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Hour of Power vom 22.11.2020

### GOOD MORNING/INVOCATION – Bobby & Hannah

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Hello!

HS: Welcome visitors and church family. Thank you for worshipping with us. You know the same God who divided the waters and the land and created the sun and the moon to govern the sky, thought of you and knew the world needed one of you, too? You are not an accident. You are on purpose and you are so loved.

BS: We're so glad that you're with us today and let's open with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much that you love us just as we are, not as we should be. We thank you, God, that so many of the things that we dislike about ourselves are a part of the process of becoming who you want us to be as your disciples. Thank you, Lord, that every single person under the sound of my voice is treasured by you. That when you see us, you don't see us with wrath and anger, you're not embittered towards us, but you love us and you're for us and I want everybody under the sound of my voice, Lord, to understand your love this morning. I want them to be full of your spirit. I want them to know the richness of your kindness and mercy and favor towards them. Help us to have faith and to believe it, and it's in the mighty name of Jesus we pray, amen.

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

### SCRIPTURE - Philippians 3:7-9, 13-14 – Hannah

In preparation for the message, Philippians 3:7 and 13:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. Bothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, we strive to not dwell on the past but to press forward and finish well. Amen.

### INTERVIEW – GERALD FADAYOMI

{VOICE OVER: Gerald Fadayomi is a pastor, author, and non-profit founder. He has served as a student pastor, focusing on helping students grow their faith, and also founded the nonprofit, The Stello Initiative, which helps young adults find places to give back through service-based events. His most recent book, When Life Gives You Lemons, is a practical look at how to navigate adversity in all seasons of life. Please welcome, Gerald Fadayomi!}

BS: Gerald, hi! Welcome. We're so glad to have you.

GF: It's so great to be with you, Bobby.

BS: Where are you joining us from during this crazy COVID time?

GF: We are Atlanta Georgia hanging out at home right now. My wife is out on the front lawn with my identical twin baby girls, just hanging out.

BS: That's awesome. That's great. We're so bummed we can't have you here visiting with us in person, California, but thank you for taking the time this morning to be with us and to talk about your new book, which is awesome. But before we get there, tell us a little bit about your life and your journey, and kind of how you came to know Jesus.

GF: Absolutely. I was born and raised in Atlanta Georgia. Grew up in a single parent household; my dad left in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. At 16, my biological mom went to jail for aggravated stalking. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia. I didn't know that at the time, but that led to just a misunderstanding of the world. She ended up in prison, and so at 16 years old, I was on my own, actually walked away from the church because having a mom whose a Christian and seeing that things weren't going her way, I had this misunderstanding of who God was and I thought that following Jesus meant that we wouldn't have trials in life. I walked away from the church and became a club promoter in Atlanta for three years, threw parties all over the city, and after three years of doing that and losing three friends to murder and one friend to suicide, it led me back to the church. And that's where I made the decision to follow Jesus. And so I've been a Christian for about ten years now, and man the trials that have come my way have definitely been a huge part of why I choose to follow Jesus now.

BS: I can't imagine losing three friends to murder. What is the story there? Did it all happen at the same time or was it different?

GF: Yes, it was in the same year. So being a club promoter, there were a lot of things that came with the lifestyle: drinking, partying, smoking, and a lot of drugs, unfortunately, and so I made some really good friends who were good people but who had lost their way, and because of the lifestyle we were in, unfortunately, that was the result.

BS: Its interesting, one of the things I notice that you said is that you sort of walked away from your faith as a kid because you believed that following Christ meant you wouldn't have any adversity, whereas a lot of people walk away from the faith because they grow up in environment that's like too strict or like really has a dark spirit about it, uber legalistic. But there is that other side where there's some traditions that actually teach this, like if you have enough faith. Like I heard a guy say once, if Paul had enough faith, he wouldn't be persecuted, and that kind of crazy thing. And this has become a big part of your message, right? Is how adversity plays in our walk. How has that worked out for you? I mean how is your view of adversity taken shape?

GF: Yes, absolutely. So as I mentioned in my story, I faced a lot of adversity, but as of recent, 2020, my girls were born in the middle of the pandemic and because I had a pending coronavirus test, I actually wasn't able to be there for the birth of my firstborn kids. And so I've faced a lot of adversity and honestly I'd handled most of it poorly in my life.

BS: Wait, can I stop you there?

GF: Yes, yes.

BS: Let me just pause. So you had twins and you had taken a COVID test and you were waiting to get the results so you didn't even get to be in the hospital when your twins were born?

GF: Yes, so I wasn't there when they were born. When they were born, my wife couldn't see them or hold them for two days because of her pending test. So we got negative test results, we saw our girls for two days, and then we found out that the NIC-U where our girls were was going to be shut down indefinitely, and so the first month of their life we saw them a total of four days.

BS: Oh, that's incredible. I'm so sorry to hear that. Was that your first kids?

GF: Yes, they're our first.

BS: Okay so it's already crazy, too, when you're a new parent. Like I remember when we took our first daughter home, I was like they're just going to let us take this baby home? I mean! Like I just remember watching her as a baby like thinking like is she breathing? We were just nervous! And you had to be so nervous being outside of the hospital. You might even wonder like are these my kids?

GF: Right..

BS: You know, stuff like that.

GF: They're so cute I'm like they could not have come from me.

BS: ..oh that's great.

GF: But yes, I've faced a lot of adversity and in this season I've really held strong to Romans 8:28: "We know that in all things God works together for the good of those who love Him and who have been called according to His purpose." And for me, I always read that verse, and I think a lot of us do just being American Christians, like God works all things together according to my purpose, right? If things are going my way according to my plans and my purposes, and God is good, but the moment that they aren't, and that's when we begin to question. And so I think the shift for me has been understanding that the purpose of God for us as believers is to become more like Jesus and to lead more people to know Jesus.

And so that means any moment, adversity, trials, situation that has that end result is actually good for us, even if it's painful in the moment. And we see Paul, I mean Paul's such a great example of that, right? Like leading people to know Jesus in prison, right? So for me, I've just had this shift as I look at adversity to go man, this may be difficult, it may be painful, but so is the cross, and so just because it's difficult doesn't mean it's not good, and that it can't be used for good.

BS: You're saying that a big part of being a disciple of Christ means changing this way that you experience adversity, you experience even tragedy, that although those adversities and tragedies don't always come from God, God can use them to actually improve your life, to improve your future, improve your family, and improve your walk with God, and make you a more joyful person. And this is something that a lot of people probably don't understand about our faith.

GF: Totally. And it's all through the pages of scripture, right? Like from Joseph to Paul, we see trials and adversity used; Job is another example; trials and adversity used to grow our faith and lead us into deeper intimacy.

BS: You do such a good job on your book. It's a small book, so it's easy to read and easy to get through, but so, so useful. *When Life Gives You Lemons: Three must ask questions for navigating seasons of adversity*. Did you finish writing this just as COVID started? That's in here, right?

GF: Yes, I wrote it in the middle of COVID. So my girls were born, I was reminded of a sermon that I'd preached about a year ago, and I had this moment with the Holy Spirit where He said to me hey you can preach this is true, but now I need you to live like it's true. And so I started writing and journaling and processing these thoughts, and I thought man, maybe this would be helpful for someone else. So in about three months, which is uncommon for a book, I wrote this book and tried to get it out to be helpful

BS: It's so good. What do you think is the one bit of advice you would give to people? So many people are going through hard times; a lot of people are facing depression. I've felt depression during this time. A lot of people anxiety about the future, anxiety about the world, election years, protests, people losing their business, people running out of money. I mean there is so much adversity, angst and trials. What advice would you give to that one person that's looking to you and just saying what do I do? What do I do right now? What can I change?

GF: I would say is the story that you're living right now is not the end of the story, it's just a chapter, and if you feel like it's over, it's not, right? And the reason I can say that with such confidence is because when Jesus went to the grave, everyone thought the story was over. Nobody was standing outside of the grave waiting for Him to come out, right? Like everyone thought the story was over. But three days later, He rose from the grave victorious, and so we know moments that may feel like the end, are not necessarily the end. I'd say to you, if you're going through a hard season right now, like I get it, I know what it's like, I know what it feels like, but God wants to use it. It's not the end of the story, it's just a chapter and we get to turn the page and with the help of our heavenly Father, we get to write a new story and we get to determine how we come out of this adversity.

BS: That's awesome. Thank you so much Gerald Fadayomi. Am I saying your last name right?

GF: You crushed it!

BS: Yes! I crushed it like I crush lemons when I make lemonade. Awesome. The book is called *When Life Gives you Lemons: Three must ask questions for navigating seasons of adversity*. Gerald, thank you. We appreciate you. I want to encourage everybody to go get this book, if you needed some hope and encouragement and some practical ways to kind of get your spirits up and learn that all this adversity that you're going through, God's going to use it to your favor. He's going to use it to help you draw closer to Him, to have more joy not less, to be a stronger person not a weaker person. This is the kind of thing Gerald wants to get to you and I want to encourage you to get it.

GF: Thanks Bobby.

BS: Gerald, thank you. God bless you. Stay safe and go hug your kids. So happy for you guys.

#### DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Wherever you are, would you stand with us? We're going to say this creed together as we do every single week. 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 "The Chutzpah of Paul the Apostle"

Today I'm going to talk about the importance of finishing well in life. In life, you're going to have lots of projects, races and things you're going to do that you need to finish, and you need to finish them well, and you need to understand, we all need to understand the importance that there's a good way and a bad way to finish things. That a part of being a joyful, energetic, successful and most importantly Jesus kind of loving person, means that when we face necessary endings, we end them with kindness, we end them with specific-ness, and that there is a method, a good method that we can end things so that we can enter into the next chapter of our life.

Many of us are facing various little and big endings, but the most important thing is that we remember that whatever it is that we do, that we ought to finish it and finish it well. I really appreciate a book that was written by Dr. Henry Cloud, a great counselor and psychiatrist, psychologist, he had his quote from his book that goes like this. I absolutely agree. It says: "getting to the next level always requires ending something, leaving it behind and moving on. Growth itself demands that we move on. Without the ability to end things, people stay stuck never becoming who they are meant to be, never accomplishing all that their talents and abilities should afford them." Gosh, do I agree with that. And that is an important part of Paul's message. Very often the Apostle Paul who wrote much of the New Testament, much of the word of God, talks about this theme of finishing the race. Of pressing forward. Of not focusing on what's behind but focusing on what's before us to win this prize, this reward, this great thing, and to make sure that we finish and finish well. Of course for him, it was a theme of his missionary journey's and all the hard work that he was doing to help the church and help various people, but as Christians, or non Christians, whoever, I think people in general are just not great at finishing things well. Very often when we come to a necessary ending in life, we tend to do either fight or flight. So in other words, in the various things that we have, we either erupt in anger and storm out and it ends up being this really bad, messy, sad ending to something that probably at one time was good, or which is also very common, it's the flight, right? We just vanish. You don't say anything, you ghost people, you disappear. Both of these things are not loving. Both of these things are not the right way. Both of these things are not going to make you happy. And by the way, both of these things are easier, yes even fighting, is easier than the slow and steady right way of ending something. The slow and steady good way of finishing something well. As a pastor, you see people leave church all the time, and most of the time its fight or flight. They storm out – I'm leaving this place, I'm never coming back! Or they flight – they vanish out of thin air. They've been there for years and years, and you never hear from them. People don't always make it to church, and that's fine, several Sunday's go by and nobody ever heard from them. They never said good-bye and that's, in a way, hurtful because they're your friend. We do this in relationships when we're dating or when we have friendships and they don't go the right way, or when very often we go through a hard time. I think very often when we're going through a hard time, we end things prematurely with people, or we just know we have to end it, but we ghost people, not because we are upset with them, but we feel like we're a burden. I'm going to just disappear because I'm a burden to this person.

Let me just tell you something – you are not a burden. You're not a burden to God, to me or to your friends. Part of growing in your relationships with people is being vulnerable; being honest about your weakness. I love friends that are flawed, don't you? It's nice to be around flawed friends who are working on themselves; that don't try and pretend like everything is great because when they're that way, I can be flawed, too. And as my wife and daughter can attest, I am flawed. We all are.. oh that's a very sweet response, thanks Han. And this is true in business, its true in everything, and its especially true in your walk with God and in life. That we want to end life well; that we want to live life with the end in mind. That we left behind us a legacy and that we left the world a better place, and that we leave it to inherit an even better future, a future in heaven with the Lord.

All of these things are important, and we know they're important. This is why we make up even little things, little challenges for ourselves. Think about it: have you ever done like where you give up a thing for a period just to see if you can do it? It's fun. It's an accomplishment. I know like one really cool movement that's here in LA and I think it's in London, too, is in November, men will stop shaving their upper lip and grow a moustache to bring awareness to prostate cancer and other men's things. There are things like that that people do. And in our faith, we fast. I remember once during lent, I decided I was going to give up coffee during the season of lent, and can I just tell you, that was a mistake. Just to take a little diversion here.

This is a socially acceptable chemical dependence, and I can't live without coffee. There are a few things I can do without: sugar, anything, but coffee is a tough one. Anyway. We do these things, and when we finish, we reflect back on what we learned from that journey of no sugar or no alcohol or no TV or lots of things that people do in order to notice that there are maybe these things in their life that maybe their life would be a little better if they had less of it or none of it or whatever. And we finish and we look back and we go hey, that was good. Much of life should be that way where we think about when we're doing things that if it ends or if it changes in a necessary way, that we actually end it, and that when we end it, we end it well, not in fights, not getting all upset and not flight – ghosting and disappearing, but we end things in a loving and intentional and yet ended way.

In the Bible, there is this thing, and I've talked about it.. I'm not going to go into it at length here, but called the Nazarite Vow. The Nazarite Vow. We don't know a whole lot about the Nazarite Vow, for example, why someone would do it, or how long it would go, but this Nazarite Vow is a vow when someone wants to take a season of their life and dedicate it to God. The Nazarite Vow is done by both men and women. It can go for as a little as 30 days, and it can go for as long as a whole lifetime, and it's really up to the person how long they want to go. When someone does a Nazarite Vow in the Bible, there are three things that they're saying they're not going to do, and during that time, they're going to dedicate their life to God and their neighbor.

The first thing they're not allowed to do, and this sounds strange for us, like why would that be an issue, but remember in the bronze age of the ancient world, this is a hard thing to do. You're not allowed to touch any dead thing. So this also means you can't eat meat. So you have to be a vegetarian, and you cannot touch any dead animal or dead person during this vow. So like in those days, like your grandma lives in a house with you, your grandpa, and if they pass away, you can't be in the house when they die. The number two thing they can't do is they can't drink any wine, some traditions say alcohol at all, but some others say just wine. But they can't have wine, which is a big deal, which wine is a really important part of Jewish culture. And number three, they can't cut their hair during the whole time of the vow. This is also important because as the person's hair grows, it shows how long their vow has been. When that vow comes to an end, this is what happened in Paul's day, in Jesus' day, the person would go to the temple and end their vow and dedicate it to God. And this sounds a little gross, but what they would do is they would get all this stuff, and they would have to make this very expensive sacrifice to God, and neighbors and friends would help them raise the money and the sheep and everything, and then be so like their family and a village would come, and then they would shave off their head and for a lot of these people, it's been years. A lot of young men and women, even, shave their head down to the scalp, and then you've got this long thing of hair, or short thing of hair depending on how long, and then they would burn it on the altar so it smells like a salon or something, like someone getting a perm; that gnarly hair smell.

To us that sounds really gross, but in those days, that was a symbol, that smell to them would have been a holy smell, in a way. It would have been a symbol that someone took this part of their life, they dedicated it to God, they committed to this very hard thing to do, and then they ended it right; they ended it well and they finished for the Lord to maybe prepare their lives for some other thing that they were going to do. One of the most famous stories that we know of the Nazarite Vow is a Old Testament story of Samson. Now I find that boys, in particular, love the story of Samson because he's this herculean type super hero in the Bible. There are not a lot of super heroes in the Bible, but Samson is one of them. And very often we read the Samson story as a good guy. Samson's a bad guy, actually. He takes place in a book of Judges. Judges in those days were not like.. don't think of it like a guy and a gavel ruling over people. A judge was more like a warlord, a commander, a chieftain. And the worst of all the judges and the most evil of all was probably Samson. And yet there was this part of Samson that in the end you see he wanted to do something right for God.

It says in the Bible that the Israelites were delivered into the hands of the Philistines, and what this means was that they began to take on the cultural things of the Philistines. Now we say well that's not a big deal, what's so wrong with inheriting your neighbor's culture? Culture is great. Well we're not talking about theater and pasta and this type of thing. The neighbors of Philistines, there is a reason the Bible hates idolatry so much. We can't see it in our modern age, but in the bronze age, idolatry was almost always, and in particular with the Philistines, was associative with human sacrifice, with killing children alive. Almost every pagan temple incorporated temple prostitutes who were very often women, boys and girls who were taken during tribal assaults of neighboring villages. These temple priests and priestesses who were also temple prostitutes were basically human slaves.

Of course in God's eyes, this is utter evil, and so I know it's hard when you read the Old Testament to see that someone like Samson went around defeating these men, but these are bad guys. These are guys who not only kill children and women, but harm them in these horrible soul crushing ways. I heard a guy say once that very often atheists say something like why doesn't God do something about the evil of the world? But then when we talk about how He does something about the evil, they say well look, God's a violent God!

But the truth is, Samson is sent by God to end bad guys. He's like an anti hero. He's very imperfect, prideful, sinful, but he's also sent to bring freedom for children and freedom for women. And it's important that as modern people, we know that the ancient authors saw that it was implicit in their personal knowledge of their neighbors, the Philistines. Okay. Is that enough, do you think? Philistines are bad guys. When Samson is born, he is dedicated to this Nazarite Vow. The Nazarite Vow. You remember what it was? No dead things, no wine, don't cut your hair. And Samson, in this Nazarite Vow, is given power from God that as long as he withholds from these three things, and is faithful to finish this Nazarite Vow, he will be given strength to defeat his enemies. Think about that for a minute. This is a metaphor for our lives, guys. We often think that having less in our lives, having less of these things makes life boring, makes life difficult, but it might be that God wants you to end certain things in your lives, even though it makes you separate and different from others, so that you can have more power, not less. There are so many things in life that if we were willing to just say no and cut off this thing that we know God doesn't want in our lives, that we know is not the best for us or for our family, or for what we're supposed to be doing, that if we could just cut it off, like Samson, we would be given the power to do what we need to do. But we negotiate with these things and lose our personal power to overcome the enemies that stand before them.

I'm telling you as your friend, I want you to ask God very seriously what these things are in your life. For Samson, it was no cutting your hair, no touching dead things, and no alcohol. As we read the story, we see that Samson breaks all three of those things.

The first thing he does is in his strength, he kills a lion and then goes and does some other things, and when he comes back, this is really gross, sorry Haven, this is going to gross you out. In the lion's body is a beehive full of honey, which is also an analogy because Jews love honey, in the ancient world honey is like candy. But its inside this disgusting dead thing, and so Jews, like us, are all that being clean and so this is already horrible for anybody. But Samson reaches into the dead carcass of the lion where the honey is, and eats the honey, breaking the first thing that he said he would never do. Later on we'll see that he takes some of that honey with him and serves it to his enemies. The second thing is he has this festival where he drinks wine. So there he is, he's broken the second thing. Finally, the third thing he does is there's this girl he loves, who's a Philistine, named Delilah. He's in love with her, and she keeps bugging him to know what's the last thing that if you do this thing, you will lose your strength. And he finally tells her. When you read this story, you're like Samson is such an idiot. He's such a dummy. But any man who has been in love, or been smitten by a girl, knows that they too have been an idiot; knows that they too can be stupid when they are in love. This also is a metaphor for Israel; that Israel who has been given all of this strength and power, is itself lured into this type of evil that their Philistine neighbors do, like child sacrifice and all this other stuff. When Samson tells her if I cut my hair, I will finally have broken all three of my vows and my vow will be over and my strength will go for me. When he tells her, of course she cuts his hair, and the Philistines who hate Samson, come and arrest him. They gouge out his eyes, and they bring him to the temple and this whole temple is filled with these evil men who are mocking him and he's pushing this thing around, and I just wonder what it would have been like for Samson. Thinking about I had all this strength, I had all this power, but I also had pride in my heart and I could have defeated these evil people, and I could have brought freedom to my people, but out of my stupid-ness; eating honey out of a lion, and drinking wine at the festival, and telling my girlfriend that she should cut my hair, I had contempt for the great gift God had given me. And I've lost all power. When I was a kid, my dad was a pastor and sometimes they would have these like children's ministry things, and they would wheel in that cart with the VHS and the TV on top and like the little strap that holds the thing together. And they had these like VHS tapes with Hanna-Barbera, remember that? Where they had these things and they had this VHS tape with Samson. And I just remember feeling so bad for Samson. All the regret he must have felt, but this famous ending. In the Bible, Samson is tied to these two pillars in this temple that kills children and this temple that turns women and children into sex slaves, this symbol of evil full of evil men, Samson knew that he was called to free the world

from these evil people. And his final prayer is not a prideful one, it's a simple one. He says 'Sovereign Lord, remember me.' You ever feel like God's forgotten you? It's okay. You ever feel like because of something you've done, or because of your past, or something that happened to you that God doesn't see you, God doesn't know you, God doesn't care about you. Maybe He's taken His favor from you. I want you to know God has chosen you. He sees you. You don't have to ask Him to remember you. He loves you. This is what Samson says. 'Sovereign Lord, remember me.' And when he says this, there's this power that comes over him, and he pushes these pillars out that hold the temple up, and he gives his own life and this symbol of evil and destruction and all these evil men are killed in this one final act. And the thing I always think when I think about the story of Samson is a life wasted, a life of arrogance, a life of pride, but at least in the end he was able to finish well. At least in the end, he was able to do something great. Many of you, maybe you feel like you're at the twilight of your life. Maybe you feel like you've lived a life like Samson where maybe you made a lot of mistakes, but your life isn't over yet, nor should you end your life. Whatever time you have, is given to you because God wants you to use that time to do what you were called to do! To finish well. To finish the race the way you were called to, so that when you get across that finish line, I can rejoice with you and the Lord can rejoice with you, and you can look back and say even though it was hard and difficult, I crossed this line. Finally we get to the Bible verse, and I'm almost done, but I'll finish with the Bible verse. So I think of Paul, also, when I think about a life like this. Paul is in prison when he writes this passage I'm about to read in Philippians. He's probably in Rome, he might be in Ephesus, but he's in a prison and he's rotting and this guy from Philippi, the church which is in what today is modern day Turkey, a guy named Epaphroditus brings a financial gift with some food with him and goes over thousands of miles to bring it to Paul, and to encourage Paul who's in prison, this special gift from his church. While he's there, he gets this guy Epaphroditus, gets sick and Paul is worried for him, and he's praying for him, and he gets well and this letter he sends back with Epaphroditus, but before he leaves, Epaphroditus says all these people in the church you started, Paul, are starting to get kind of legalistic. And they're kind of like being told that they have to like do all these dietary things and they have to like be circumcised and like everybody has to be the same and we all have to like do the stuff, but that's not what you taught, you taught us about freedom in the Lord, and you taught us about grace, and a lot of people are confused. A big part of Paul's letter here is answering this. He says I want you to hear this. Paul's back-story is interesting. He was a rigid, rigid religious guy. I mean you think about the most religious person you've ever known, Paul is like a hundred times whatever that guy or gal was. And out of his love for God, actually became a bad person. That can happen sometimes. He so wanted to do the right thing that he was actually hurting people, and we know that he was there when Steven was murdered holding the clothes, and he was just utterly dedicated. He was mentored by a guy named Gamaliel, who even today is venerated by Christians and Jews. That would be like me saying I studied engineering under a guy named Albert Einstein. That's basically what Paul says. I mean he's got a laundry list. He's a Pharisee, he's got all of these things and he looks back and in this letter he says I had all these things, I had my Hebrew of Hebrews, meaning I speak Hebrew perfectly, and I follow the law perfectly. And I have all of these religious accomplishments, and he says and when I look back at that, it is all skubalon. Let me read it to you. He says "whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Listen, there's like a regret almost when I read Paul. He regrets that in his desire to serve God, he was against God. "What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them" okay I'm reading a translation called the NIV. They chose the word garbage. So there is this word skubalon here that Bible translators, they have to all get in a room, and they know what the word means, and they have to like find another word. Skubalon. What do we do for skubalon? One translation says dung. That's getting a little closer. A lot of times it will say refuse. But the word skubalon is probably something akin to a cuss word. I'm not saying Paul necessarily cussed because he didn't support cussing, but this is the one time he uses a word in Greek that as Bible translators we know what it says, but we can't put it in the Bible. Martin Luther, when he translated this, he just wrote shiza. That's - but my works were shiza. Paul wants you to get an image in your head. He's saying all my religious achievements were worthless. They were dung. And this is regret, this is regret. All that stuff I did, I thought it was helping God, I was hurting people. I was ruining lives. I assisted in a murder of an innocent man.

I put people to prison. And he says all of it, all of it is skubalon. All of it. It was a waste. You ever feel that way about your life? About some of the things that you've done, and you're just like man, it was a waste.

But Paul also knows that his life is not over, and neither is yours. He says "but" and you go down to verse 12 "not that I have obtained this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I'm going to press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do," just one thing, "I forget everything what is behind and I strain toward what is ahead. I press on to the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ." Paul's saying like I'm bummed out that I did this with my life, but I'm going to forget it, I've been forgiven, and I'm going to continue to press on. I'm going to move forward. I'm not going to be stuck in the past. I'm going to take a step forward in the right direction to the thing God's called me to. Man, if you have regrets, if you feel guilty, if you feel ashamed about your past, let it go. Join the club. Join a club. Let it go and press on towards the high calling God has given you. A big part of having a bad past makes your future actually brighter. When you get to tell your story down the road, you will see that all those things that you did, you're going to be able to help other people someday understand when they need to get through those things, you're going to help them get through, and I'm just so proud of you, and I want you to know that you're going to do this, you're going to get across that finish line, and we're going to be rooting for you because we love you, we're with you all the way. So finish well. That's it. That's all I have to say. Finish well. So many Christians, so many pastors, so many people in business, so many people in non-profits they just don't finish well. When I finished seminary, the average time that seminary graduates who went in the ministry, stayed in ministry was five years. Ministry is hard. It is hard. And so many people couldn't finish. So many people look back in their parenting, they feel like I just didn't do a good job being a parent, or I have all these regrets. Don't just walk away. You still have time to reconcile with your kids or with your grandkids. So many people who want to quit drinking or want to be clean and sober, or want to walk away from a life of crime, or some of these other things that are a part of their past, or they know that there are hard things they need to do, but they need to finish well, and I want to encourage you, it's okay, just get back on. And most importantly, I want to encourage you to commit your life to God. I'm astonished at how many people say I love Jesus but I hate Christians. And my response to that is then become a Christian and show us how to do it. If you love Jesus, and if you love the way He lived His life, then the best thing to do is to become like Him. Not to become like the people that make you not like Him, but to become like Christ Himself. I want to encourage you that so often we make this harder than it has to be. At the end of the day, it's just a decision. You just decide. This is what I did. I didn't pray a prayer, I didn't go down an altar, I just made a decision one day, I just decided. I'm done riding the fence, I'm going to commit my life to God. I'm going to love the Lord with all my heart, all my soul, all my strength, with everything in me, and I'm going to love my neighbor as myself. Do that and you will gain eternal life. Do that and you will live the best kind of life you could live. And that's a fun life. It's a life full of joy and full of friendship and full of improvement, and good decisions, and this is what the Lord wants for you. My friend I want to tell you, whatever thing, whatever necessary ending you may be going through, finish it well. And maybe you're not going through an ending, but remember when the time comes, don't freak out and get all angry, and don't just ghost and disappear, but end things the right way and watch how much that's a testimony of friendship, kindness and goodness, and actually respect to the people that you love and you work with.

Father, we thank you that you love us just as we are, right where we are, that you want the best for us. I just pray that you would affirm in everyone's heart that we are alive for a reason. That sometimes life is painful and difficult and isolating and lonely, but there are so many wonderful, great things that lay before us, so many adventures, relationships, new things, new projects and help us to get excited about that. Help us to build a dream. We know, Lord, that when we build a dream, the dream builds us. And help us to be dream builders, and help us to be hopeful people and to look to you for a bright future, and we do, Lord. We thank 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 peace in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.