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GOOD MORNING/INVOCATION – Bobby & Hannah Schuller

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Hello.
HS: Welcome church family and visitors. We are so happy that you joined us. The world is still so chaotic, but may we keep pressing into God more than we ever have before and cling to the one who can redeem any pain and any tragedy. He really can. Thank you so much for joining us. You are loved.

BS: We're so glad, too, that you are inviting us into your home or your cell phone or wherever it is that you are. We truly are remembering the Biblical view that the church is who we are all the time everywhere we are. That we share in our hearts the Holy Spirit with all other believers as we work to see the kingdom of God fulfilled in the space around us.

We're so grateful that we just believe that you're participating in an amazing thing right now as God gathers His people today, and I want to believe that because you're starting your week right, that the rest of your week is going to go better. That you're going to have more joy, you're going to have more peace, you're going to be wiser, that God's even going to bless this week in a profound way, and let's just build our faith in that way and believe that this week's going to be better because we started it right. Sunday is the first day of the week, not the last, so we're starting it with the Lord.

Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much that you love us, that you look at us with a smile, that your heart is full of joy, God, when you see your children, and I just pray that we would hold that reality in our hearts. I pray for everybody going through something. All of us, in a way, are really going through something, but especially those who are going through a particular loss, or trial or difficult time. Give us strength and let the suffering that we experience be something that sharpens us; be something that makes us stronger, be something that can oddly make us more joyful, and I pray for that over everyone under the sound of my voice, and we pray it all in Jesus' name, amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – Isaiah 51:1-3 - Hannah Schuller

HS: In preparation for the message, Isaiah 51:1-3:

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many. The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing. Brothers and sisters, may we allow the struggle to make us stronger. Amen.

Remember the Quarry

INTERVIEW – Bobby Schuller (BS) with Hannah Brencher (HB)

Hannah Brencher is a writer, author, teacher, and TED speaker. She moved to New York City and later found herself struggling with depression, so she began writing letters as a way to cope and hid them throughout the city for people to find. These notes became the start of her global organization, More Love Letters. Now, she mobilizes teams that reach people all over the globe with letters of encouragement. She also found reignited faith as she stepped into her mission, and now she uses her influence to share God's love all over the world. Please welcome, Hannah Brencher!}

BS: Hannah welcome! Thank you so much for joining us today. Tell us a little bit about your story and how did you get into writing these love letters to strangers?

HB: So it definitely was a pretty unexpected accident. I always say it's the best accident that ever happened to me. But at the time, I had just graduated from college. I was living in New York City and I was dealing with what I didn't know was depression. So it would later become a diagnosis of depression. But at that time, I felt a lot of loneliness, I felt a lot of sadness, and I really was at a point of just trying to figure out where God was in all of this. At the time I wasn't a believer, and I felt so surrounded by people in New York City, but at the same time you can be surrounded by people and feel so disconnected. And so as a way of coping, I started to write letters to people that I would see on the subway or in coffee shops, or wherever I would go on my commute, and I started to leave the letters behind for other people to find, because I thought man if I feel this lonely and sad, maybe other people feel this way, too, and I don't think that I ever expected that it was going to touch so many people once I started writing about it and blogging about it online.

BS: You'd just hand write a letter.. so you would see some lonely guy or somebody that somehow you kind of empathize with them, you write the letter. Would you ever actually hand it to him or her, or you kind of left it.. you'd kind of do it later or like how did that work?

HB: I would leave it after I, like, when I was ready to leave, I was way too nervous to ever like walk up to somebody and be like here's a letter, but I remember the first woman that I ever wrote a letter for. She had come onto the subway, she was sitting right across from me, and I for some reason, I couldn't explain it, I pulled out the notebook, I started writing to her and I got so entrenched in writing the letter, that by the time that I looked up, she had actually left the train and it was the first time I had felt in a long time that I didn't feel lonely or sad or disconnected. It felt like okay, I need to do more of this because it makes me feel different.

BS: There's something to say about.. a lot of time you hear people say something like one thing that helped me with feeling depressed or anxious was actually just helping someone else, like trying to use my gifts. It almost like helps you stop spinning wheels in your head. Do you feel like that's a good.. I hate to call it a tip, but like something that is really useful for someone that maybe they feel like they're going just through kind of slump or something like that? It seems like it was useful for you.

HB: Absolutely. And it's something that as somebody who continues to deal with depression, it's something that I have employed again and again and again, that anytime that I am in a slump, it does help to look outside of myself and think about somebody else, so whether that's writing a letter to a stranger, or its writing a letter to somebody in my own life that might need to know, especially in today's world that they're seen, they're loved, they're noticed, that they mattered. I think it's so easy to get stuck in our own head and to let our own head take us down and so finding those ways to step outside of yourself and encourage somebody else.

BS: You said when you were doing this, you weren't a Christian, but did you become a Christian through this process, did it have something to do with you sort of forming a relationship with God in your life?

HB: Yes, no, I am one hundred percent a Christian today because of what God did through these letters. So after I started blogging about the letters and basically I wrote one blog post that I said if you need a love letter for whatever reason, I will hand write it soon and I will mail it to you. Now I thought I was probably going to write like two or three letters, like one to my mom and like one to the other person that read my blog at the time but God did something crazy with that. That post ended up going viral and I ended up spending the next nine months writing about 400 letters to strangers. And that was the time that God really showed me like listen, like, I have a part for you to play, I have something that I want you to do, and also for me to realize I wasn't the only person dealing with this loneliness and depression, and that there were a lot of people feeling exactly how I was feeling, and so I really feel like God used that to bring me closer to Him and to ultimately give my life to Him.

Remember the Quarry

BS: That's awesome. That is a huge chore. For people that don't understand. I remember when my wife and I were married and we had to write thank you letters to everybody that gave us a gift and they were short letters, and that took forever. It seems like your letters are really.. like it seems like you really think about them and you really maybe pray about them and put a lot of your heart into it, so I imagine it took forever to write 400 letters.

HB: It did take a very long time and I won't sugar coat it or make it look like I loved every moment of it, but I knew that I had made a promise to people and I wanted to be the kind of person that followed through on a promise.

BS: So you've now turned into this mega like blog organization called More Love Letters. Tell us how did that happen? This just kind of has ballooned into this thing that you didn't like have a plan and a strategy, you're like I'm going to write some letters, I'm going to have this thing. It just kind of turned into this.

HB: I mean I tried multiple times to like not have this be the thing because it's not even that I'm.. like I don't even like letters that much so much as I like what letters symbolize. I like that in a digital world we could have something tangible, to hold of one another and that's why I think they're so important. But how it started was after I had written the final letter of that bundle of hundreds of letters, I was ready for the story to be over. I was ready like I'll tell my kids about it one day, but like this is it, the end. And everybody around me was like no, this isn't where the story ends. Like this is where the story begins. With a lot of prayer, I built a website, I set it up so that people could nominate friends and family members going through something tough, and if their nomination was chosen, people from all over the world with the power of the internet could handwrite a letter, mail it to a central location, and that person would get blessed with hundreds of letters on a day where they think probably no one is going to notice them. So that's what we do every day. We've sent out close to half a million love letters into the world. We honestly can't keep count anymore.

BS: You don't have like your.. it's all like crowd sourced, right? So you're almost like a broker. You connect the person who.. I hate to make it sound that way, but you have the person that is going through something and somebody else who wants to write a letter. So there are even people watching now that if they wanted to write or receive a letter, they could do that right now, right?

HB: Absolutely. They can go right onto the website, they could read the stories of the people that are receiving love letters this September, and they can also nominate somebody that is going through something in their own life. And so if that story's chosen, they become the recipient. They will have all the letters come to them and they will kind of go through the letters to make sure they're a fit for their loved one, and they'll get to gift them to their loved one.

BS: That's awesome. Well Hannah Brencher, thank you so much. And what a great reminder, too, that one of the best ways to get out of these slumps is to focus and to help other people and to be a loving person, so we thank you so much and thanks for your ministry. I think you're just touching so many lives and people need what you're doing now more than ever. Hannah thank you so much.

HB: It's wonderful to be here.

BS: It's our privilege, really. Thank you. God bless you.

HB: You too.

BS: Bye.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Whoever you are, please stand with me, 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 "Prepare Ye the Way"

Today we're starting a new series in which we're talking about this very Jewish and Christian idea that the suffering we go through in life, though it's not necessarily and usually not from God, that God can use those times to shape us and craft us into who we're supposed to be. That in a way, it's almost like God has His revenge on the enemy by when the enemy attacks you, using that experience to make you a smarter, more loving, more joyful, more powerful person.

Remember the Quarry

That though we go through tough times and trials and tragic loss, we can in those moments, if we live in God's kingdom, if we dwell in His presence, if we receive His spirit, we can receive a gift within the loss that can cause us to have a greater impact in our lives for God's kingdom. But it takes time and sometimes we go through these times where God like an artist who's chiseling away at stone, like Michelangelo chipping away, creating a David statue; when you're that stone, it's very painful. And I'm going to trust that God's going to give you the resilience and the patience to endure the chipping away so that you will become who He called you to be. Today we're going to talk about Isaiah 51 and about this passage that talks about God drawing us out of a quarry to shape us. But before we get there, I want to tell a personal story that many people in our local church will share. Now a lot of our viewers on TV now because I've been here for awhile, actually aren't familiar with my grandpa, aren't familiar with the Crystal Cathedral, but it's a really important part of this television program, and an important part of our local church. Back in the day, when Hannah and I moved back to California from Oklahoma, we were recently married, and we very much felt that the Holy Spirit put a calling on our heart to come to California at a salary of \$23,000 a year in Orange County, which was not a lot. I had an offer at another job at \$79,000 in Washington, DC, actually, and we turned that down because we felt that the Lord called us to come to the Crystal Cathedral and to effectively help my dad, who was the new senior pastor, bring young people into the Crystal Cathedral and that was our goal. We came in as effectively, eventually college pastors. We created a group that originally was for college people, but just kind of became a almost church service within the church where people were attending, and I have to tell you that those years at the Crystal Cathedral were maybe some of the most wonderful years of my life. We lived in a little house on Anzio with blue carpet that was backed up right to the church. Every morning, you could hear the church bells play whatever music that had been scheduled, and it was just so wonderful to be a part of something great that God was doing in the world. And as a Schuller, and a family member, there was just so much, I think, good pride that we felt in being a small part of something really big. It was during those times I got to spend a lot more time with my grandpa Schuller, who I really came to idolize. And during these times, I remember as my dad was stepping into leadership, those are big shoes to fill. He wrote a book called *Walking in Your Own Shoes* saying you have to find your own calling and during that time, I think, really struggled as a void of leadership, my dad was trying to fill it, there were other people who were also sort of trying to get a piece of that. And without going into too much detail, I can remember very often after a work day, my dad and Donna and I and sometimes Hannah, we would go to our favorite deli and we would get dinner, and we would commiserate about all the difficult things we were going through and all the struggles that we were facing, but at the end of the day I can tell you, it was a wonderful, wonderful time and a great experience. And yet I remember vividly.. actually do we have a picture of the Cathedral? This is my favorite version of the Cathedral. Empty. But I used to go in the mornings and afternoons sometimes with my Bible, and sit in one of the wings and just pray: pray for the church, pray for the mission, pray for my family. It was and is a special place. And that's why it was very strange that on July 9th in 2008 my dad called me on the phone, I was driving in my car, and he said 'Bobby,' he was crying, 'I just resigned from the Cathedral.' And I had this conversation and as he's talking and I'm listening, I'm also having my own thoughts in the back of my head. It's like I knew in that moment everything was going to change, I had a good feeling that the church was not going to survive this, and yet I had a feeling of relief, joy, and excitement. I think the reason I felt excited was it was maybe starting to feel too safe, or maybe starting to feel like everything in my life was going to be planned out. And I started to think like am I just going to be a curator? My family, we're just here to maintain this thing? And when that happened, it was like the whole script had been thrown out and that something new was before me. And yet, here I am looking back on those days. I remember the death of grandparents. I remember watching my grandpa sort of fade over time, and I even remember at his funeral when we were carting his casket to his resting place, they played to dream the impossible dream by Man of LaMancha. It was his favorite song: to dream, the impossible dream. And as I heard this child sing the song, I just began weeping. And ever since that day, the Crystal Cathedral, every time I drive by it on the 5, looks like a giant glass tombstone. It just made the Crystal Cathedral be a place that even though it's beautiful, when I see it, it's just aching, aching grief. And it's been that way for years now. I love what God is doing here. I love the Hour of Power. And in a way I'm also grateful that we went through that to reclaim a lot of the great things that God has done.

Remember the Quarry

And the future is so bright and I'm so excited to be here, and yet I've had this aching. I don't know, Hannah, if you've felt that way, but just this burden. Last Monday I saw an old friend, Phil Munsey, who's been a pastor to pastors, a man full of the spirit, and a man my dad and I have known forever. We used to go to his church back when my dad would take a break. Charismatic guy, Pentecostal. And we were talking and somehow this Cathedral thing came up. And I think full of the spirit, almost prophesying, he looked at me and he said 'Bobby, that building is a seed. It's a seed that God has planted in the ground and something even greater is going to come out of that.' Friends, let me tell you, I knew exactly what he meant by that. This is not a new idea. This is the most Christian idea there is. The old world called it the Paschal Mystery. Charismatic's today call it seed theology. But however you look at it, it is the Easter miracle. When we experience death, loss, cutting, breaking, hurting, God turns those things into victory, into joy. He was referencing John when Jesus says "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. That's what God's going to do with my loss, with our loss, and with your loss. He is going to take something that maybe He didn't even want to happen, something that the enemy did, or something that just happened for whatever reason, He is going to take that and turn it around. This is the kingdom of God. The Lord is present all around us. His power, His life and His spirit, friend, let me tell you I know you went through a lot, but God is going to bring you to a place of joy, a place of victory, and all this stuff you're going through, it's going to chisel you into who you're supposed to be. When he said 'the Crystal Cathedral is a seed' that gave me so much freedom. Look, you might have gone to Yale University, but I went to ya'll university in Oklahoma. It's called Oral Roberts University, and they teach you this kind of thing. There's certain things you don't learn at Yale that you learn at ya'll, you know? And maybe you went to a place like that, a place where you learn these principles and I knew I just got so much freedom in that. Tertullian said, the blood of martyrs, this is in the time when the church was under immense persecution. I mean kids and parents were being killed by an evil empire just for worshipping Jesus Christ. And Tertullian said, and I love this, that the blood of his martyrs is seed. He said the more of them you kill, a thousand of them will replace them because that is who God is. I believe so much that the martyr Stephen, in a way, was a seed that sort of produced Paul. I think Paul became.. this is conjecture, but I just believe that Paul sort of took on the mantle of Stephen, and it was like ten-x'd. And this is what God does. He takes our tragedies and He turns them around. He turns them around.

Your life, unfortunately sometimes, will be like Job's life. Job had it all. Job did nothing wrong. He served and loved the Lord with all of his heart and yet when all of this tragedy befell him, he had a choice to make: his spouse and his friends, they said curse God and die. But he said though he slay me, even then I will trust Him. That is the choice we make when we go through tough times. To curse God and die, or to say even though I'm scraping boils off my arms, even though I've lost everything, even though I'm dying, I know the Lord. I know He is good. He is always good. Everything He does is good. Everything He wants for me is good. That His future for me is good, and it is. You know who the Lord is. And you may be going through a tough time, but as you're going through that time, you'll weep, you'll cry, sometimes you'll feel self pity, sometimes you'll feel bummed out, you'll be depressed, you can't get out of bed, but you will say though he slay me, I'm going to trust Him.

God brought back to Job everything and more, and He will for you. When I look at that statue of Job, I love that statue because you see that a man.. I was the model for that, by the way. Just kidding. You see that a man has been chiseled out of stone, that chiseling comes from cutting. It comes from cutting. It comes from pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. If the stone had feelings, that would not feel good. Ga, ga, ga, ga, sh, sh, sh, ga, ga, ga, ga. I just believe maybe that's what God's doing through you, He's creating a masterpiece. You don't want Him to do this, maybe you don't, but He's creating a masterpiece in you. What the devil meant for evil, God is going to turn to goodness. Man, Satan was so excited when Jesus was crucified, wasn't he. He was so excited to see the perfect Son of God nailed to the cross, but God had a bigger plan. He has a bigger plan for you. And when we clothe ourselves in Christ, we clothe ourselves in that resurrection power. Your loss is going to be a seed, your suffering is a chiseling. You know the word passion, it literally means pain. You can't have passion for something if you haven't suffered. You can't really believe in something if you can't have empathy for your neighbor, if you can't have a vision for where you're going. Friend, let me tell you, passion is power. God is going to do something great in you.

And remember, what would that person want for you? What would they want for you? What would they want? Hold onto that.

Remember the Quarry

Live your life for them and for Christ, to live up to what they want for you. To be full of joy. To be full of power. To be full of wisdom. To be a leader with a limp. People want a leader with a limp. They don't want a perfect person. They want someone like us, people who go through tough times, and I'm sure you've gone through much more than I have. God's going to use that to help you lead people. Finally, I got to the passage. Isaiah 51: "Listen to me you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn. Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him, he was only one man and I blessed him and made him many. The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on her ruins. He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her; thanksgiving and the sound of singing." Hear that for you. Read it as its for you, that the Lord will surely comfort you and will look with compassion on your ruin, and He will make your deserts like Eden, and your wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in you. Thanksgiving and the sound of singing. This is the word of the Lord. Believe it! It's true. God's going to do it in you. He did it for me, He'll do it for you. This passage is saying remember Abraham and Sarah, they went through all of this stuff, and when the Bible says Abraham and Sarah, it means everybody: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Moses, Joseph, David, Solomon, right? Ruth, Deborah, Sarah. Remember, remember what they went through. Remember that their lives, none of them were easy. None of them were perfect. I had a professor that once said the best that any of them did was like probably a B minus on the moral report card. They all were imperfect, they were flawed, they messed up, they would break the law, but they were people who in the end, kept their eyes fixed on the kingdom of heaven. They were people who loved the Lord, and that was the one thing you couldn't take from them. That they all loved the Lord and they loved His word and they trusted Him, and because they trusted Him, God saw that as righteousness and blessed them. Remember them. Isaiah is saying remember, remember those stories. Remember what they went through? God had a bigger plan for them, and He's got a bigger plan for you. Remember. Then he goes on to say 'and remember what God did to Egypt.' Egypt, the great symbol of power. It says later in the same passage remember Rahab, not Rahab the prostitute from the story that's a good guy, but Rahab the monster. So in Middle Eastern culture, there's this symbol of Rahab the sea monster who is specifically a symbol for Egypt, but also functions in the Bible as a symbol for Satan. And so you remember, God brought the small people, the Hebrew people, out of Egypt, the greatest empire on earth, and in doing that, God says I cut Rahab into pieces, referring to Egypt. But it's also saying I cut Satan into pieces. Notice Isaiah 51, the theme is cutting: chiseling, breaking. And it's like when the arrogant and the proud and the wicked, according to Isaiah 51, when they come under the cutting, they're cut to pieces. They're destroyed. Even though they think they're great, they're going to be annihilated. But when the righteous, people like you who are not perfect but are pulled out of the quarry of Abraham and Sarah, you're from them. You come from that place. And when a stone is pulled from a quarry, it doesn't come out looking like Michelangelo's David, it comes out looking gnarly and discolored and dusty and dirty. And that's how your life is. But the substance of the thing is valuable, its marble. It has value and it requires cutting and sanding and breaking to become what it's supposed to be, and this is what Isaiah 51 says when the wicked come under God's cutting, they're cut to pieces, but when someone like you comes under suffering, comes under hardship, comes under difficulty, God is forming a masterpiece in you. Believe it and let that hope carry you through this tough time. Let that hope carry you. I believe that the theme of Isaiah 51 is that God says I will cut Satan to pieces, but I will cut you to your purpose. I will cut the enemy to pieces but the cutting that you are going to face is going to cut you into your purpose. Cut you into what you're called to be. I was interested to find out that there is a thing called post traumatic growth. Have you ever heard of that? It's almost as common as the more well-known post traumatic stress. It's interesting because the first world war may be the most awful war that the world has ever faced. It totally, in many ways, began out of something completely pointless - the assassination of Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand. And the whole world got riled into this thing, and this is when the world's war machine now had artillery in bombs and gas and machine guns, something that they hadn't really experienced on a big level, and as soldiers from both sides were coming home, they were coming home with this thing called shell shock, where the lights were on, but nobody was home. They weren't able to get back into normal society because they had seen so many horrible things: friends being blown up and things with children and women and all sorts of atrocities and stuff.

Remember the Quarry

And it's interesting because that was the beginning of studying this thing called post traumatic stress, which is a real thing where I heard, I don't know if this is true, but like 30% of homeless men are combat veterans and that many soldiers, they don't just sacrifice their lives, sometimes there's a part of their soul that they lose in just going through so much trauma. But a positive side is that there's also, for many soldiers and many people who go through traumatic life events that sometimes the opposite happens. I wish they would talk about this more, this thing called post traumatic growth. I remember when Hannah and I had a season where we were invited to go to Palm Springs and we met a bunch of rich people and it was just because the friend that invited us was wealthy, and so we met all of her friends. And it was interesting to see that a lot of people that we met, a lot of the men or women, but mostly men in this case, and then we saw this in another case, as well, that a lot of them were combat veterans from World War II. And they seem to be peaceful, joyful, risk-taking family men who loved the Lord, and these are guys who in the Second World War had experienced some really gnarly stuff. But I wonder, psychologists say that very often when someone goes through utter trauma, something that should destroy their soul, the loss of someone you care about or some kind of horrible life event that sometimes the opposite could happen. Because they discovered that they're stronger than they thought. They would think they could never endure something like that. They get a new appreciation for life. They begin to change their priorities to be about what's really important in life. And because of that, a reinforcing thing happens where now a lot of positive change is happening in their life. I think that, not in all cases, you know we need medicine and we need counselors, but sometimes when we go through trauma, I'm going to believe that if you've gone through trauma, I just got to declare that you're going to experience post traumatic growth. That God's going to use whatever it is that you went through to continue to do a good thing in you, and a good thing in a world around you. I just want to pray and believe that over you, my friend. I believe in you. You don't have to let the trauma that you went through define your outcome. If anything, let it make you into the person you were born to become. That's the best revenge you can have on the enemy is become a fully formed Jesus kind of person. Americans are disagreeing on a lot of things. One thing we can agree on is "Princess Bride" may be the greatest film ever made. I remember in this film, the main character who is the hero of the story, he was trying to save the princess bride. He faces these three guys, and he gets to the last one, Vizzini, and they go back and forth through this whole thing. I remember watching this as a kid where they have a dual of the wits. And the man in black poisons one of the glasses of wine, and Vizzini, who's this intelligent guy, has to choose which one has poison and which one doesn't. And so they have this whole thing, and Vizzini does this whole monologue about 'you can clearly not choose the wine in front of you. And I can clearly not choose the wine in front of me.' And it goes back and forth forever, and then eventually he goes 'what in the world can that be?' And then the man in black turns and he switches the cups and he's like 'okay let's drink' and they drink and he goes 'ha ha! You chose wrong, you fool!' I'm not going to do it, Hannah. But anyway, and then as he's laughing, Vizzini, the villain, keels over and dies. And he saved the princess and he tells her 'they were both poisoned. Over the years, I developed an immunity to iocane powder.' And as a kid, I thought you can do that? You can take small amounts of poison so that you become immune to it? And the answer is yes, it's called mithridatism. There was a king named Mithridates who was the great enemy of the Roman Empire, and Rome was known for poisoning its enemy's kings and then brokering a peace with the runner up, so Mithridates was the guy who effectively mastered the art of being immune to poison. The reason I bring all of this up, is one: I like to talk about the "Princess Bride." But two: I think it's important that we understand that in life, as we go through these little things, or big things, it may be that God is using that struggle to make us not immune, but resilient to things that other people couldn't face. It might be that God's dream for your life is so big that you have to go through some of these, maybe for some of you, smaller trials, that maybe are annoying or taxing or frustrating. Go through these to prepare you for the big dragon or the big thing that you're going to face. It reminds me of the quote from Marcus Aurelius who said fire feeds on obstacles. I think that is true for believers. That there is something about us that when we get too comfortable, too complacent, when things get too easy, that sometimes we become weak in spirit. That's not to say that we should look for obstacles and that we should look for pain and look for trial, but to try and see the stress that we go through in life as an opportunity to grow. I'm just going to believe that what Jesus said is true. That before you lies two paths. He said "enter through the narrow gate for broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it, but difficult is the way that leads to life and only a few find it."

Remember the Quarry

Friend, you're going to find that path. Maybe you're on it now. Don't give up. Don't give up. Don't turn away from the Lord. Double down on your commitment to God's kingdom. Love your neighbor with all your heart, with everything in you. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul. If you do these things, you will live and truly live, not just go to heaven when you die, but you will be full of life. I'm going to believe that for you. You're going to get through what you're going through. I want you to know I love you, Hannah loves you, this church loves you, and the Lord loves you, and He will never give up on you. He allows us sometimes to go through tough times, but He always carries you through to victory. Your victory is closer than you know. Let's pray. Father, we love you and we thank you that you've not given up on us and we just ask, Lord, I pray over everyone under the sound of my voice that the losses that they've gone through, the challenges that they've faced, that those losses could become as seeds would in the ground. That something multiplying, something enriching could come out of that to bring life, to bring joy, to bring dancing. Some of us in our church have lost a spouse or lost a loved one, a child, a mother or father, someone that we're really close to, a best friend, and we miss them. Lord, allow their lives to continue to bless us today. And we pray that as they're safe in your loving care, that we would live and lean into what they would want for us today, what they would want for us to become. And I just pray, God, an outpouring of your blessing over everyone under the sound of my voice that you would open up the heavens and pour out so much blessing on them that there would not be room enough to contain it. Above and not beneath. The head and not the tail. That their needing baskets would be full. That you would overflow an abundance in health and life, and I ask all these things in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

Friends, thank you so much for joining us today. Again, I just believe that your week is going to go better. You started it right and please join us next week. Would you rise for the benediction? 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.