

Hour of Power Deutschland
Steinerne Furt 78
86167 Augsburg

Telefon: 08 21 / 420 96 96
Telefax: 08 21 / 420 96 97

E-Mail: info@hourofpower.de
www.hourofpower.de

Baden-Württembergische Bank
BLZ: 600 501 01
Konto: 28 94 829

IBAN:
DE43600501010002894829

BIC:
SOLADEST600

Büro Schweiz:

Hour of Power Schweiz
Seestr. 8
8594 Güttingen
Tel.: 071 690 07 81
info@hourofpower-schweiz.ch
www.hourofpower-schweiz.ch

Spendenkonto:

PostFinance AG, 3030 Bern
Konto: 61-18359-6
IBAN:
CH1609000000610183596

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GOOD MORNING – Bobby Schuller (BS) and Hannah Schuller (HS)

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

HS: And welcome, welcome visitors and church family. It is such a joy and a pleasure to be with you this morning. The Bible says that God so loved the world that He gave His precious Son. You are valued and so loved. Thank you for being here.

BS: We are so glad you're here and we're just going to believe God's going to do something great. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much for your goodness and your friendship to us. We pray that your Holy Spirit would do a good work in our lives, our hearts and minds. We praise you and thank you for the people in our lives, they're a gift to us. Help us to love them more every day, and we're grateful for them. It's in Christ' name we pray, all God's people said, amen.

HS: Amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – Matthäus 2,10-11 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, Matthew 2:10-11. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child Mary with his mother, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Amen.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING (Joy) – Tim & Ruth McCalmont / Jonah & Lena Williams

TM: On this Advent Sunday, we get to light the candle today and so Ruth and I decided to invite two of our five grandkids, Lena and Jonah Williams and they're going to help us light the candle today.

JONAH: During the first two weeks of this Advent season, we lit the candles of hope and peace. Today we light the candle of Joy.

LENA: It is the only pink candle because it reminds us of the joy Mary felt as the angel Gabriel described for her how a special child would be born to her; One who would save and deliver His people. It also reminds us of the great joy that was experienced by the shepherds and sung about by the choir of angels in the fields outside Jerusalem that holy night.

As we light this candle, we welcome Christ's light of joy into every place of care and sorrow. Our joy builds with the anticipation of His birth and as we yearn to experience His love and presence in our lives.

TM: Would you join me as we pray together: We joyfully praise you, O Lord, for the promised fulfillment of your gift of salvation through the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ. As we wait, let us open to your glory and your gracious and loving presence. In the name of Jesus, your Son and our Lord we pray. Amen.

INTERVIEW – ZACH SOUTHALL

Zach Southall is the founder of Charity on Wheels, a non-profit organization based here in Orange County which aims to help the homeless in our community. Inspired by his faith, Zach wanted to help others, so he delivered resources to those in need. From there, Charity on Wheels was born in 2012. Now they help people get off the streets and restore their lives.

Get Good People Around You

BS: Hey Zach, how are you?

ZS: Morning, how are you?

BS: Good, thank you so much. I want to talk to you today about.. there's a crisis, especially here in Southern California. It's not just in Orange County, it's in Los Angeles and many places, and you have a heart for our homeless neighbors. But first, tell us a little bit about your faith, and sort of how that got you into what you're doing.

ZS: Well, I began about ten years ago God's prompting. I got in my truck one Saturday morning and went to Walmart. I didn't know what I was doing. I knew I wanted to help and I had it in my mind that it was the homeless I wanted to help, God's children; they were suffering on the street. I bought some bicycles, I bought some food, and I drove around and I was frankly scaring the heck out of homeless people because nobody was really ministering at that point, so I was driving up next to people – hey, I'm Zach. How you doing? I'd like to help you. But I really didn't know what I was doing. And then after a year or so doing that, and I realized that just giving people stuff wasn't really helping them, and I really wanted to make an impact, so I set out to learn what it really took and what it really meant to rescue someone and lift them up out of poverty; make them self-reliant again.

BS: I love.. you had said at one time that you don't just want to give a hand-out, you want to give a hand-up. You want to help people get jobs. You want to help people get training, learn life skills, develop as people so they can get back on their own two feet. Tell me more about that. How important is that in what you do?

ZS: Absolutely. I think a lot of times, the homeless they've been robbed of their dignity oftentimes; they're ignored, they're stepped over. The context of relationship is really everything when it comes down to changing a life so taking the time to stop and talk to someone and find out who they are, what brought them to this point, and then intervene. That's the big.. everyone can be an instrument for God, for change, can make a difference, but you have to look around. That's why I go around now and encourage churches to pick up the mantle and try to make a difference where they're at. And there's a lot of churches, mine included. We send money to Africa and India, and I'm trying to encourage folks to hey there's a guy right across the street who needs you, who needs your help and needs the church and you're really good at this work, you really good at loving people, and so you're halfway there. The rest of its easy.

BS: Its interesting how a lot of times our definition of homeless is pretty narrow, too. Like when we think of a homeless person, we think of the person on the street, and there are a lot of people like that. But a lot of homeless, I would say probably a majority of homeless are living in cars, a lot of times you wouldn't know; they dressed nice, or they're in a motel. Like a lot of people are in these situations and they just don't know how to get out of it, and they're just completely overwhelmed. I mean financial, money, food, you're alone. What can we do as a church if we have friends in our community or our schools or our business places, or if we meet people, what can we do to help or make a difference?

ZS: I think it's all.. I think it all starts with intervening where you make the conscious effort to do something, even if it's small. You don't have to have all the answers but if you just start somewhere. We encourage churches to put together our health and hygiene bags, which also include a resource table, basically, for people that might.. let's say they're having trouble with addiction, they have a place to call mental health, they have a place to call or get to. We're just beggars pointing other beggars to water, really, is all it is. But I think you can do that and it's a tangible help, and great things can come from just stopping, having a conversation with somebody. Praying for them is huge, obviously. Giving them one of our help bags and again, you get to point that person to water.

BS: I think conversation's big, too. If you notice, most Starbucks have at least one homeless person there, and if you're waiting for your coffee, if you see someone that looks a little down on their luck, you can just ask them how their day is going. Ask if you can pray for them, right? I mean that's a big part. That's something I didn't realize.

ZS: Huge, huge part. Yes, again, a lot of folks are just used to having their blinders on. You're on your way into Target or Starbucks, like you said, and you're trying to avoid eye contact at all expense, but again changing your mode of thinking to where you go right to that person and you greet them and you introduce yourself. It's disarming, and it changes things.

BS: One thing I've done, too, because I know a lot of people are uneasy about handing money out to people flying signs, but I keep Starbucks gift cards. You can get a pack of five dollar or ten-dollar cards from Amazon I have a huge stack, and you can get bus passes, and those I know are a huge deal.

Get Good People Around You

ZS: Huge! That's a monumental blessing. I always encourage people, like if you're going to go and buy a coffee for yourself, like I said, and we're using Starbucks as an example, but there are many, and you come in and you introduce yourself to this person, you go I'm going into to grab a latte, would you like anything? And then you come back out and just that little bit of interaction and then who knows, maybe you see them next time, and then next time, and then maybe you have a deeper conversation that leads somewhere.

BS: The Bible says that anyone who gives to the poor lends to God. I love that Bible verse. And what a great message. What does that mean to you?

ZS: I think there's a power in doing what our Lord commands, I think, and He's commanded us to take care of widows and orphans, and oftentimes that's what we see on the streets – single moms. And you would think that it would tire you but in this instance, it's like you can run and not grow weary. It's a super charge. I mean if you want to feel the spirit moving in your life, I would encourage you to serve the poor. There's nothing else like it.

BS: Amen. We take that encouragement. Zach Southall, thank you so much for all you do. We love and appreciate you. God bless you.

ZS: Thank you for having me. Thank you. God bless you all.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

We're going to say this creed together as we do every week. Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord: 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 my neighbor. Thanks, you can be seated.

MESSAGE – Get Good People Around You

So today we're going to talk about joy. Before I want to get into that, I first want to talk about my experience in religion, and many of you have probably had this. As a young guy, especially when I first kind of discovered faith for myself, I bounced around a lot of churches, and some were really loving and sweet, some were not. And many churches seemed to use shame as a way to draw you closer to God. And I would even say that there were times where I thought man, the times I'm closest to the Lord, or these times when I'm weeping and repenting, and many of you have had that experience, but here's the problem with that: in order to repent, you have to sin! Right? You got to make some mistakes! And that was a question mark for me that I was like how come so many churches seem to teach me that when I'm repenting is when I experience God the most, and it really took the charismatics to show me, nope, there's other ways to experience the Lord other than when you feel guilty. All of that to simply say I think that in life we forget, and this is what I've realized as a pastor, shame separates us from people. When we are constantly dwelling in shame, shame drives us from others. It's not what God wants for you. When you're feeling embarrassed or ashamed of your life or your past, especially if you haven't done anything and you're living under the kingdom of God, and you're living under God's grace, and you're living in the mercy of the cross, God sees you. We say theologically the way He would see Christ Jesus, that Christ became sin so you could be sinless, it is good to be free from shame. So if you want to be a better dad, a better husband, a better wife, a better mom, a better friend, one of the best things you can do is get rid of your shame and to receive freely the free gift of grace of Christ crucified. I want to encourage you today if you've never made a decision to follow Jesus Christ, He is asking you now to follow Him. Make that decision today, your life will never be the same. And if you do make that decision, text me the word HOPE to the number on the screen. The reason I'm starting with this about shame and how it drives us away from one another, is on joy Sunday, I think the best thing you can teach people on how to be joyful is to teach them about the importance of our relationships. If I wanted to teach you a sermon on how to be full of despair, I would say get isolated. Get alone. Ruin your friendships. Burn bridges, then you'll feel despair. Human beings are unique creatures in that we're the only people I can think of where.. only people that I can think of are people. That's a strange thing to say we're.. what is the expression in prison when you're thrown into a room – isolation. What is that called? Solitary confinement. Its torture. Its torture. To just be alone. So one of the finest things we can do to honor God with our lives, to grow as people, to grow in morality, to grow in our benefit to the world, to grow in our economic value, to grow in all these ways is to grow in our relationships.

Get Good People Around You

And so today we're going to talk about the importance of being deep and wide. Going deep with the people in your inner circle, and getting a wider net of people who are hurting and helping them in your difficult times. You might have heard a story. A wealthy businessman who graduated from Harvard, went on vacation to Mexico. He was standing on the shore and looking at the water and in came a boat full of yellow fin tuna. Young Mexican guy, local, had a great day fishing, was coming in and the businessman asked him wow, that's a great catch. How long did that take you? And he said oh, it took about thirty minutes, maybe an hour. Not too long. And he said well, why didn't you fish longer? You could have caught more fish, made a little more money. And the man said, no, this is all I need to provide for my family. It's enough for today. The businessman asked him a question, he says what is your day like down here every day in this little pueblo in Mexico? He said well it's pretty simple. He says I usually sleep in, and then I go fishing, get a little catch, then I come in and play with my kids, and then as a family we have lunch together, then I take a siesta with Maria, my wife, and after our siesta we take a nice long walk into the village, and there we'll sip some wine, maybe play guitar, and later in the evening I'll play cards with my friends. And the businessman says that sounds interesting, but I think I can help you. He said really, I think I can help you. Look, if you could catch that many fish in just under an hour, what you need to do is get a bigger boat and hire a crew and catch as many fish as you can. And then what you need to do is get a fleet of boats, and eventually stop selling to the middleman. Go right to the cannery, and use that money to create your own cannery. Then you got multiple canneries, I can help you. You can distribute it all over Mexico and eventually go international. You can move to Mexico City, then you can go to Los Angeles, eventually make it to New York, and you will make a ton of money. And he said well how long will that take, sir? He said oh, it will take about 15 – 20 years, but you'll make millions. And then he says well then what do I do? He goes will this is the best part – you can take that company and you can either sell it to private equity, or you can go public and then you can retire. And he goes well what do I do in retirement with millions of dollars? And he says well you can do whatever you want! You can move back home, you can do a little fishing every day, you can play with your grandkids, you can go to lunch, go on a siesta, go on a walk with your wife, maybe go wine testing, play some guitar or cards, whatever you want to do. Great story, isn't it? Now here's the thing – many of us, maybe all of us who are not rich, dream of money. We dream of financial freedom. And many of us who have done well, we dream of more money. And what happens in these thoughts for many of us is the idea of freedom. That's what we really want. The ability to not have to work if I don't want to. And here's the question – if you didn't have to work, why wouldn't you want to work? And the answer usually goes something like this: so I could spend my time with the people I want, or, I could spend my time doing what I want to do. No doubt some of your best memories are the memories that you had doing what you wanted to do with the people that you loved. If you think about financial goals that you have, a lot of times it might be about a house, but that house, the purpose of it is so what? You can have your kids over, or your friends over, or throw a party, or have a nice big room where you can have a good chat with a good friend. Or, so I can travel with someone I love. And notice how many of these fantasies that we have, they're really much more about the freedom to have good relationships than they are about having money. Now that's not always true for everybody, but I think that a joyful life is a life that is full of life-giving relationships. Many of us have lots of relationships, but we don't have life, and those relationships oftentimes are suffocating us, choking us, we're worried all the time. But a good joyful life is one that is full of life-giving relationships, and you can have that in your life without any money. Isn't that good news? Now I wish for you financial success and financial freedom and all the dreams that you want, but you can work on those relationships today, and actually very often those relationships will help you achieve more in your life. Valuing relationships as the greatest asset in your life is something that women tend to get and men tend to miss. Can I just get an amen for all of the ladies in the house. I read somewhere that women really value relationships. Men tend to value objects. So men like cars and instruments, and this is a broad stroke. Not everybody's the same, but men like objects and sometimes will objectify their relationships. And sometimes women will relationship-ize, yes I invented that word, objects. Now I remember when my six-year-old daughter was heartbroken because we sold Ivory, our Toyota forerunner. She said it was a member of our family! I said Haven, it was a hunk of metal. So it was interesting thing. And just because women understand this and men don't always understand it, doesn't mean it's not true for men. It is. It's true for everyone, and typically older men learn this, but it takes a while so young men are usually oblivious to this.

Get Good People Around You

The idea that really, the purpose of a good life is deep meaningful relationships. It's not just about crossing the finish line, it's about crossing the finish line with people who love you and people you love. And that leads us to a famous birthday party, not really on a birthday, but in Bethlehem, that happened about 2,000 years ago. Starts with a villain. His name is Herod. Herod in Jesus' day, a famous guy internationally, he'd be considered today a world-wide celebrity. He would be like some great business titan. Maybe we would think of a billionaire. That's not altogether good or bad. You can probably think of four or five. He would have been like that. His name was now Herod the great. He was crowned the king of the Jews by the senate in Rome, and the irony is that he wasn't Jewish. He was an Edomite, who was related to the Jews, but he married a Jewish princess and that sort of gave him legitimacy. But he always felt sort of like he wasn't really the king of the Jews, and this seemed to drive a lot of his craziness in his story. To sort of prove himself, he built the Caesarea Maritima, a beautiful palace. He built Masada, you might have heard of that. It's a big, beautiful fortress in the south to guard against Cleopatra. Many famous buildings. Built the great temple, the foundation of which is still there today. And he built this building – the Herodian. This is where he lived most of the time. It was named after himself, and it was a fortress slash palace with servants and water. He was called Herod the great because he was such a great builder. But he was evil. He killed that princess, he murdered her. He murdered multiple family members. He probably murdered a lot of other people we've never heard of, and he was an isolated frankly nutcase. And he is always trying to prove 'I am the king of the Jews.' One day a group of mystics from the East a thousand miles away have come in a huge caravan because they've seen a star, and they were told that the king of the Jews was born this day. So they follow the star, they travel, and I like this picture because it really shows us what it would have looked like. It wasn't like three guys. It would have been an entourage, more like when Aladdin comes into Agrabah if you've seen the movie Aladdin. And as they come in, they burst open the doors of Jerusalem, they march to the center of town, and they ask the question - we have come, oh king, a thousand miles to be here to ask you this question – we heard the king of Jews was born. Where is the king of the Jews? And it says the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. Why? Well we all know who the king of the Jews is. His name is Herod. He lives over in the Herodian. Did he have a son? What's going on? So Herod, of course, is furious. Invites these great Magi into his castle, and he says 'when you find this baby,' with teeth like knives, smiling, 'let me know where He is so I too can go and worship Him.' And we know this story. The kings go, they find the baby, they lay the gifts before Him, incidentally that's why we give gifts on Christmas, and this great celebration takes place. It's just a beautiful image. We see it all the time, the nativity scene when you go to church corners and people's houses, a great picture of rich, of poor, of influential, of nobody's, of kids, of old people coming together to glorify God and thank Him for the most important day ever, the birth of Christ. And what's interesting about the Herodian, that building I showed you, it's about three miles from Bethlehem, and Herod would have been all alone, all isolated, an old man, a shell of a man. Doesn't know it, but he's got about four or five years left to live, and all he's trying to do is hold onto everything and prove himself. And he's just an empty shell of a man. And today, everybody just says who cares. Who cares. Nobody cares. The thing we care about is that baby that was born, and he missed out on it. And the question for us is how often in life in our need to achieve, which is a good thing, or our need to build and do great things, which are all good things, how often do we sacrifice the really important thing for those things. Striking a balance as an achiever is such an important thing. But of course the balance should always tilt in the direction of the people you love. It's a hard thing to do when you want to do great things. But that's why it is so important that we understand God's view of relationships and how we connect deeply with people, and how this is our greatest treasure. Before I sort of carry on this brief message, the first thing I want you to get in your mind, something I've said a lot is this – freedom is the currency of love. Now I know that sounds strange, but the more love you have in your life, the less freedom you'll have in your life. I learned this when I was a kid, and I got a dog named Mya Puppies. Now Puppies was her middle name. Schuller was her last name. Mya Puppies Schuller. MPS. She was my best friend. I remember just as a puppy, getting this puppy thinking oh she's so cute, and just being oblivious to the amount of responsibility I just took on my life. I wanted to play some video games and she wants to go for a walk. I wanted to eat my lunch and she wants to get pet, and she wants to eat some. And I just remember as a kid sort of feeling a little sometimes like ohhhh, I don't know if I want a dog. I got to take care of this dog, I'm losing my freedom, blah, blah, blah. But of course it was totally worth it on those mornings when you wake up and a dog is licking your eyeball. For some reason, they always go for the eyeball. I don't know what that's about.

Get Good People Around You

And this is something we learn as we grow older, that the more love you have in your life, the less freedom you have. You might have got it with your first girlfriend or boyfriend. You for sure got it if you ever had children. You for sure had it if you've ever become a committed Christian, right? God wants some of our time. He wants us to come to church on Sunday, He wants us to read our Bibles, He wants us to pray when we're feeling anxious, He wants us to bless our food. So there's these commitments, and the more love and the more compassion and more life that you get from these, the less freedom you have. And here are two ways that people respond to that. First, some people resent it. When your wife says 'come home by 5:00 because I want to see you and I want to be with you.' Some men will resent that. Or some women will resent that. Some people will resent the dog that barked because he wants to go on a walk. Some people resent that. Other people, people like you, they will rise up to it and say isn't it a gift that there's someone in life who needs me. What a freedom that was for me to realize that I have a gift; that there are people in my life that I love who love me that need me to become the kind of man they need. What a gift it is to have people in your life who love you, who want to be around you, who want to spend time with you. It is really, really a gift. But here's the thing – in life we have so many people that we meet and spend time with and do things with, at some point we have to understand that not only do we need to value these relationships, we also need to think about who's influencing our lives. To be honest with you, if you show me your closest friends, I will show you your future. It's interesting. The Bible says as iron sharpens iron so does one man sharpen another. But I think the opposite is true, as well. As iron dulls iron so does one person dull another. If you're a teenager, you remember, you might have had some dull friends. I remember having some pretty dumb friends who convinced me to do dumb things. Hey Bobby, you should jump off of that. Hey Bobby, you should taste that. What is it? I don't know. Let's try it. It's interesting how in life who you surround your life with is going to influence you in such an important way. Now we know this with our kids. If you have children, many of you would say when you have kids, you don't want to be overbearing, but you kind of want to manage who your kids' friends are, right? You want to think about your kids having friends who are a good influence on them. That's a really important part because you know the influence that kids are going to have. I know here as a pastor, you meet all sorts of people. If you meet a bereaved mother who's suffering because her son died from a drug overdose or some violent thing in a gang, and you talk to her and you comfort her, she'll say to you with tears in her eyes, 'my son was really a good boy. He just got mixed up with the wrong friends.' And guess what – those friends have mothers, and when those mothers are crying and they say he got mixed up with the wrong friends, they're talking about this lady's son, also. See that's weird. And here's the interesting thing. We all understand that, but somehow we think well, once I turn 18, I don't need to manage my friends anymore. Somewhere around becoming an adult, friends stop having an influence on my life. It's amazing what we will want for our children that we won't want for ourselves. We want our children to eat healthy while we eat junk. We want our children to have good influential friends while we have bad influential friends. And this is the main thing. Our friends create and inform our standards. What's a standard? A standard is the minimum that you're willing to accept. Our friends, our closest friends, I don't mean the broad, but our closest friends are going to define our moral standards, our achievement standards, our manners. They're going to define our attitude towards life. If you have friends in your life that tell you to blame everything, and all this stuff, that's probably not going to help. You get friends that are encouraging you, that are encouraging you to go after your dreams, those are the good kind of friends that you want to really have close in your life. You might say to me well Bobby, hold on now, wasn't Jesus reaching out to sinners and broken people? Absolutely, one hundred percent, and we should, too. But Jesus' inner-circle was the disciples, and when He sent them out, He sent them out two by two. And when He prayed to the Father, He prayed that they would be one as He and the Father are one. You see our relationships are like a target where you have rings, and the ring I'm talking about is the bullseye. The one in the middle. Your closest friends, the family members that you care about, this is the one that really matters, and this is where you got to be careful. And you got to be intentional about meeting the kind of people and developing the relationships with the kind of people that are going in a similar direction that you want to go. The Bible calls that term "equally yoked." A yoke, like when you have two ox that are yoked together, they're going in the same direction. You don't want to be yoked to people who when you leave them, you feel down and you feel gross or you feel like you made bad decisions. You want to have in your life the kind of people that are going to build you up. It says in the Bible that the love of Christ is deep and wide. Deep and wide. What does that mean?

Get Good People Around You

Deep - meaning that He knows us exactly how we are, and He loves us just as we are. Wide - that it's for everybody. And so the kind of love we should have, if we want to love like Jesus is a love that is deep and a love that is wide. First let's talk about wide. I know that there are some people here, some that are watching, you just say I don't know what my deal is, I don't do well meeting people. Can we just say that pretty much everything in life, but especially this, it's a skill. Meeting people, meeting new people, growing your network and this type of thing, it's about growing as a person. Yes, there are books you can read and things you can do to learn more, but here's something that I heard that was interesting from a guy named Jim Roan. He defined this Bible verse, I've heard it a million times. It was so interesting to hear it this way. There's a Bible verse that says God sees the heart, but man sees the outside. Now there's something we can learn. That yes, God sees the heart, and we say but man sees the outside. And we say well man shouldn't look at the outside, they should look at the heart. Well we can't deal in should and shouldn'ts. This is the way things are. And there is something important about thinking about your first impression. Very often being a friendly person, being put together. I know that sounds like something you shouldn't say in church because God loves everybody, but brushing your teeth, putting your hair together, taking a shower. Here's what I used to think. You know what my favorite outfit is? Gym shorts, no shirt, and flip flops. That's my favorite outfit. And in a place like Southern California, you can get away with something like that. But if you want to make friends and influence people, as the famous phrase goes, that will not do. It helps to be put together. It's interesting when you think about how you dress, you can't dress like a good person, but you can dress like a bad person. Isn't that interesting? You can dress like a gang member. You can dress like someone who's going to mug somebody. So don't dress that way. See these are things that very often we don't understand that it's good to recognize, to just understand that if we want to reach people, that we have to be careful about a lot of these things. I think I've spent too much time on this. It's not super important in the sense that we don't want to be vain, but we need to be put together. And don't forget that people love to talk about themselves. People love to talk about themselves, especially kids. So very often when we meet someone and we're excited, someone says I recently went to Mammoth, and you want to say I've been to Mammoth, too! Right? But the better thing to say is tell me more about Mammoth. Okay. So that's wide. Be put together, think about other people, care for other people, see people that are hurting, especially, be there for people. And then deep. Deep. Now there are about probably four or five, six people, some people are better at this than others, that can go deep, but this is so important that the people in your life, you look at those relationships the way a gardener looks at a garden. Here's something I learned about gardening is that it requires constant effort. It requires diligence. You have to look at it every day. You have to pull every weed. You have to feed it, you have to water it, it has to get sun, it has to be treated properly. And look at your personal relationships this way, you'll be so glad you did. Here's one thing you can do in your relationships with your spouse or your best friends: constantly show them that you care and that they are safe with you. That they can be exactly who they want to be. Many of you, you say oh if my wife or my husband talked to me about me, I'd probably lash out. Okay. You need to prove to them that that's not true anymore. Find your own way to do it. And here's something that men are actually really good at in relationships that's so important for every relationship, and that is ritual. Ritual. It is so important in your marriage, for example, to have a date night, or with your kids to have a weekly thing, a breakfast, a coffee, with good friends that you want to hang out with. Have a once a month or once a whatever thing where you get together to watch a football game, or go on a walk, or pray together, or imagine this – Sunday morning church. You go to church with your friends. These rituals are important. And then most importantly, with the people that you really, really care about, just do your best to move heaven and earth to say yes when they invite you to something. I remember my dad told me recently, he said we learned that when you were teenagers, we weren't the center of your universe anymore, and we decided that whenever you invited us to do something, we would drop everything and say yes. Now he told me this recently. And I thought that's interesting. He said we tried to look at this way. We were so privileged that our teenage son wanted us to see his video game, and play with him, or whatever, check out this new thing that he made, or go to his show, that we would try and drop everything and go to it. Was it always true? No, but I think that's a great attitude to have. Maybe you're not a parent, maybe you're not married, but there are key relationships, key friendships in your life, and a friend invites you to do something, if you can move a meeting, if you can wait on a project you're working on to be with your kids or your spouse or your parents or the people that matter, it'll mean a lot to them if you keep doing that. They'll remember that and it'll make all the difference in the world.

Get Good People Around You

You want a life-giving existence? It comes from life-giving friends, family, and people that matter most. I know every pastor's saying it during the Christmas season. It's so easy to get obsessive about events and projects, but at the end of the day what we're really going to remember is the stories we told, the songs we sang, the hugs we gave, that's what's going to matter. So just continue to work on your relationships, and your relationships will build you and even work on you. So Father, we ask for that in Jesus' name. We ask you to teach us the skill of how to be loving people, how to receive love without being afraid, and how to go deep with friends and family we care about. We thank you and we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, all God's people said amen. Would you stand with me?