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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. Hello.

HS: Welcome visitors and church family. It is such a joy to be with you on this beautiful day. Did you know that faith is more often seen than heard? Faith without action is dead. Act your faith today and watch what happens. You are loved.

BS: Amen. We're so glad you're with us here today. Yesterday we celebrated Cohen's birthday. Ten years old! Happy birthday, man. And we're just excited to be gathered with you here today. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we love you and we thank you for your goodness to us. We know, Lord, that joy is the fruit of a relaxed heart. It's the fruit of the spirit. You've given us your Holy Spirit, and the assurance that you've already won the battle. Help us today to live and walk by faith, and we ask it all in Jesus' name, amen.

HS: Amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – Nehemiah 8:8-12 - Hannah

In preparation for the message, Nehemiah 8:8-12.

They read from the book of the law of God, making it clear and giving the meanings that people understood what was being read. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them, this day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law. Nehemiah said, go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. The Levites calmed all the people, saying, be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve. Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because now they understood the words that had been made known to them.

Amen.

INTERVIEW – Cristabelle Braden (CB) and Bobby Schuller (BS)

Cristabelle Braden is a speaker and singer-songwriter. After experiencing a traumatic brain injury, she took to music and began songwriting as not only a way to recover, but to also worship. Today, she is an advocate for those suffering from brain injuries. She ministers to survivors and their families and shows that there is hope ahead.

BS: Cristabelle, hi. Thank you so much for joining us.

CB: Hi, thank you for having me.

BS: For those who maybe don't know a lot about you or a lot about your story, maybe we can hear what happened to you and your faith journey.

CB: Absolutely. My faith journey, as probably everyone can say, has been a long process and a walk with the Lord. I had my first traumatic brain injury 14 years ago, and that led to multiple reinjuries. Over the last decade or so, I've had multiple concussions and TBI's.

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After my first brain injury, I had to relearn everything, like taking a shower, getting dressed. I couldn't put my clothes on, I had short term memory loss. The right side of my body got weaker. Headaches, overstimulation, light sensitivity, just constantly feeling confused and overwhelmed. The doctors didn't think I'd ever finish high school, and by the grace of God, I am here today, and it took an extra year and rehab therapies, but I did finish high school, and the Lord has been with me every moment. And I was able to go to college, I studied music. And just this year, I graduated with my master's in theological studies. And so, what doctors or what man says is impossible, God always has a plan, and He can do anything.

BS: Amen, amen to that. If you don't mind me asking, what actually happened? How did you get the brain injury?

CB: Yes, absolutely. So my first brain injury, like I mentioned, I've had multiple, but the first brain injury was actually a game at my youth group. So when I was younger, I would go to youth group and we would sometimes play games, and this one was a lot of running, and imagine a bunch of teenagers in a room. The boys decided to pull a prank, and chaos ensued, and I ended up slamming my head into a cement wall. My head bounced off the floor, I was unconscious, we're not actually sure how long. I don't remember right after the incident or almost the first whole year. My brain was just recovering and so we've been told what happened. My brain started to swell, and the pressure increased and so a couple days later, I had to relearn everything. I kept getting worse and worse, and then over time, I continued to improve, and then my balance and my vestibular systems off, which led to falling and hitting my head again. So it wasn't so much the one incident; that was definitely the one moment that changed everything, but it's been multiple injuries over time.

BS: I'm so sorry to hear about that. But, of course, one of the great things about that is one, obviously you're doing so well, and what an awesome testimony that is. But I love the way that music became, and worship became such an important part of your recovery journey. Can you talk a little bit about that?

CB: Thank you. Yes, as I mentioned, it was pretty hard when I first had my injury, and I actually never wrote a song before the brain injury. And after, I was having a really hard time expressing myself in conversations. I had frontal lobe damage, so my emotions were all over the place, and I would cry, and I would throw temper tantrums, I just couldn't regulate emotional responses. I also struggled with my speech and singing really helped with that. I started writing songs pretty much out of nowhere, and they rhymed, and they made sense and they were deep, and the doctor told my parents, well I guess music is lighting something up in her brain that nothing else is. And something I've read and learned is that music is actually the only thing that lights up every area of your brain; that uses your brain differently. The Lord used music in my healing process. And worship music is so powerful. Any music effects our brain, but music with worship, it's our brain and it's our spirit. And so writing music is kind of my parents saw, hey there's still something in there. And over time, it's been a journey. I didn't set out, say oh I want to be a singer/songwriter at all. Somebody just asked me to share my songs at their church and their story, and from there somebody asked me to share that, and it's just grown into a touring ministry over time.

BS: Brain injuries are such a hard thing because our family, our son has had a brain injury from epilepsy and he's recovering from that, but there are all sorts of challenges. Lots of people in our church have different experiences from kids in sports, to someone falling and tripping, to Alzheimer's and things like that. That's really something that's on your heart, isn't it, because it's a different kind of ailment than the others in its own unique way.

CB: Absolutely. Its invisible so you can't see it on the outside. I'm passionate about bringing awareness. I started an online global support community called Hope After Head Injury, almost ten years ago. It was 2012, and it started just as a social media page, and over the years, more people joined and its grown, and now I host once a month Zoom support group. We have a Facebook group with thousands of people that talk about brain injuries and bring hope.

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I also have a podcast for brain injury awareness and education called Hope Survives Brain Injury podcast, and my goal is to bring awareness and hope to survivors and families. I also have started a group called Brain Injury Bible Study where we read the Bible together and part of my reasoning of getting my master's in theology is because I want to create Bible studies for people who've have traumatic brain injuries because it's hard to read and hard to comprehend, but faith is the thing that gets us through.

BS: Amen.

CB: I hope that I can make a difference.

BS: Of course, there are lots of people going through all sorts of stuff. Oral Roberts used to say everybody's a little bit sick, like everybody has something that they're going through. Very often it is something really traumatic: cancer, or some kind of something. What do you say to somebody who's watching now, and man they are just holding on to that last thread of hope? They just feel so stuck and they're like I don't feel like I'm ever going to get out of whatever this thing is. Do you have any encouragement for those types of people?

CB: Absolutely. I know that whatever we go through, there are so many invisible struggles. It could be a brain injury, it could be another injury or illness, it could be a financial struggle, an addiction, a relationship, something happening in your family. And whatever you're going through, first of all, know that God sees you, even if its invisible and other people don't. And when it comes to getting through it, I still have daily struggles from my brain injury, but the Lord has been showing me that it's a moment-by-moment process with Him. I've been reading a book called *The Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer, and he writes that "faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God." And so when I think about faith like that, if we continue to set our soul gaze on Him, when we look at the Father, when we look at the cross, when we look at Christ, and we see.. we might not be able to make it like look at our life and look at the next week and think I can make it through that. No, but you can make it through this moment with Him. Keep the gaze of your soul upon Christ, and with that, you can do anything with Him.

BS: Amen. Thank you, Cristabelle. What a great word. That is, what great music you make. If you're encouraged by this story and you want to hear some of Cristabelle's music, I want you to encourage you to do that at CristabelleBraden.com. Cristabelle, thank you so much. What a great story and encouragement to all of us.

CB: Thank you so much. God bless you. Thank you.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the spirit. 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 " Eternal Life is the Quality of God's Life"

The world is crazy right now, isn't it? And I've said that a lot of times from the pulpit, but its sure been true the last couple of years. I don't know about you; I am so sick of hearing the word "unprecedented." I would love more than anything to have precedented times to come back. Wouldn't it be great, somebody got on and they said 'welcome to whatever, CBS News; today is precedented. Its going to be just a very plain day, nothing weirds going to happen. Have a good day.' I'd be stoked. But seems like constantly, whether the news is sort of cooking it up or whether it's really happened; obviously we were kind of swimming in the water of a global health crisis, but there's like looming wars and rumors of wars, as the Bible says, and there's all sorts of political tensions at all-time highs and people are marking political lines over things that don't seem like they should even be in politics. All of that to say, and not to pick a side, but just to say there is so much in life right now that is robbing you and me of our joy. There's so much that is fighting for the bandwidth of our attention.

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There's so much that's battling to take away a peaceful spirit. So many of us today really struggle to feel genuine happiness and joy in life. And yet I want to say to you today, God's going to bring your joy back. Many of you even were pretty joyful people up till a couple of years ago, and now there's just some weird thing going on in your body or mind where it makes it really hard to feel joyful. But joy is a part of God's promise to us. It's in the Bible. It's a part of the promise of resurrection life and it's not just something I get when I go to heaven. It's actually something that I get when heaven goes into me. What that means is when the Holy Spirit dwells inside of our hearts and bodies, there is, even if we're going through a kind of personal hell, there is something inside of us that says no wait, God won over this. God can take this. God can work through this. I will do my best and forget the rest, as I heard in a workout video once and I say it all the time in my sermons. But I will do my best and forget the rest. I will trust it to the Lord and that will give you the peaceful heart to have a lightheartedness and to smile again and have some joy. It's amazing to me how many religious people feel an aversion to real joy. Can we just pause for a minute, too, and say that Christian joy is not what some of you heard in certain sermons? I don't know where this idea came from that like someone who has joy who's going through a hard time is like "I have joy. You can't see it in my face or my attitude or my words, but it's here. Its deep down inside." There's no such thing as Biblical joy in the sense that it looks different than everybody else. Joy is joy! It laughs, it smiles, you can see a person rejoicing and full of joy, and you can see a person who is sad or depressed or has nothing. Let me tell you the kind of joy that God promises us is not some stoic inner joy. It is real joy, okay? It's the kind of joy that you have when you cheer for your favorite team, or when your friend, whatever, something great happens to them or in your life, it is joy! It's a joy that laughs and smiles, and that's what's made available to us. We know in Jesus' sermons if you were to take like a thesis statement for like what does Jesus preach about all the time, the correct good theological answer would be the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of the heavens, the same thing. The kingdom of God. And to describe the kingdom of God or the reign or life of God in a person, Jesus almost always uses two types of parables. The first, and very common, is the one of judgement, right? We read about that a lot. That's the sheep and the goats. That's the hell, fire and brimstone. That's the judgement, the weeds and the grain. That's the wheat and the chafe. It's the really heavy stuff. How many of you know if you're a believer you don't have to worry about that? Right? When Jesus said, 'it is finished,' how many believe that is real? That its finished. Its back then. It's done. Those messages are not for you. You are loved, called, and forgiven. So what are the other half? Well, the other really common parables are parables about parties, weddings, feasts. And it is so amazing to me how often religious people love to sterilize this part of Jesus' message out of the presence of the kingdom of God here and now. Jesus talks about how the kingdom of God is like a wedding or like a party, and the people who don't get into the party, it's almost never sinful people. The people who don't get into the party, into this joyful thing are people who are too busy. Okay, we'll get back to that in a minute. But look at how religious people love to sterilize. Now this first image: I just pulled this randomly off of Google. This is a mosaic, probably in a church somewhere. I actually really love images like this in many ways, but you can see this is a work of theology as well as a work of art. This is the parable of the story at Cana. This is actually.. or not a parable, this is a real story where Jesus turned water into wine. And this is how the artist in the probably late medieval period, somewhere in Byzantium, so this is like a Greek thing, this is how he pictures, or she pictures, this story. You've got the couple being married who look like a Duke and Duchess, right? Or like a king and a queen, and then here's like their court behind them all doing the like holy pose, these things, right? Here's Jesus, sterile as ever, and his mom wearing black and purple, and the servant men's.. and he's like 'I will change the water into wine.' Right? That's like what they're doing. And so you can see like there's a lot of things here, miracles and sacred, but you don't see joy, do you. I mean it's not really coming out.

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And then, I found an artist, a watercolor artist who passed away, but he had some great stuff named Herb Mandel. In 1980, he did this print of the same story. And this is so much closer to what a first century person would have read and experienced when Jesus talks about coming to a wedding, coming to a feast or coming to a party. This is so different, isn't it? You can almost smell it, can't you? You can smell the food or the stew cooking. You can hear the clanking of dishes; you can almost imagine singing in the background and an eruption of laughter at a table. And there's Jesus in the middle enjoying it all. And when they ran out of wine: everybody say, "when they ran out" His mom was like we need some more. And the Bible says it was the good stuff! This is a wedding in a first century Judaism. A couple things they got wrong - the dogs and the tables aren't right. But in general, this is what it would have felt like, a real celebration. Joy, happiness. I think there are so many unhappy people who are like the joy of the Lord isn't in my heart, so it must be a sterile, stoic kind of inner joy that no one, especially my wife, can see. No one can see it. I can't see it, but by faith, it's there. No. No, no, no, it's either there or its not, my friend. And that is a promise. Jesus, in His parables, is inviting people to this. Come to this. The kingdom of God's like this. Come, come to this. And you know what happens is as the invitations go out, everybody's too busy. Just too busy. The one guy says 'oh, I just bought some cows and I need to go see them,' which is in itself, Jesus' own stand-up comedy. We don't see it, but nobody, I mean there would have been a chuckle or even an outright laugh when He said that to His audience because nobody would buy cows and then go see them. And then somebody says, 'I just bought some land, I got to go see it,' right? Nobody would buy some land and then go see it, right? So there's this hilarious thing that He's basically saying people are just overwhelmed, super busy, and frankly I just don't have time to come to your party, Lord. I just don't have time. How many of us are like that all the time. I don't have time. I don't have any time in the world. I'm really, really important, you see. I'm so important, I just don't have time. And so you don't have time for the party, and you don't have time for the book you want to read, and you don't have time for the meal, and you don't have time for your kids. You're so important and you don't have time, and you don't have joy. That's not a judgement on you. This is a struggle that all of us have because somehow, we learned in our modern world that being busy was a virtue. You may not have thought about it that way, but all you have to do is invert it and see that it's a compliment or an insult. Imagine I called you on the phone - 'John, what's up, man! Hey, its Bobby.' And I was like imagine my first line was 'hey, I know you're not very busy, you want to get some dinner tonight?' I mean right now, you feel like oh, that's horrible. But imagine the opposite, if I said 'John, how's it going? Hey, I know you're a super busy guy.' What am I saying when I say that? I'm saying I know you're super important. Everybody needs to meet with you. Everybody's trying to pencil you in. But can you pencil me in for a cup of coffee? How about a round of golf? I know you're super busy. How about early March next year? Can you pencil me in? No, you're too busy? Because you're so important? Maybe 2024. See, that's a compliment. That's crazy. It's crazy. When all of us have this deep, deep desire for joy as a promise in the scripture, Jesus just keeps repeating it. I'm inviting you to the kingdom, but you're too busy. You're too busy. So busy means important and I remember, and our world's getting busier. We keep trying to invent tech to make us less busy and more organized so we can have more free time. Can I just tell you, there's an old saying "with new tools come new tasks." Right? That the more tech we create to free up time, the more time it's going to suck. None of us have learned this. It's been going on for like 40 years. I remember when I was a kid, I was convinced that by around the year early 2000's, this was like when I was a teenager, we were going to have so many computers and robots and A.I. that most of us were going to be like those baby people on Wall-E, and they just kind of float around and play games and drink Slurpee's all day and robots take care of everything. Anybody seen Wall-E?

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That's what I thought would happen, and that is still to this day, it's a myth within Silicon Valley. You hear people say it all the time. Right? And you would think that as we have better phones, self-driving cars, A.I. and robots that we'd see some fruit of that. And yet it's the opposite. Most of us are so overwhelmed. We don't have time to do anything. Our jobs are demanding more and more. And the more we can connect, the more disconnected we are, and the more tools to help us get our work done faster, the more busy we are and the more work we have. Actually, I just heard a guy on a podcast from Silicon Valley say, "if we just got everyone to be a basic engineer encoder, in five years we'd have enough robots and A.I. that none of us would ever have to work again." And I was like (GROWLS)! Do you not see the correlation? So life, all I'm saying is many of us are waiting for life to be less busy; for life to get easier in these things. You're not going to find it in tech, you're not going to find it in money, you're not going to find it in some grand life change, the first place you have to find it is in here, and you have to find it now. You can find it anywhere, anytime because God is everywhere all the time. Can I get an amen from the church? Anytime, everywhere, and that is the answer you're looking for. Right now, we are in the middle of what I think in economics will be studied for a long time. Many are calling it the great resignation. This great illustration was done by the economist, I thought it was just really.. I like art and I thought this was just super clean and nice. I thought it's just a beautiful image of what many people are feeling. This could also be the state of California. We'll get to that in just a minute. But we have 17.9 million people last year quit their jobs, and many of those, contrary to popular belief, I looked at the data, many of those were high paying, six figure jobs. They just quit. Quit. A lot of them are bad low paying jobs, no benefits, but it's not like they're all that way. What is the deal? Why are so many people leaving their jobs? I'm going to go out on a limb here and say they think it's the A, B or C. They think it's the pay, and maybe it is, and they think it's the benefits, they think it's the work environment. I think it's what all of us have faced in tough times - I am not happy in my job. It's just that simple. This is a joyless job. And if you live in a state like California, you spend a third of your life at work. You spend a third of your life at work, a third of your life sleeping, and a third of your life in traffic. That's California, right? That's it. That's what we're doing. And so, it's just like there comes a point where somebody today just says I think I'd rather risk homelessness than spend one more day with this empty meaningless feeling on the inside. In coastal cities like Los Angeles, Southern California, New York, you are also having a mass exodus in big part because of the price of real estate. If you live in a beautiful city like Tulsa Oklahoma; it's a really beautiful place, or other parts of Texas or Utah where many people are leaving to, and you want to invert it, you want to play the reverse UNO card and come to California, I have a beautiful home here for you. Check it out. This is in Costa Mesa, and not the good part of Costa Mesa. This is one block from the 55 freeway, which if you're not from here, that's an eight-lane freeway that has traffic all the time. And for one point six two five million, you can get this treasure. Needs a little work. It's a handyman special. As far as I know, the lights are not included. Here's a street view. Let's go on the inside, take a look around. Here's bathroom number one. It's a two bedroom.. a three-bedroom, two bathroom. Some Coke memorabilia, I think there's an organ or something. There it is there's an organ on the left. Can we get a better picture of the organ? There you go. Not included but you can see how an organ would play well. One of the questions in my head is like why didn't they just clean up their house a little bit before taking these pictures? I don't know if the peanuts and garlic are included, but this is what you can get in an okay part of Orange County, my hometown Costa Mesa, for one point six two five million dollars. And by the way, if you look at the Zestimate, it's four thousand below the zestimated value. You understand that if you want to buy that house, you have to put down about three hundred and twenty thousand dollars in cash, and then pay eight thousand or so per month for 30 years, plus sixteen thousand in real estate tax forever, and you can live there. That doesn't include the repairs. There will be some.

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What's happening is people who live in a house like that are like I'm going to sell my house, move to Utah, buy a five-acre mansion and retire on a million dollars at 35. You see that's really happening, that's really happening. And the sad part about.. which I said, I love my state. I love California. I'll never leave. I love it here. And I love the weather, but there is an angst from people. You have to have a six-figure job to buy that house, and they're not happy, and so they think well I'm making money, maybe I can get this job in Texas or something. And what happens, very often, is someone moves away from their family and their friends, and they get the house, and they get the thing, and I just want to say 80% of the time they don't really get what they think they're going to get. They don't get the joy that they're so thirsty for. They don't get it. They have about six months of real happiness and joy and fulfillment from this change, but then their life will be bogged down and busy again. If you're in a beautiful place like Tulsa Oklahoma or Salt Lake City Utah, or Austin Texas, or one of these many places that people in California are moving from, I know you know, you're like my life is busy, too. And my life is joy-less, too, for some people. And that is not God's plan for you, my friend. God wants you to be a joyful person. There is no substitute for true Christian joy. No amount of entertainment or games or anything, it comes from the Holy Spirit. It's something you can have in prison. It's something you can have on the street. And it is the very thing that gets you off the street and out of prison. It is the sustainable strength that comes from a lightheartedness and confidence in the strong name of Jesus Christ. It is the chain breaking, burden breaking, burden lifting power of God. It is the thing that turns the stones you're carrying on your back to balloons. It is the spirit of God. There is no substitute and it's available to you right now. Right now. No amount of money or anything can get you the joy that the Holy Spirit gives you. That gets us to our scripture. Don't worry I'm winding it down. All the dudes in the house are always like GOSH he's just getting started! Just kidding. We're going to read from Nehemiah chapter 8. In this story, remember that the Jewish people were chosen by God to be a force of renewal, restoration, covenant life, joy and love in a world that was totally swallowed up by evil, things like child sacrifice, human violations and slavery. The Hebrew people were meant to come in and bring freedom and God's way, and many times did. But because they were seduced by the glory of the world, they fell into those same practices and were punished by God by being exiled in Babylon. But God used that season, when they were in the great place of Babylonia, to form inside of them, I wish I had more time to talk about this, Rabbinic Judaism, which they brought back with them to Israel. And as they returned to Israel and come home after being gone, for some of them 50 to 70 years, returning to their old home, to the Promised Land, there's this moment after the temple has been built, and many of the things in the city have been restored. Ezra the priest, and Nehemiah the governor, come out to address the people and they have a time where they begin to read from the Torah, from God's word. As they're reading, the people begin to just wail, and weep and you can understand why. What an emotional experience after this long travail. We're home again hearing the word of God. God has brought us home and they're weeping. I would weep! I mean what an amazing thing that God has brought us home. But then they're almost rebuked. You can see in Nehemiah, chapter 8 verse 9. It says "Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the law, and the Levites, who were instructing the people, said to them all 'this day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.'" You see for them, holiness is not mourning and weeping like it is for so many of us. "For all the people have been weeping as they listened to the words of the law. Nehemiah said, 'go and enjoy'" everybody say, 'choice food' and do the kiss thing. Come on. Choice food. Oh, I have such a cool church. You guys are the best. "And sweet drinks." Everybody say sweet drinks. Let's see how good you do this. Okay – sweet drinks. I'll give you a B-minus on that one. "Sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared" right? You give it to the poor. Give it to people who are lonely or maybe they have it but they just all by themselves. Invite them to your party. Right?

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And it says, "this day" and again, it says it again, "this day is holy to our God. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength." There's that line. Joy here is a celebration with sweet drink and good food. That's what it means in this context in Nehemiah to make the day of the Lord holy is to celebrate. To celebrate. "So the Levite calmed all the people," the Levites, "calmed all the people saying 'be still for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.' Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and celebrate with great joy because they now understood the words that had been made known to them." That's the key. When you understand the word of God, the words of God, He's got your back, He's got your life, He's got it all. He's got the whole world in His hands. We get this joy that creates a deep sense of trust and lightheartedness in God. I believe that when really committed Christians don't have joy, they almost always fall into the trap of judgementalism because if you don't have real Christian joy, and then you see some sinner who's like pretty happy and like just laughing and having a great time, it's like well that's not right. There's like this thing, right? Because inside there is a despair for any believer who's not joyful when they see a sinner. Like I would never encourage you to sin, or to do bad things, or to hurt your neighbor or hurt yourself, in order for moments of happiness. But can I just say sin is fun? Sin is fun. Craig Groeschel said, "if your sinning isn't fun, you're not doing it right." There's a sense that it is fun, like people wouldn't do it if it wasn't an escape. But I will tell you that in most cases what you're seeing is temporary or on the outside. What God has to offer is a real, real joy that is mirthy and laughing and fun, and wonderful. Remember, God really does want us to be joyful people. The Bible says as part of the fruit of the spirit, its actually one of the ways you can test and see if someone really truly knows the spirit of God, actually. So it's a way to test Christian leaders. I'll finish with this reflection. I was going to do something like here's two or three tips on how to be more joyful, but as I sort of prayed about that, I think that would actually cause more harm than good because so much of our joylessness comes from trying harder. I think that the joy of the Lord comes from an ease, an inner like a lightheartedness. That's where it comes from. It comes from a lightheartedness. I think we're born joyful, and we lose it as life goes on. You know why I think that? There was a study done and it haunts me all the time. I wrote about it in one of my books and I still don't have a crystal-clear answer on it, but there was a smile study done and it found that the average child smiles about four hundred times per day. You got little kids; you know it's true. Kids are full of joy. And the average adult is 20 times a day. What happens to that kid when she becomes an adult? What is it? Maybe its perfectionism, comparison, disappointments, illness, the loss of loved ones. But kids go through that, too, and they still smile. I think its a sense that I have to be a responsible person, and this fear that I got to control outcomes and I got to control what people think about me. It's a lot of stuff, isn't it? And so the opposite of whatever that is that I can't really put words on, there's a lightheartedness that's rational and reasonable because it comes from the Lord. Yesterday we celebrated Cohen's 10th birthday. If you don't know about my son, he almost died a couple of times. He has this horrible brain thing, and we believe God's going to heal him, but we're in this in-between place where we don't know. And yesterday we celebrated his 10th birthday. It's like wow, already, you can see that God has brought him this far, and he's doing good in his life. He's not having seizures anymore. And so there's a lot of good happening. But at his party, we had this.. Hannah, could you bring those to me? We had this guy, who first of all, because it was Cohen, it was really fun. Thank you, my love. Mrs. Schuller. Assisting. I feel like a magician and you're like the.. all right.. So we had this party at our house, and it was.. let's see how this goes. And it was.. gosh it was fun. We had a lot of serious adults who were with us, and there was this balloon artist who came, and he literally could do, I mean almost anything. People were just asking him to do this and that, and he just had these little like skinny balloons and he would make this stuff. My daughter was like.. he was like what would you like me to make? And she was like a unicorn.

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But instead of making just like a weird unicorn, he was like I will put a unicorn on a Skittles rainbow, and he's like this is what she got, like this unicorn like flying. And then like somehow it started to like take on a weird like.. oh yeah, I think it was my sister, she was like can you make me a tiara, like a princess tiara? Look at this one. Kind of cool. I'm not going to put it on because someone will take a screen shot, but there you can kind of see there's a tiara. And because my son likes Little Mermaid, it started to take on.. like somebody said made an octopus, and so he was like here's a.. so it kind of started to take on like a sea theme. And it was so funny because I remember my sister was like; she was just like blowing everybody's.. this guy was blowing everybody's mind away, and so she was like what about like a jellyfish. Can you make a jellyfish? And so he was like, okay, I'll see and he brought this thing out. It's a little deflated but I mean it still looks pretty good. The jellyfish. Does it look like a jellyfish? Still? But can I tell you my favorite? Because it was a shark theme, he was like oh I'll make a shark, and everybody had to wear one of these hats, so even though it was a lot serious Christians there and my family, everybody had to wear a hat, and so I had the shark one, and it was for sure my favorite. Check this out. Look at that. Pretty slick. And so, the shark.. and then the best part about this shark is like look at it from the side. Look, see like the dorsal fin? Isn't that great? See what I mean? I think that there's a.. see like all of us just now, we're just kind of like laughing. Like isn't it funny how you could just laugh and take a break? Everybody in this room is fighting a battle right now. Everybody here has something heavy that they're dealing with. But when we are able to, like children, have a lightheartedness, and trust God the way we trusted our parents when we were kids. And there is a way in which in learning to trust our lives to God, we just get a lightheartedness and we're able to just smile again and enjoy life. That's what I want to encourage you today. Who carries your life? Who carries your life? I think if we carry our own lives all the time, especially if we feel like we have to carry other people's lives, be very difficult to be joyful people. And so God's inviting you to trust your future and your present to Him, even though you don't have all the answers, worrying about it, staying up, just begin to trust and believe, like release your faith, that God's going to bring a breakthrough in your life, and invite, and just even ask Him on your own time. Just invite the Holy Spirit to bring you a lofty, easygoing lightheartedness in your life, and joy will just kind of come out of that. God loves you so much. I do, too. And I want you to know that God is going to restore your joy. Maybe you've been going through a lot lately. I want to invite you today to be a joyful person. Lord, we thank you and we love you, and we bring before you our heavy burdens. And we know that you love to answer these prayers. We don't pray in a round-about way. We're saying Father, help us. And in fact, we just, in our hearts and minds, release those things to you. And today we choose to just relax and trust in your kingdom. We love you, Lord, 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 His peace, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.