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WELCOME – Bobby & Hannah Schuller

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

HS: And welcome visitors and church family. It is always such a joy to be with you. You know, God's love creates value. What God loves is valuable. What God loves, He will die for, and that is you. That is you, my friend. You are so valuable.

BS: Amen. We're so glad that you're here with us today.

COHEN: This is my friend, Cohen.

BS: This is my friend Cohen. Nice to see you, Cohen. And we're so glad to see you, and we're so grateful that you join with us today. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much for all that you're doing in our lives. We just continue to open our hearts to your spirit. Stand with us, Jesus, as we stand in the storm. We pray, Father, that you'd carry us through what we need to get through. We trust in you, and we thank you, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen.

HAVEN: Turn to the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

SCRIPTURE – 2 Timothy 4,7-8 - Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, 2nd Timothy 4:7-8. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing. Amen.

INTERVIEW – Mariela Rosario (MR) and Bobby Schuller (BS)

Mariela Rosario is a speaker and the founder of the mission organization, She Speaks Fire. She launched herself into ministry after a powerful encounter with God in 2015, and she founded She Speaks Fire in 2018. Through her work, she hopes to stir the hearts of younger generations and ignite a passion for the Lord that will impact the whole world.

BS: Mariela, hi! Welcome.

MR: Hi, thank you.

BS: What a joy to have you in the house today.

MR: Thank you, good to be here.

BS: So for those who don't really know your story, why don't we begin there?

MR: Yes, definitely. So I wasn't raised in the church, but we would frequent every so often, but there was no discipleship in my home, so that led me down a lot of paths in my journey: darkness, a lot of abusive relationships, addiction, just where darkness is. And one day in 2015 I just heard a voice inside of myself that said 'open up this Bible' that had been in my house all these years that I never really cracked open. And I started reading in the book of Genesis and I read that I was created by somebody; that God, I was made in His image. And in that moment, like the scales were taken off my eyes. I had a revelation of my identity; I had a revelation of God, and He supernaturally delivered me from addiction. In that moment, I never touched drugs ever since that day, and I just started feeding on His word and I haven't looked back.

BS: That's amazing. And you can see it in your countenance. Like you can see the spirit of God in you. Hannah even said that, she's like you can tell when people are full of the Holy Spirit. You can see it with you, Mariela.

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And isn't it amazing that God can do that, that when you received the spirit of God, so often, a lot of times we have these long.. usually addiction is a long process, so working through a lot of things. But sometimes, God just gives us freedom! Isn't that amazing? But either way, there's incredible hope in His word.

MR: Yes, definitely.

BS: I always think its amazing when somebody picks up a Bible and they just start reading it, and then God just.. usually its through like a Billy Graham crusade, or something, that somebody comes to faith. But what was that like for you?

MR: Yes, so honestly, I now understand when the Bible tells us that the word of God is living, its active, its sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts through bone, it cuts through marrow, soul and spirit. So vain imaginations that I thought about myself that I wasn't loved, that I wasn't wanted, that I was a burden, in that moment, the living word of God pierced that and it cut through that, and I had that revelation. That's why its alive, its not just a book, its alive, its living, its active. God wants to speak to His people through His word, so its powerful.

BS: Amen. And because of that, you started this group called She Speaks Fire. Tell us a little bit about that.

MR: Yes, so that's my ministry. God has done so many cool things through it. It started off because I'm a spoken word artist, so that's like my personal ministry. But She Speaks Fire has turned in to be an international women's ministry where I'm just empowering women to step into their identities, their calling of who God created them to be because I believe each one of us is a person on mission. If you're alive, if you have a pulse, if you have a heartbeat, God is doing something amazing through you.

BS: Is the spoken word still a part of what you do in your ministry?

MR: I do. Well, when I go to different churches and things like that, sometimes they ask me to do spoken word.

BS: How did that happen?

MR: So its so cool because I went to school to get my bachelors in Christian ministry, and one of my classes asked me to do an artistic expression on who you are in Christ. So I wrote this poem entitled "Who Am I?" and I shared it with one of my leaders in my church, and they're like you need to come and do this in the church. I'm like no I've never shared my poetry with anybody. So I went into the young adult ministry, and I shared it, and that's where it started. People were like you need to have Mariela come to your church, and then God just did it.

BS: That's amazing! Can I put you on the spot?

MR: Oh yes.

BS: Would you be willing to do a spoken word thing for us real quick, like you have something in your..

MR: Do you want it to be like little ten second..

BS: Yes, just go.

MR: Okay. He freed me from my shackles, and He took away my shame, and ever since that day, I have never been the same. So forgive me of my enthusiasm or my energy. It seems to be a little much. But you will never understand my worship until its my pain that you have touched. This passion inside me, it has to come out. It just can't stay within me; I just want to shout: Come, look what I have found. You guys have to see. I want the world to experience what has happened to me. People, they call me passionate, they say I have a lot of zeal, but you will never understand my worship until its my pain that you will feel.

BS: Wow. Very good. Love it. That's a gift. Its weird, when you think about spoken word, like its really kind of like if you took poetry and a sermon and kind of put it together. Like what I'm hearing is a sermon, really, but it's mixed with rhythm and rhyme.

MR: Yes, yes.

BS: And so it kind of gets to the heart a little more, right?

MR: It does, yes.

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BS: And it even kind of sounds a little like rap the way you're doing it; the way anybody does it. It just seems like so appealing to people that are into music.

MR: I think it's really cool, it's a cool tool that God has given me because there are some people that will listen to a poem, but they won't enter the four walls of a church. They'll listen to a poem, and they hear the gospel through that, so a lot of my writing, its always pointing back to the prophets, always pointing back to Jesus.

BS: Do you think.. this is a weird question, but do you think of it as music, in a way?

MR: Yes, I just am so rhythmically.. I cannot hold a tune for anything, but yes, it is music, its art, it's really cool.

BS: Its art, yes. That's awesome. It opens the doorway. So I think there are a lot of people right now who have been, and maybe are, in a dark place right now. Maybe they did read the Bible, but they didn't have the experience you had. Or maybe they still feel trapped. Maybe its like that abusive relationship you talked about. Its not something necessarily they're doing to themselves, or maybe it is. What do you say to someone who would say, Mariela, I need freedom. I'm stuck in this place. What do I do?

MR: I would just encourage them, honestly, to seek the Lord, even in the secret place of your home, in your word, just come with an open heart. He says if you seek me, you will find me when you search with your whole heart. Get planted in a local church where you can get disciplined in the word. You're not meant to do this life alone. We're called to carry one another's burdens, and just know that as long as you have a pulse, you have a purpose and God is good, regardless of our circumstances.

BS: It sounds like, too, the big part of the message you heard is just how precious and valued you were to God, too.

MR: Yes, it changed my life.

BS: So many people that are trapped, its because they feel like I'm not worth freedom. I've messed up too many times. I don't deserve whatever. I don't deserve life. I don't deserve to live.

MR: Yes, and to that person, I say a lot of times in our world, people talk a good game, but they don't walk it. Love had an action in Jesus Christ where He took off His robes of majesty and put on the rags of humanity and walked a life that you and I could never walk, and died a death we deserve to die so we could be back in relationship with Him. That is love in action, so when you don't feel it, just look at the cross and you know you are loved.

BS: Amen. Great word. Well thank you so much, Mariela Rosario. We appreciate you, and we appreciate your ministry She Speaks Fire. Thank you so much for being with us.

MR: Thank you so much.

BS: We're going to pray for you and cheer you on. You're doing great.

MR: Thank you. Appreciate it.

BS: God bless you. Thanks.

MR: All right. Thank you.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Well, welcome anyway, we're so glad you're here. We're going to say this creed as we do every week. Would you 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. Its 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. Thanks, you can be seated.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "Strong Friends for Strong Enemies"

Many of us are running a race this morning, this evening, wherever you are, and I want to begin by just asking that question. Bring it into your mind right now. What's the race that you're running? Maybe you've been on it for a long time.

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Maybe you've just started, and you know you have a long way ahead of you. Maybe you've been going for a while and you're asking yourself this question, will this race go on forever? We run all sorts of races in our lives. Court battles, maybe you're looking for a job and you haven't found one. Maybe you're looking for an employee and you can't find them! A lot of people are having that problem today. Maybe you want to get married or start a family. Or maybe you're fighting to save your marriage, or your relationship. Maybe you just went through a brutal breakup, and you're getting through whatever it is you're going through. Maybe you've taken the brave bold step of fighting your addiction or working through some past thing that's been hidden for a long time, you just brought it to the surface and now you're working through the mess. Very often cleaning up our lives is like cleaning up our house, it's like spring cleaning. When you do your spring cleaning, the house looks a lot messier before it looks cleaner because you open all the drawers and you start pulling out all the stuff and you find all of the wrappers and the dust and everything, and you think maybe you're in a time of cleaning in your life and you think man, everything's getting worse! I thought when I followed God that my life would get cleaner. It looks dirtier! It's getting cleaner. It's getting better. You're getting there. We run these races. Today, my encouragement to you is to look at the word of God, and especially to look at the encouragement of the apostle Paul, and that is finish well. Finish, finish the race you started. Finish! Even if you finish and you fail, you still will have, in a way, won. When we become people who finish the races we start, we become people who are prepared to live daily in the kingdom of God. God finishes what He starts; so do we. It is hard to finish well in a world that gives you all sorts of excuses, all sorts of reasons to be a victim, all sorts of reasons to sell out, all sorts of temptations to draw you out of whatever it is you want to do. All sorts of comforts to alleviate the pain of staying on the path that you're on. But God wants you to finish the race you've begun so that you will come out the other side a winner. There is something that happens inside of us when we finish these races. Can I tell you a little fun history? About five hundred years before Jesus, in Greece, there were Greek people on the Ionian peninsula, Asia Minor. Today its modern-day Turkey. And they were under the reign of Darius the First of Persia, and they revolted and wanted to be free from his reign, and so there was this big Ionian revolt and the Athenians, who were not on that peninsula, decided to join in the fight. And this group overtook Sardis, a famous city in Ionia under the governing of Persia. And then of course they were chased out. But when Darius the great king found out about it, he had in his heart this desire for vengeance against the Athenians. Legend says that when he found out they burned Sardis, he grabbed a bow and arrow and he shot it straight into the sky and cursed Zeus and said he would burn Athens to the ground. He apparently commanded the guy who served him dinner every night, right before serving him dinner to say three times 'master, remember the Athenians. Master, remember the Athenians. Master, remember the Athenians,' and then he could eat. And for years he did this. Eventually Darius landed on the shores of Athens hell-bent on taking over Greece, on conquering and sacking Athens and burning it to the ground, and on this little valley, it was called Marathon, he met a much smaller group of fighters, the Athenians who wanted to defend their land. And the battle raged on and low and behold, the Greeks, the Athenians won. This battle was called the Battle of Marathon, maybe the most famous battle in history. For years and years, old men and old soldiers would say 'I was there. I was at Marathon. I was at the battle.' So much of this is wrapped up in legend. We don't know how much of it is true or false. A lot of it comes from Herodotus, who's called the father of history. By others, he's called the father of lies. But anyway, so there's many versions of this story. You may have heard a different version than I have, but the most agreeable one is that after the battle of Marathon was won, and most of the Persians were routed, and it was a huge, I mean a huge triumphal watershed moment where a lot of people look at it as the emergence of Europe as becoming a sort of a world power type thing. There was a group of Persians who turned not away from the battlefield but went around and started to go towards Athens.

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Back in those days if that little group of Persians had got to Athens, they could have declared a false victory so that the Athenians would have panicked, or they might have been allowed into the city and it could have turned the tide of the whole war. So on seeing this, there was a soldier named Philippides and he said there is no way that unit of soldiers is going to beat me to Athens. And so he started running the distance from the battle of Marathon to the city of Athens as fast as he could because he wanted to beat them there. He thought if I can get there, I will save the city. He ran as fast as he could, kept going, kept going, took off all of his armor, the story goes he ran completely naked so he could go as fast as he could go. So Philippides, the story says he runs butt naked 40-kilometers from the battle of Marathon all the way to Athens and as he runs into the, whatever it is, council chamber or their early version of the senate, he says 'we won the battle of Marathon!' and then legendarily collapses and dies because he ran as hard as he could. Who knows. But the story, he's a hero because the idea is he saved Athens from this false victory that might have been thrust upon him, who knows. But it's of course been a legend in the west for a long time, and of course the battle of Marathon has been an important battle in history. But in 1896, when there was sort of a revival of the old ways, one of the first modern marathons was ran for the 1896 Olympics held in Athens. Here are three guys that are training for their first marathon. Originally it was 40-clicks, 40-kilometers, and I think it was the last event. And ever since then, marathons have grown like crazy. Eventually it became 26.2 miles. I forget the history about why the weird .2 is on there, but it had something to do with Windsor Castle and the queen wanting it to start in England, or something like this, and it for whatever reason was settled over then. Well once, I remember we moved to our new house, this was years ago, and I remember our first Sunday, there was a Sunday I was supposed to come to church, and I pull out, I'm about to drive to church, and the street in front of like the cul-de-sac that enters, it just had hundreds of people running. And all of my neighbors were sitting out on this like shared lawn that we have, because we kind of live like in an apartment complex, and they were like sitting there watching this running, and I asked my friends, I was like what is going on here? And they said oh it's the Orange County Marathon. Once a year, and it's always on this day. And I was like well I got to get to church. And they're like bro, you're not going to church for like three hours. I was like well surely there's going to be a gap. They're like no. This is like a river of people that's going to go for a long time. But it's interesting how marathons have become so popular all over the world. To me, I'm like who would want to run a marathon. Yuck! I played basketball and hockey and other things, but I'm like just running, you just run for a long time? And then I started getting fat and I started running. I was like I'm going to lose this weight by running, and then I got it. I was like running. Yes, running, running is fun. And it's not fun, but there's something about when you run, how hard it is on your body and yet how good it is for your body, so it's like mentally you know you're doing good to your body, even though your body is like WHY! Why are you doing this? And so it's like a type of meditation, almost. It's like a type of training when you run. And it's not a new art. Not the marathon, but people did like a long run in the Olympics and the other games, as well. And there are some things you learn from running, and there are some things you learn from the marathon, so one of the first things.. I've never run a marathon, but when you talk to people, when you look at the marathons, one of the first things you notice that makes a marathon different than any other sport is that 99.9% of the people who are running a marathon, know they're going to lose. Most of the people that are running a marathon are not trying to get a gold medal, or even a silver bronze medal. What are they trying to do? Finish it. Their goal is to finish the race. To see if I have inside of me what it takes to do what 99% of people just can't do, and that is to finish this race. I can finish other distances, but can I do 26.2 miles? Can I start this thing and when I think I'm about to die and fall over, press through. And not everybody does! But for those who do, they attain a kind of treasure that they have the rest of their lives. Most of all, they get to put a little sticker on the back of their car that says "26.2". Maybe you've seen those.

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There are others, as well, who are not running to just finish, and they're not running to get gold either. They're running to, do you know what I'm about to say? Qualify. See you can't just go out and run any marathon you want. You have to run the marathons nobody cares about first, to run the really awesome marathons that everybody cares about like Boston. You can't just go to the Boston Marathon and sign up. You have to run a marathon in a certain amount of time, and that qualifies you to run the big race. This is a spiritual principle, my friends. Very often the little races we run; we don't realize that we are attempting to qualify for a bigger thing. You might think that the little race that you're running now, that is so taxing, seems to have zero reward at all, it might be the race that qualifies you or disqualifies you for what you're supposed to do next. Did God not say that we who are faithful in the little will be faithful with much? Did He not promise us that if we were faithful in the little things, He would entrust us with much? But if you cannot be entrusted with the little things that God gives you, how can God entrust you with the big things? So to us who run our races, we say finish well. Finish whatever race has been given to you, even if it seems that it has no reward at all, finish because that alone is a reward, and build something inside of a person that he or she will never lose. When you run a marathon, you fight for yourself. Every other game, you're fighting someone else, or you're fighting for your team. But it's one of the few games out there where you really are fighting against and for yourself. So don't give up. Finish the race and finish well. Be faithful in the little things and God will bless you in the big things. It's hard to feel that when we fail at so many of the little things that we've been given, that even though we're failing the little things, we're actually succeeding in the big things. There's lots of examples of this in our lives, if you really meditate and think about it, but one for me, like I think of this is one of the great callings of my life personally, but I see that it took multiple failures for me to be ready to do what I'm doing today. I still remember when I was 19 years old, and I got to intern with a Canadian news organization that was also owned by a Christian, and my job was to be the host of this crew called, a TV show, it was like an MTV type TV show in Canada called Frequency X. And it was an amazing experience, and we went to the Expo and the World's Fair in Germany in 2000, and my job was to go to all to the discos and go to all the big concerts and like interview the DJ's and all of the performers and stuff. And can I just tell you, I was terrible. I looked bad on camera; I like didn't understand how to like look good and like I was really nervous on camera, so you'd have like one guy with a camera and an audio guy, and me, and I'm like 19 and be like "welcome, to love stern galac-tica. Today, we're going to.." and I'd like.. sorry, let's start again, let's go again. And it would be like there were multiple times where I would do like 15 takes and the camera guys would be like hey, we're going to just take 10 minutes and just come back. You can tell they were frustrated. I was feeling embarrassed, and I had signed up to do this for seven months. Talk about a marathon. But can I tell you something? After about three or four months of miserably failing, and there were like four hosts and no camera crew wanted to be with me. After that season, I got pretty good where I could look at a camera and talk. I thought I was failing, but I didn't know any of this was going to happen. Then years later, the Learning Channel was putting together this show where they wanted to find America's next great inspirational speaker. And they called Robert Schuller to see if he would be a judge. And when they called Robert Schuller, guess who's phone they got? Robert Schuller, me. Robert Schuller the third! Accidentally! So I had a meeting with them. They didn't tell me this until later. They thought they were going to meet my grandpa, who was a famous order to be a judge. I was like a 25/24-year-old guy in seminary. And I talked to him for a while and they were like huh, maybe he can be a judge. And they asked me to be a judge on this show, to judge people's speeches. I was like okay, I'll do it. And can I tell you, they paid me so well. They paid me; you know what I mean? I'd never been in TV before, and I got this paycheck, and I was like you're going to give me this check every show. And they're like yes, we want to do a season two, and I was like (GASPS). I was like so excited! I was like 25, driving this same beat-up Camry. I mean I was just like so stoked.

And this was in 2006, the show aired in 2007. It rated okay, not great, and then the crash of 2008 happened, and my dreams were destroyed. By the way, have you ever heard of the show *The Messengers*? No, nobody else has, either. So that's what happened to that dream. So another failure, you see? I really thought oh maybe this is going to be like the thing I do. And yet there again, I had to be in front of cameras. I had to speak. I had to understand production. I had to watch the flows. I had to be in script meetings. I had to see where all the outside tapings were. I got to see the flow of how long it took to make a TV show. But when that was over, all I felt, all I felt was failure. Failure, disappointment, bummed out. But can I tell you, when that day came that I had to preach in the Crystal Cathedral and fill in in that pulpit, I had no problem looking at that camera, I had no problem understanding the flows, I had no problem going through a production sheet, I was ready. I was ready. Because even though I failed in those other things, I finished the race I started, and I kept going. I didn't look back and say, oh what a failure. I didn't realize that even in the failure, I was training for this! Young people today, I was young then, young people today are so disheartened when they face failure, but they don't understand that so often God's preparing them for the next thing. The next thing. Isn't that great? Maybe you're going through a tough time, and you just took a horrible failure, and you don't understand how it could be a good thing. Just finish and finish well. That's a victory. Finish well. Maybe you're qualifying and you don't even know it. Paul writes in 2nd Timothy; Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus when he writes to Timothy. Timothy is the pastor he put in place there, a young man originally, probably a middle-aged man now as he's writing to him. A dear friend and a brother in the Lord, and Paul is in prison, he's probably about to be executed. We know 2nd Timothy is the last epistle Paul ever wrote. And he has this famous line where he compares himself to what we would think of as a marathon runner. It says he's being poured out like a drink offering, which probably means he's bleeding a lot; that he's already becoming like Christ, someone who had to lay down his life for the kingdom of God. And in verse 7, he says, "I have fought the good fight." Do you want to say this when you get to the end of your life? I know I do. "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." This might be confusing when you think about a disciple receiving a crown. The crown that Paul is talking about, at least here, is not a king's crown. It's not the gold crown you put on your head when you're put on the throne. That crown alone belongs to Jesus Christ. The crown he's talking about is the crown you receive when you finish a race. So for those who won the great races of their day, the Smithian games, Isthmian races. You say Isthmian. It's hard. And the Olympic races would receive these crowns, huh? This one's olive branches, I believe, and that's like a wreath. Very much like a Christmas wreath, and so if you win, they place this on your head. So what is it? It's worth nothing, right? It has no actual value. These are worthless branches, and yet it's everything to the people who win them. It's a symbol that they're the winner. It's a symbol that they finished. It's a symbol that they did what they were called to do. See this is what Paul is running for. He's not running to put a crown on his head like the king's crown, he's wanting the gold medal! He's wanting to win a spiritual race that the world doesn't see. He knows that if he finishes this race; that having Christ place this on his head will be one of the greatest triumphs and feelings in the whole world. That's what he wants. That's what he wants more than anything. Okay, five very quick things. So you're running a marathon. Here are some things that will help you finish your race, okay? Number one, it is so important when you're running a race, fighting a battle, going through a thing that takes a long time, to have a why. To have a why, a reason, a good reason why you're doing it. Most of us do have a reason, but instead of focusing on the reason why we're running the race, we're focusing on the pain. We're focusing on the injustice. We're focusing on the trial, the difficulties. Focus on why you're running and that will keep you going.

Crossing the Finish Line

Next year, I believe in April will be the ten-year anniversary that I've been preaching in this pulpit. Isn't that great? So I'm thinking a lot about how we went as.. when I think about the Hour of Power, which again is including a lot of churches and people, new people that weren't a part of the old church but I think about how God got us from there to here, and it's just amazing. And it has been a marathon, for not just me, but for our whole team, for our family. I remember when we started, my why was achieved well before I stepped into this pulpit. I went with the choir to the Netherlands. Hannah and I were newlyweds, the two of us went, and I didn't really care much for the Hour of Power. I didn't really think about it that much, just thought it was another church. And when we were there, we just heard story after story of life change, of complete and totally life change. And when I came back, even though we were there on a musical tour because I was Dr. Schuller's grandson, I heard these stories, and I knew what this thing did. So that when it looked like it was coming to an end, I said no! We said no! This cannot end! Not because of my family name, not because of my ego or pride, but because of the stories of life change that needed to continue. I pictured people's faces, people's stories, and that's what got me through those tough times. And I can't tell you how many people before I was in this pulpit, I tried to get into this pulpit. And people said that ship is going down. I said Christ is in the ship with us! It won't go down. And there were people who said but you lost the building. And I said we are the building! We're living stones. Everywhere we go, we're a building. We don't need a building, especially not today in a virtual world. Build a Crystal Cathedral on Facebooks Meta. You know what I mean? Cost me like five bucks. Not really. But that why got us through lawsuits, embarrassing scenarios. The amount of people I had to call and ask for money, and be told no, no, no, no, no, over and over and over to make another payroll. And it got us through that to where we are now. We're in the best position we've ever been. And the future is ahead of us, but I can tell you the one thing that I think Hannah and I and so many of us in leadership had that nobody else had was a why. We had a reason why this could not just go away, and why we were going to fight with everything within us to make sure it survived. We had a good why. And the why was changed lives. Still is. Don't let go of your why. If you have a reason, if you're feeling tired, just keep the reason you started the race in the first place at the forefront of your mind. When you get to the worst places, bring the best whys to the front of your mind and that will keep you going. Second thing – when you feel tired, learn to rest and not quit. In a normal run, you can't rest, but in life you can. And very often, when we feel exhausted or alone in the races that God's put before us, we want to quit, and quitting, it looks like sinning, just to be frank with you, or withdrawing, or just totally pouring into something that's really unhealthy for us. Just chronically watching TV or chronically.. whatever it is that you go to as a withdraw. You need deep rest. Deep rest. Time with the Lord, meaningful conversation with friends, a good meal with somebody you love, deep rest, a break and that will recharge you to keep running. Number three – you got to free yourself from the opinion of others. There are very few things in this world that are more painful than being publicly embarrassed. But, if you could endure that, it's really good for you. It's good for you if you're a musician, it's good for you if you're a leader, it's good for you if you're a parent, if you're a student, if you want to make any change at all in life, I actually think being publicly embarrassed on a regular occasion is really good for you if you can just get through it. Because you know what it does? It shows you that it doesn't really do that much to you. It frees you. It frees you to just be who you are. Just be who you are and you can put butts on the screen and everything. It doesn't matter. You just do it. You just do your thing. All right. Brennan Manning said this; sorry, I don't have it written down. Brennan Manning said, "real freedom is freedom from the opinions of others, but above all, its freedom from opinions about yourself." See most of the time when we're embarrassed, people aren't saying they're so stupid, they're so ugly, they're so foolish. You're saying that to yourself. You're saying these things to yourself as you're rotating in bed all night, all these things. Let it go. Let it go.

Crossing the Finish Line

Just see yourself through the lens of grace; a blood bought redeemed beloved son or daughter of Jesus Christ. Number four – America, I’m talking to you. Don’t run alone. This is something that Americans are the worst at, I think, of most countries. We are a country of Lone Rangers. There is some real virtue in picking yourself up by your bootstraps and pressing through, but there is no reason you need to run your race alone. There’s an old African proverb that says, “if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with friends.” This is why church is so important, this is why your clubs or whatever it is that you do, that having friends, places you can go to belong regardless of what you do or don’t do, is so important. And finally, most importantly, a disciple is someone who is trained. The word disciple, it comes from discipline. It means discipline. It means you do things you don’t want to do. You do things that don’t feel good. So the final thing is when you’re not running, make sure you’re training. Be training when things are good. For many of us, things are really good right now. Economy is great. Many of us, our relationships are fine, life is fine, things seem to be going okay. This is when you train. You train now when you’re not running the race. If there was a game and a football player had been missing practice for weeks, and then it got to the game and he missed that critical play that would have given the game to their team, is it that he missed the play or is that he missed the training? Which one? We should say it’s the training. So when we fall short and we sin or we make mistakes or do things that were just dumb or we’re embarrassed or whatever, we beat ourselves up for the action, not for the lack of training. So spend time with the Lord! Do the work. Do the work of praying, of pressing in, of being with Him, of cutting out the things in your life that are toxic and watch how that trains you and prepares you to get through the next race you’re about to run. My friend, some of you are running some of the hardest races a human can go through. A lot of you are going through something I could never understand. But I want you to know that God does, and He’s with you, and He will help you to finish this race you’ve been set to. I want you to believe that you can win the race, you can finish the race, and I want you to keep in the front of your mind the reason you started in the first place. I’m so proud of you. You’re doing so much better than you think and we’re for you and so is God. So Lord we ask in Jesus’ name. I ask for an outpouring of your Holy Spirit to give us what we need to finish this race. Help us, Lord, to be the kinds of people that can focus on what we’re called to do and not be distracted by all these other things. Thank you, Lord, that it’s so worth it. We love you, it’s in Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

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.