this era?

BH: It's interesting that you bring up that idea of if it bleeds it leads. I've had a lot of conversations with neuroscientists and people who research the brain and they talk about this internal negativity bias we have where bad news sticks to our brains like Velcro, but good news slides right off our brains like Teflon and that's why that bad news is sticking with us so much. But I think about this quote from Mr. Rogers who I just admire so much where he said when I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me "look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." And so that's what I'm leaning into in this time, that quote from Mr. Rogers' mom where despite all this bad news, and despite the fact that it sticks on such a deep level in our brains, there are always going to be people showing up to help. I'm just leaning into that belief and saying okay, I'm going to look for them. I'm going to find them, I'm going to celebrate them, and then when we elevate them, it'll inspire more people to join in and become good news themselves.

BS: That's awesome. You're getting great response to this, aren't you? I'm sure people need good news now more than ever.

BH: Honestly it feels like this is what we were made for, the work that we're doing – celebrating good news. We've never felt more passionate about this work and it really is special because I genuinely believe that there are so many people who want to step up and make a difference. And so when you see those examples of other people doing that, I think that that really is a beautiful catalyst. I know for myself that's been true for me.

BS: I'm a pretty positive person and it's almost a joke sometimes. And it's interesting because I have not been sleeping well and a lot of people have not been sleeping well lately, and usually I sleep okay. And I was watching a thing and it said one of the best things you can do during this time to sleep better is to not look at the news within a couple hours before you go to bed. But it's making me think of this, I'm like it's because all the news is mostly bad. I'm like maybe it would be good to check out Good Good Good before I go to bed and maybe that'll help me sleep better.

BH: Honestly, I feel that. I know that I've been trying to be really intentional, because I think that.. I'll say I think that the news is really important. I think that it's important that we know what's happening in the world that we know how to show up and love our neighbor, but we can choose when to do that. Choose your one little slot in the day whether it's your morning paper or an afternoon break where you consume the news, and then make sure that you spend your evening and your morning and the times that are sacred to you, doing the things that are going to fill you up and energize you so that you can go out and make a difference the next day.

BS: What's an example of a good news story during this time that you've gotten a pretty positive response to. I mean it's hard to think of well what would good news be during this time.

BH: I mean ultimately I think its stories of people who are saying what's the unique way I can make a difference during this time? I'm not a front line health worker, I'm not somebody who has the ability to show up and help COVID patients at the hospital. Well what's my story? I think about the Texas principal who drove 800 miles to visit 600 students from his school in person wearing a mask. I think about the married couple in New York City who filled hundreds of backpacks up with pandemic supplies and delivered them by hand to New York City's homeless communities.

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I think about.. this is super dorky, I love this: there's a Face book group of people who love their RV's and they thought how can we make a difference? Well let's figure out how to get these RV's to healthcare workers so that they can still live at home but isolate from their family safely. And it's all these people who are saying what's my unique way to make a difference? And that's even what we try to do on our side. We're like well what can we do? Well we just make a good newspaper. We make a print newspaper filled with good news. Well what if we just started mailing some for free to people. What if we started making this available to people so they could sleep better at night, so they could make a difference. And so that's my favorite thing is saying what's the unique way that people are showing up and becoming helpers in a way that's unique only to them.

BS: And in this age of digital stuff, you guys actually are a print medium, right? Like you're an actual.. like in an age when people are saying oh the old grey lady's going out of business, you guys are like no, we want to do a print media, right?.

BH: I mean its super dorky but we make a real life print newspaper. We ship it all over the world. It's so funny. And I think there's something special about being able to tangibly hold onto this thing you believe in. If you believe in the power of good news, to be able to hold that instead of it just being digital is cool, and also, I think that there's something about the fact that this newspaper is not going to get a push notification with any bad news on it.

BS: There is something about holding it, though, because I went to business school and I started reading Wall Street Journal, which is not only business, but I still love just holding a Wall Street Journal and flipping through all the stories and the opinion articles and what's going on in the markets and globally. There is something about holding a book or holding a newspaper that is so great. Today more than ever, we're just so grateful for these stories. How can people get a hold of your paper, any of your other media? We'd love to get good news out to as many people as we can.

BH: Well thank you. You can go to [goodnewspaper.org](http://goodnewspaper.org) and we're actually still giving away an issue to anybody who wants it, so if you care about good news, you can go to [goodnewspaper.org](http://goodnewspaper.org) and sign up and we'll mail you your first issue free.

BS: That's awesome. Well Branden Harvey, thank you so much. Thanks for bringing us good news in a time when there's so much bad news, helping us remember the importance of positivity. We appreciate you and your spirit. You're great.

BH: Thank you. Thank you for doing the same. I appreciate you.

BS: All right, have a great day. Take care.

### DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Stand with me, we're going to say this creed together. Hold your hands out as a sign 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.

### MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "You Are a Drafted Soldier"

Today we're going to talk about what it means to be a drafted soldier; what it means to be in the Lord's army; what it means to be a soldier for the Lord. There's a lot of negative military past with the Catholic Church and the Protestant church and other things, but there's also a lot of good about thinking in terms of being a soldier for the Lord. And the main thing I want to talk about today, and I think this is a context that Paul talks about it, is the idea of persevering for a reward. The idea that when we're going through a tough time, that we push through. We persevere. That we're mentally and spiritual tough when going through tough times. And so much of it is because the whole world is in the grip of this thing, and there's other political things and government things, and rules and unknowns, and conspiracy theories and all of this stuff that there are just layers and layers and layers of why it feels hard to go one day more through this difficult time.

But friend, let me tell you – I think you are tougher than you know. I think you have more in the tank and I want to encourage you to press through in this part of your life to, as I said last week, never cut down a tree in the winter; to never make huge decisions in your life when you're not feeling good, but to persevere and when you're feeling better and when you have a fresh mind, then to make those tough decisions. Maybe you're struggling in your faith, maybe you're struggling with God and I want to encourage you to persevere and to press through, not because it's the right thing to do, but because there is a reward. This is exactly how the Bible teaches us to think about it.

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We typically, as Christians, think about persevering because it's the right thing to do; because it's honorable, because it's noble, and it is. But what the scripture tells us, very often, is to press through because of a reward, and we'll get to that in just a minute, but there is a reward for persevering.

There are a lot of games in the world that have to do with just getting through something. I'll never forget in 2000 I was 19-years-old and I was living in Germany. I was there with David Mains on a ministry news media thing, and it was a great time. We were there for six months or so, and part of it, I had a week break and I got to go to Venice, so I went with a friend of mine, we got cheap tickets to Venice, and we had to overnight in Munich. You have to go south from Hanover where we were, and we overnights in Munich. This was in September, and who knew that Oktoberfest; Munich is the capital of Oktoberfest, by the way. That Oktoberfest happens in September. I didn't know that. You didn't know that unless you're in Germany, in which you did know that. Oktoberfest is mostly in September, so when we landed in Munich, the whole place was a light with drunkenness and laughter and singing, and a mix of funny, gross and interesting and fun. And it was all of the in-between and I really was not into it because I just wanted to go to sleep.

There were these guys that would walk around singing this song (SINGS: Hey, baby!) I mean totally drunk, walking around. And you're late at night, you're trying to just sleep and these guys are walking around.

But anyway, one of the things that they did at Oktoberfest, and I think they still do is this thing called Stein holding. I'm regretting showing pictures of beer in church all of a sudden. That's what happens when nobody's here; I just start doing stupid things. But in this game called Stein holding, you have to hold a one-liter thing of beer out in front of you, and that's all you do, and whoever can hold it the longest wins. It sounds so boring, but I got to watch one of these things, and it was so interesting. You see people like trembling, they have all sorts of rules about how you're not allowed to hold the cup, you're not allowed to go back, you're not allowed to lean forward. And as this gets down to three guys and then finally there's usually two guys and they're just gritting their teeth, and everybody's cheering for them, and finally somebody drops their beer and everybody erupts! Yeah! You know. There are games like this; it's so funny, you'd think that seems so boring, but it's so fun because all of us know what it's like to try and just hold on; to try and be the last man standing.

The reality show "Survivor" has a game like this. They have different versions but you have to stand on a pole for a long period. There's a You Tuber named Mr. Beast who recently gave away a million dollars and all they had to do was not take their hand off of the box that held all this cash. And you'd think that would be so easy. I mean you just have to die. But one by one, they start to fall.

And all this to simply say these games that we play, there are so many of them, but these games of perseverance show us, reveal to us something we already know, and that is that perseverance almost always comes with a reward. If you can be the one that goes the longest without giving up; you don't have to do anything, all you have to do is not quit, if you can be that person, so much good is going to come in your life.

There was a study, a marshmallow test that was famous about children who if they could not eat a marshmallow that was in front of them, they would get another marshmallow and then if they could not eat those marshmallows, they'd get more. And this study showed that there was a direct correlation to people who can have delayed gratification and success later on in life. This is something we learn when we're kids that if we can delay gratification, if we can stick with something, even when it gets really hard, whether it's piano lessons or school homework or the things when we're children, we learn these lessons that perseverance has a reason and the reason is not a moral one; the reason is a reward that good things come to those who have the mental capability to press through tough times and that is you. You are tougher than you know.

You are solid, and you will get through this thing that you're going through, and you'll be so grateful when you receive the reward that God has set aside for you that you didn't quit in the winter; that you didn't give up when you were 80% of the way there; that you didn't retire.

Forgive me for this very ego driven, self-gratifying story. That if we were sitting down together having a cup of coffee and you were to ask me Bobby, what is the coolest thing you've ever done in your whole life, second to marrying your dream girl Hannah Schuller, which is the coolest thing I've ever done; it's true. The coolest thing I've ever done was catch a 300-pound shark. It wasn't quite 300 pounds, but it was close. I remember as a kid, I just lived on the ocean. We had this small boat, it was a Boston bay liner, and we would go out fishing all the time. My dad loved fishing. Every summer of my life I was on this boat and we would fish for everything under the sun, and we'd compete in tournaments, and we would eat all the fish or we would catch and release and we were very humane.

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But I remember we went shark fishing and I caught a thresher shark. And I didn't know it was a thresher shark, I just knew it was a big fish, either a shark or a marlin or swordfish, and I was the one who caught it. I was 12-years old, and I just starting fighting this fish. I was with my friend Abe. Abe was my best friend, and there was something about having my dad and my best friend there that I was like I'm either going to reel this shark in or I'm going to die – those are my two.. like I am not going to give up.

And I would fight, and the shark would get close to the boat and then he would run away, and then he'd get close to the boat and he'd run away. Finally we got him up to the boat and everybody was like 'shark! It's a thresher shark!' And we were stoked, because thresher shark is good meat, it's a good thing to catch. And when you fish, they have this thing called a gaff which is a pole with a long hook, and my dad went to gaff the shark to pull him onto the boat, cut the side of the shark, it freaked the shark out and he ran away. It ended up being two hours and 45-minutes of fighting this shark, and I finally got him on board.

I was 12-years-old, the shark was 271 pounds. When you measure a fish, you measure the length plus the tail. Threshers have a six-foot really long, thin tails. It was a six-foot long tail, and the whole length of the shark was 13-feet. And what I learned on that day was the value of perseverance, that I can't tell you, to this day as a middle aged man; by the way, this story gets better and better every time I tell it. The fish gets bigger, but it really was awesome.

But here's a picture of the shark. This is a true story. There's me and my dad and you can even see the cut on the side of the shark where the missed gaff was. And here just as a 12-year-old kid, I had the most rewarding feeling in the world to show my dad I was a man. That I had what it took to bring in a monster; to fight my dragon. And for me, catching the shark even as an adult man today, was for sure one of the important parts of a boy becoming a teenager or a man; like I feel like I'm a man in this picture, I'm just a little kid, but I just felt so tough.

There is something about persevering as we get older that these battles that we face, persevering unto the reward that the thing itself is so rewarding because the fight was so hard. And I want you to know that when you get through whatever this thing is that you're going through, you're going to be so, so glad you didn't give up on God. So, so glad you didn't give up on your family, or whatever it is that you know in your heart God is telling you to keep pressing forward towards. I want you to know God's cheering you on and I'm cheering you on, and I know you have what it takes to get across that finish line and receive the reward God has set aside for you.

The scripture for today is 2nd Timothy chapter 2. The book or letter of 2nd Timothy was Paul's last letter that he wrote to his spiritual son Timothy before he died. Not Timothy but Paul. Paul was prisoner in Rome and he would eventually be executed, tradition says by the Emperor Nero. And it might even be that by the time Timothy got this letter, this is just speculation, but Paul might have already been dead. And the message in this part of the letter that he really wants Timothy to get a hold of is to persevere because of the reward. To persevere because God has set aside something special for Timothy.

Timothy is a pastor of a city called Ephesus in Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey. It's one of the wealthiest cities in the Roman Empire in those days. And Timothy's having a lot of trouble as a young pastor. Pastoring is a hard job, I can tell you, and it's especially hard for young pastors. I don't consider myself a young pastor anymore; I'm sort of a middle aged pastor. I'm not 40 yet, but I will be in about 15 months. But I remember being a 27/28-year-old pastor. I remember trying to keep order in a church and dealing with all of the various spiritual problems, mental problems, addiction problems, sin problems, money problems, city problems. I mean there were so many issues, pastors have to be simultaneously CEO's and accountants and priests and psychologists.

They have to be all of these things and it's hard on a family and it's hard on a person and I know Timothy had to feel that. His job was much harder than any job I would have ever had, and Paul, the spiritual father, wants Timothy to know that God has a great reward in store for him.

He says this: "and then my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering." That's not very encouraging, is it? "Join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer." Let me just pause there real quick. The idea of a soldier or a legionary in the Roman Empire is a very weighted idea. It's interesting because if you were a young man in the Roman Empire and maybe you came from a poor family, becoming a legionary was a very dangerous proposition, but it was one full of opportunity.

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Let's say you were 17 or 18 and you were a pauper and you enlisted as a legionary, you were now dedicating 25 years of your life, yes 25 years where you can't marry, you can't do anything except be a soldier. A lot of that time, for the most of the Roman Empire you're going to be deployed out fighting, dealing with barbarians, it's very dangerous. About 60% of legionaries would actually survive, so 40% would die. And you had to be tough as a coffin nail. You had to carry like 60 pounds of equipment. They would have some days where they would march in like almost a jog speed for 20 miles. I mean there were a list of reasons why you had to be tough, but at the end of your journey, every legionary had the promise of land and a pension. Now that's a big deal today, but back then, if you had nothing and you were promised that if you made it to 25 years of service as a legionary, you were going to have land and farmland and you could grow stuff and a house and you could get married and you could do all this stuff. Well that's a great prospect for a lot of people.

These legionaries would be put into groups of ten; well really eight with two servants, but these eight soldiers would serve together the whole length of their military career, effectively being like a small group; being like best friends. And I think this is one of the most important things that made legionaries so effective. They didn't move soldiers around and do all this stuff and mixing and matching all the time. They were constantly with the same eight guys. They fought together, they protected each other, they actually voted on who would be the leader of that small group of eight guys. And for those 25 years, they would be a family. I think there are a lot of analogies between the Roman legionary and what it means to be a soldier for Christ.

Another important part of being a legionary in the Roman Empire was the value of holding a line. So one reason the Roman Empire was so effective is they borrowed this idea from the Greeks called the phalanx. The Greek hoplites had this system of creating a wall of shields, and they had these super long spears, and they would do this and they would just create a wall that barbarians and these crazy armies would effectively bounce off of, and then they would stab them.

Romans took this idea of the phalanx and took it a step further in this thing called a tortoise. You can see an image of a tortoise behind me, a reenactment. And they would have these long, long lines where they would effectively.. their whole thing was to just hold the line. Now that doesn't sound like a big deal but you'd have maybe six thousand Romans on one side, and one real story, 20,000 German barbarians on the other, and all you had to do as a Roman most of the time was just not turn and run. And on your right, you've got your friends that you've been with the whole time, and you know them by name, and you're encouraging each other, and you're holding the line, and the reason you do that is so cavalry can go around the back and archers can hit them, and all you got to do is hold the line. Hold the line. When you study military history, that's like 70%; when armies fight face to face, in that fighting, there's not a lot of death and destruction. There's a mental game. The death happens when an army breaks ranks and runs and retreats and the cavalry cuts them down.

All I'm saying is that the way Roman soldiers think about fighting is they think about mental toughness, they think about forming a line, and they think about doing what the commander tells them, and never retreating unless the retreat is commanded.

So much of getting through difficult times is not about being bold and taking huge leaps and doing all these things. Very often, especially in times like this in COVID-19, it's just like holding the line. It's being with your friends and the people that love you and listening to the voices of God, and of your pastors and your spiritual mentors to during this dark time, hold the line! To not give up. To persevere because you'll be safer and you'll do better and God will have a reward in the end, I believe that.

When it comes to fighting, there is always a spiritual fight. You remember when we were kids, there was this song – Haven probably knows it.

I know she knows it because we sing at our house all the time. (SINGS: I may never march in the infantry) what's the next one? (SINGS: shoot the artillery, ride in the cavalry. I may never fly over the enemy but I'm in the Lord's army. Yes sir! I'm in the Lord's army.) Okay. So we sang this song all the time when we were kids. And when I was like just out of seminary in my 20's, I was like that song is not very tasteful. I don't like that song. In the Lord's army and shooting artillery and shooting people? I don't like that. Can I tell you I think I've been through enough in my life now I love that song. I love it. Life is a fight. When you're 27, when you're 26 and you have all these ideals and they're good ideals but you haven't been through anything, and then you finally go through a lot, you realize God needs soldiers. He doesn't need whiny people who know everything; He needs people who are tough. People like you! Soldiers!

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Being a soldier in God's army, I mean Paul tells us, our fight is not against flesh and blood. It's not about real soldierly, it's about being tough spiritually for the Lord. For being the kind of person that can endure the things that other people can't.

You are the kind of person that can endure the thing you're going through. You have more in the tank than you know, and you have a greater reward at the end of this fight than you can even understand. Nobody in an army is looking for a perfect soldier. They're looking for tough ones. They're looking for ones who don't give up, and that's you. And I want you to know I believe in you and I know you can get through this thing you're going through.

We talk about toughness, that's really what we want when we're in a fight. I still love western movies, spaghetti westerns and some of those, and one of my favorites, and I love both versions is a film "True Grit" where you have this girl who's dad was murdered by a gangster, and she wants the guy brought in. And she goes to the local marshal and she says is it possible to hire a marshal? And he says yep, if you can get the money together. And she says well which one's the best?

And he goes through this list and he says well there's Tom Chaney and he's about the best tracker you're going to find. And then there's Rooster. Man he's tough and doesn't got an ounce of fear in him and he's brutal and he'll kill a man. But I'd say, you know, the best is John Jacobs because John Jacobs will always bring in a man alive and always give him a fair shake. She goes where can I find Rooster? Right? That's how we feel! When you're looking for soldiers, you want them to be good, you want them to be moral, but more than anything, you want them to be tough. You're not looking for perfect people you're looking for tough people.

And I bet you're the type of person that says Bobby, you don't understand the stuff I've done, or the mistakes I've made, or some of the stuff I'm struggling with. Look, those are important things and God's going to help you get through those things, but when it comes to a spiritual fight, God wants faith. Faithfulness – toughness. He wants to know that you've got what it takes to get through this, and friend let me tell you, you do. You've got it. You've got what you need to get through this difficult time.

Okay, finally Paul says "similarly anybody who competes as an athlete does not receive a victors crown except by competing according to the rules." Well that's right, and one of the rules for competing in the Olympics, at least for boxing and I think for a couple of other sports, was you had to train for ten months before you came to the fight. God wants us to be the kind of people who are willing to train, who are willing to do the difficult things, even when things are easy.

And he finally says, "the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I'm saying for the Lord will give you insight in all of this." Yes, the farmer, you know, the farmer is going to receive the best grain, the best whatever it is that they're growing because they persevered. They went through. They got through the tough times. One of the reasons God wants you to get through this, as I keep saying, is that reward.

There was a season in my life I memorized the Sermon on the Mount. And I really thought I was going to get something out of it different than I did. One of the main things I noticed when I memorized the Sermon on the Mount is the reason Jesus tells us to do this. He says "reward" over and over and over and over. There's a reward. There's a reward. Don't lose the reward. Don't lose the crown. Don't lose the glory. Don't lose that thing that you're going to be so, so glad when you finish this. You're going to have this thing in your bones that's going to lift you up and carry you. You're going to have a reward from the Lord and you're going to be so glad that you've done it.

I'll just finish with this. Many of us have been putting on some weight during this time. It's okay. There's no shame. All of us are putting on a little.. you know cake is always looking a little more delicious, pancakes, the more sweet and butter it has on it, cinnamon rolls are my.. those Pillsbury cinnamon rolls have been really getting to me.

And so I've been the last few weeks, trying to lose some weight, trying to get in shape, and I remember years ago, I was with some friends and I was training for running, and I got pretty good. I started to run Back Bay, which is a little over 10 miles and I could do it at like an 8-minute pace, which was really, really good for me. And I just was feeling great and I was skinny, and I was like athletic and feeling good. And that was probably well I won't say how long, it was awhile ago.

And so recently here at the church I was in my workout outfit because I had walked here, and I said you know what, I'm going to go for a run. And so there's this loop here and it's four and a half miles, I'm like I'm going to do four and a half miles at the slowest jog, like I feel like I can jog forever, and I've got my headphones on. And I started running and I got like two and a half miles in, and I was just dying. I mean I could feel my heart pounding, and I was just coming up with all sorts of excuses.

## You Are a Drafted Soldier

I'm like I can't breathe very good. I wonder if I got the COVID. And then I was like.. I knew I didn't, but I was like what if I do? And then like my muscles were hurting and I'm like I'm almost 40! I'm not 27 anymore. I can't do this, and just like all this stuff going through my mind of reasons; excuses of why I could give up with no shame whatsoever and just walk back. And I started pressing. I'm like oh, no, I give up. And I'm dying and it's just horrible and I'm like saying to myself why did you do this? Just eat less food. Why are you running? Just all this stuff.

And then the worst was there are these two stairs where I go over a bridge and I tripped. And being at your lowest point and then tripping while you're running, I was like kind of did this and kind of fell and then like I had that moment where I could have like broken into a walk, but instead I was like I'll keep running. And then like everything.. if you ever slow down and then start running again, everything in your body just like hurts. So it's like fire and all my legs and my back and like this is horrible! And I kept going. And like I'm going to get through it! And I thought how am I going to tell this story in my sermon if I don't finish.

And so I keep running, and then I realize that right at the end, I'm almost done, and I thought I was going to throw up, I was going to die, but when I was like maybe a quarter mile out, I could see the top of the church and I was like I'm almost back. And something lit inside of me and I was like yes! And I went into a full blown run, and when I got to the end, I tumbled and stuff.

But I realized something: in a run, it's not the last bit that's the hardest it's like that 80 to 90% of the way. It's not the very end because when you're at the very end, you can usually see the finish line and you can see the rewards there, but when you're like 70-80% or 80-90%, that zone, you feel like you're far enough away that it's still a long ways away.

And I want to encourage you, I feel like that's where we are in this COVID thing; I think that's where a lot of us are in our struggles. We're in that 80-90% of the way there, and like once you get past 90 and you can kind of see the finish line, it gets a lot easier.

So I just want to encourage you to keep going and remember; I felt so glad that I finished, even though I was so out of shape. You may not have been ready for what you're going through now, but I want you to know you'll be so glad if you could just get across that finish line.

We talk about our faithfulness to God, but don't forget God is so faithful to you. Maybe you've made some big mistakes even the last few weeks, or maybe you struggle with substance and you fell off the wagon, or maybe you said something really horrible to your spouse or one of your kids, or did something that you really neglected your faith in God. I want you to know that even though we're faithless, God is so faithful. God was not surprised by your sin, by your mistakes. God is not angry or embarrassed about you.

Paul tells us that even when we are faithless, God remains faithful because He cannot deny Himself. He understands that sometimes you'll fall off the wagon, that sometimes you'll make a mistake, that sometimes you'll slip up, but He also wants to know you're the kind of person that will get back on the wagon, that will keep one more foot in front of the other, that will cross the finish line and that's exactly who you are, and I can't wait to be there with you when you cross, giving you a big hug and cheering you on. I know you can do it. I know you can do it. You've always got more in the tank than you think. You've got more in the tank and I know you can do this. And I want you to know I love you and God loves you and you're going to get through this difficult time.

Father, we thank you and we ask in Jesus' name that we would take on this name of soldier; that we would be drafted soldiers, that we would be athletes competing in a race, that we would understand, God, that you don't have us just suffering to suffer. You don't have us just suffering because it's noble or something, but Lord the suffering will be worth it. That what we're going through now, that there's a greater reward at the end.

And I pray for my friend right now that you'd be with them and encourage them in this difficult time, and help them to get the rest of the way of where they need to go. Lord, we love you and it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.