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WELCOME – Bobby Schuller & 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. We're so happy you're here. You know, Jehovah Nissi means God is our banner, or He is our victory. As we act on the Bible, the key is not just to knowing what it says. As we act on it, God declares I am your physical and spiritual victory. Wow. You are loved.

BS: We're so glad you're here with us today, too, wherever you're joining us from. Maybe you're in some other country and it's evening for you, or wherever it is, we're so grateful that you're joining us, and we believe that God has something good in store for you today. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much that you've called us to your house, and we pray in Jesus' name that you begin to renew us. Give us fresh vision. Forgive us of our sins, and give us a fresh wind of your spirit, new joy and new perspective, hope, all the things, God, that you promise in the scriptures to those who trust in you. And it's in the strong name of Jesus we pray, amen.

HS: Amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – Psalm 1:1-6 - Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, Psalm 1:1-6. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers. Not so the wicked. They are like chafe that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction. Amen.

INTERVIEW – Sharon Dutra (SD) and Bobby Schuller (BS)

Sharon Dutra is an author and speaker who spent almost 30 years of her life in search of things that ultimately could not make her whole. Years of drug addiction, homelessness, and incarceration left her hopeless, until one day in prison, she would find that Jesus was the hope she didn't know she needed. Now, she runs Be Transformed Ministries with her husband Michael, and they minister to those who feel lost and hopeless, like she once was.

BS: Sharon, hi. Thank you for joining us today.

SD: Thank you for having me.

BS: You have an amazing story. Someone from our team, Russ, read about you in Christianity Today and said we need to hear this story. The world needs to hear your story. And even though it's, in a way, sort of an extreme story, it's a representation of what many of us go through in our journey to find Christ, I think. But let's begin there. Tell us about who you are, and your faith journey.

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SD: I was born in Los Angeles, and my father was an alcoholic and a womanizer, and my mother left when I was five years old and I never saw her again. My father was married four times by the time I was 17, so I was thrown into foster care early on in my life. By the time I was 13, I had started realizing how much I hated myself. I think I had internalized all of the rejection and abandonment issues that I felt. I started using drugs, and when I was 15, I ran away from home, and I lived on the street for a month before I was arrested for the first time. I ended up in Eastlake Juvenile Hall in central Los Angeles, and for me, that was a real eye opener to gang activity and racial tension and fear. When I was 20, I married an ex-convict and we were married and had two children together. By then, I had tried every drug known to man. I just wanted to deaden my pain and get out of what I was feeling. And little did I know that my husband was using IV drugs at the time: cocaine and speed. He injected me for the first time, and from there, I was a hard-core IV drug addict for six and a half years. I overdosed four times, and I ended up living on the street and I was homeless. Just like you see the people are homeless today, I was that person for two years. I almost died on four occasions, and I really wanted to die. I did not want to live. I ended up in prison after my 13th arrest in a Southern California women's prison, and I thought that that was the end of my life. I thought that was the end of the road and that was it for me. What really happened was I read a book and it was about Jesus and I wasn't looking for Jesus, but Jesus found me and I hit the floor sobbing, and I gave my life to Christ. When I was released, I married the son of the captain of the highway patrol, which is pretty funny, and I went back to school, I got my registered nursing degree, and I graduated with honors, which was a miracle because I didn't think I had two brain cells to rub together. And I started teaching Bible studies at my church, and I had this really interesting group of ladies, and I couldn't find any material that was appropriate for them, so I wrote my own material and they finally said Sharon, you need to put this into a book. My first book was written in 2011 called Be Transformed, and that's where our ministry started.

BS: Awesome. It's interesting how you got a nursing degree. I feel that a lot of times it's easy to think that someone who's homeless or that maybe they're just not intelligent, but I've, as a pastor, found the opposite, that very often intelligent people are the ones who sometimes struggle in this way a lot because they spin their wheels a lot. A lot of times thinking of going in, going inwardly and getting trapped in a rut. I don't know if you felt that way at all when you were going through, but it's an amazing story. Tell us more about Be Transformed. Are you reaching people in the same way like the people that were stuck in a similar kind of rut that you were in?

SD: Yes, so our passion at Be Transformed Ministries is to reach people for Christ, and to disciple them, to train them in the Christian faith so that they can go out and reach others. I have now written three books: Fishers of Men and New Beginnings are the other books. And they've been translated into four languages and they're being used in eight different countries. They're being used by pastors, different denominations, and a big part of our ministry is to send out tens of thousands of free books to prisons, jails and rehabs across the United States and around the world.

BS: That's awesome.

SD: It's been amazing.

BS: There are a lot of people right now, and with everything that we've gone through, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, child abuse is at an all-time high. There are so many of the things that you were going through, a lot of people are going through that for the first time. Some of them are Christians, actually, and that's hard to believe. With your testimony, you probably think how could that.. but what encouragement would you give if there's someone who feels like they're just so far down that path, and they don't feel like they can get a grip on their lives, or they can't beat their addiction or whatever it is. Do you have any word for someone like that?

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SD: Absolutely. Hope in Jesus Christ. He is the answer to every one of your problems, no matter where you are, who you are, what you have been through, Jesus is the answer. I would encourage you to invite Him into your life, to get a Bible and start reading that every day, because that has the power to transform and change your heart and your mind. And also to find a Bible based church and get involved. Get into a small group where you can be supported and loved. And if you'd like to check out our books, they're on BeTransformedMinistries.com, and they have helped people come to faith and disciple them in their journey with Jesus. So Jesus is the answer.

BS: Amen. And they're terrific books, too. I'd encourage you to check them out. You and your husband will be outside after the service if you'd like to buy one if you're here this morning. Well Sharon, thank you so much for your encouragement. I know a lot of people are going through hard times, but man, it is so amazing the way that God can so radically turn someone's life around. And sometimes we mess up, or we fall off the wagon, but God's there for us.

SD: That's right. Amen.

BS: Just come back to Him. Thank you, Sharon. God bless you.

SD: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

BS: Appreciate your story. Thank you.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Whoever you are, would you stand with us? 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. Let's say it together: I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It is who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world. Amen!

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "If You Want a Happy Life, Lead a Good Life"

Today, I want to talk about this thing I talk about a lot, and that is godly happiness. You probably, if you've known me for a while, know I enjoy prodding and poking uber religious people. I know that's an irony. You probably think I'm an uber religious guy. I'm a pastor, right? How can you get more religious than that? But I do enjoy it. Here's something I love to say often that is a good Biblical and theologically right thing to say: God wants you to be happy. Now if you've grown up in church, that doesn't land well. Like there's something in you that's like (MAKES AN ALARM SOUND). You know that's.. heretic! It is funny how there's this thing that's like well.. well I don't know. To be honest with you, I will qualify this, but you don't need to qualify it. Can I ask you, do good parents want their children to be happy? Of course they do. Only bad parents want their children to be unhappy. Those are resentful, messed up parents, right? Good parents who love their kids, want them to be happy. Is God a good father? He's the best! And He wants you to have a happy and good life. However, God has wired in us a way to that happiness that doesn't come naturally to people in the world. It's not that God just wants you to be happy no matter what, but that God has paved a way, and it's through the Bible about how to live in order to be a really happy person. Can I just say a happy life is built on a meaningful life. If you hear anything I say this morning, hear that. Everybody in this room, everyone watching on television wants to be happy. They really do. Someone might lie to you, but deep down inside, there is a desire to lead and have a happy life. But the pursuit of just a happy life really won't make you happy. It's actually the pursuit of a meaningful and good life that will give you the happy life you're looking for. It's nothing new. It's an age-old thing. It's been said for thousands of years, but people are still saying it, and by goodness, I think it's true. So, life is hard, isn't it? Sometimes life is hard. Sometimes some of you are facing something you thought you would never go through.

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You're facing a sickness or a loss of a child, or maybe you're facing a loss of your business. So many of us are going through hard times, and we have things underneath that that make it even harder. When you face a season in life where you're really feeling it, because it always comes in waves, doesn't it. When you're in those moments where you're really feeling it, you will make one of two decisions. You will either choose to be distracted, or you will choose to do something meaningful. Its human nature. And by the way, it's okay to choose to do something distracting sometimes. Sometimes you just need a break. Sometimes you just need to go see a movie. Sometimes you just need a little ice cream. McConnell's is the best, that's my vice, really. M double C O double N E double L, McConnell's. I got it right this time, guys. The problem with McConnell's is its ten bucks a pint, so that's the only reason it doesn't make you fat is because you'll go broke before you get fat. Unfortunately. McConnell's, best ice cream in the world. Sometimes the distractions that we choose are not so innocent, right? There are other things we run to, as well, that bring an even deeper distraction: substance or we could go on and on. We don't need to. We know that human nature is to withdraw or get a distraction or lean in to that too heavily, or to make a decision that even though I feel exhausted, or I feel a sense of dread, or I feel overwhelmed, I'm going to move in the direction of the thing that's got me down. I'm going to find what it means when the old wise men say – lean into the knife. I'm going to discover what it means to do something meaningful in this moment. Its abstract now, but it'll make sense. The short answer is this. As Christians, we believe God can turn anything around. And when we give our pain, our suffering, our difficulties, rather than running away from, we give them to the Lord, God turns our deaths into resurrection. It's the Easter mystery, and it helps us with all of the dread that we feel about time ticking away, and aging, and missed opportunities, and my kids are growing up, and all the stuff that we feel all the time. Jesus is the answer to those things. What a great testimony today, by the way, from Sharon. It's completely lined up with what I want to talk about today. I remember when I was a teenager and going into high school/junior high, when I started feeling that sense of angst or dread or fear that many of us get as we become young adults and later adults. It just happened one day. I was making my bed, and I had to go to school and I just got this sinking feeling. Not about anything in particular, but it was just this heavy weight. Maybe you know what it feels. And it's that weight, by the way, comes in waves the rest of your life. It's something you always sort of have sometimes. And I felt it when I was maybe 13 or 14, I just feel this weight. I remember going to school, later in high school, I wanted to be popular so bad. I know that's rare for a teenager, but I was one of those special teenagers that really wanted to be popular. You'd look around, and my school, I went to a small school in LA, and there was this group; I wasn't like an outcast, but I felt invisible, in a way. I had a couple good friends. I played hockey, but girls didn't go to hockey games. I ran cross country, but girls didn't go to cross country meets, either. They went to basketball games and they went to football games, and I did not make the basketball team. Boy, did I want to join that team. I thought if I got on the basketball team, I'm going to be popular, and I didn't even make JV. I remember in LA just feeling like invisible, and seeing popular kids and sort of unconsciously thinking they seem so happy! They're like a movie, and they were nice. They seemed like nice, happy, really good-looking people and I wish I could be in that group, kind of, and I never really made it. Later, we ended up moving to Oklahoma with my mom. My parents are divorced, so I had two kind of weird experiences. But I moved with my mom to Oklahoma and I started at this school, and I was like I am going to do my best to find and be in that popular group. I'm going to charm my way in. Like I'm going to get a fresh haircut. I'm going to look great. I'm going to die it a special color. I'm going to whatever I can to get in there. And to be honest with you, that was a good year. I think there was an allure about being a high school kid from LA and coming into Oklahoma. I made varsity. I had grown about a foot and now I went from not even making JV to being a guard on the varsity team, and I was a benchwarmer, but I was on the varsity team and that's something.

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There was this thing where people thought I was rich, which was an irony because we were actually homeless. We were living in a motel. But my mom always wanted us to have nice clothes. We weren't like on the street, but we didn't have a house. We were living in.. my sisters and I and my mom were in this one little motel room for a couple of months. But I would show up and pretend that I was rich. I would lean into it a little bit. And I really felt like I got into that group a little bit. Until I found out they're not happy, either. I started to realize in high school nobody's happy. Some people are just better at faking it. There was a study that was done at a high school, a number of high schools, and they asked the question: who's the most popular kid in the school? And look, we'll just make up a name, but at one school it was Sarah Connor. Sarah Connor's the most.. that's Terminator two, isn't it? The first service, I was like where did I come up with this name from? We're going to stick with it anyway. Sarah Connor. Sarah Connolly. We'll change it a little bit. Everybody answered the most popular girl is Sarah Connor. She's the best. And it was like a universal, everybody knew. And then there was a second question – who's the person you hate most in school. Guess who it was. Sarah Connor. I hate her. She's so rude. She thinks she's so great. Did you see what she posted on Instagram? She didn't comment on my thing. Imagine what that's like to be Sarah Connor. Maybe you are the Sarah Connor of your school, and you're the most popular kid in school and you're the most hated kid in school. Isn't that weird? We look at high schoolers, we're seeing people that are different, but we're just grown-up high schoolers, aren't we. So many of the things that exist in that little microcosm still exists in our jobs, in our workplaces, our churches. They're with us. And we discover this thing that there is this sort of vanity in it all that even in the moment, we think it's great or terrific or we think things are going our way, there's this sinking feeling is still there, and those people aren't happy. To drive this point home, I'm going to humiliate myself by showing you my senior pictures. Look at this gentleman. This is the class of 1999. Now, can I just pause for a moment. There are a few things you need to pay attention to. Immediately we're looking at the hair, aren't we. That was about six dollars at Walmart. I did it myself. It burns a little. I did a freshy right before my pictures. But if you look closely, you'll see I included Oakley's on my head for my pictures because I thought it just added that little accessory. This shirt was bonkers. It was like very cool, trust me, in my day. I'd also done some tanning. And I thought I looked great. But here's the next one. This one will put it even over. Just going barefoot. Just letting you know I'm going to the beach. I'm a beach guy. I took these in Oklahoma. Next one, hey are you looking to hire someone for your company. Or you want to sell a house? Hire Bobby in a suit. That big lapel is coming back in. You might see one of those coming to church soon. And then finally, this is the one that Hannah said was the only one I looked good in because you couldn't see my hair. But that's me graduating. Now the funny thing about this is like when I saw those pictures and took those pictures in 1999, I was like yes! These are sick! These are great! I look so awesome in these! And now doing this, a little part of me honestly, even now, is dying. Even though it's a schtick, I'm still like BLAH! And isn't that how fashion is, how money is, how so many of the things in life that are innocent and fun, there's nothing wrong with them, but we so often look to those things as the answer, when really, they're just ornaments. In life, this is how it is. And so for me, you want to know when I got happy? You want to know when I turned into the Bobby Schuller that the glass is half full and the other half is delicious? You know when my dread and worry and fear got wiped away? It's when I came to know personally Jesus Christ. It's when I came into a deep abiding relationship with the Lord. It didn't all go away completely all the time, but when I woke up in the morning full of the spirit, I had a purpose that God had given me for my school, I had a reason to wake up, I had a thing to study, I had a path to grow, and it wasn't available from anything that was being taught or shared with me in high school. And further, I started to notice that the happiest kids in my school were the ones that had some kind of relationship with God, and some kind of like good relationship in their families. That those were the kids, whether they were popular or unpopular, those were the happy kids.

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I wasn't really paying attention to that, noticed later, but still if you want a happy life, you must build on a foundation of a meaningful life. And it is, gosh, near impossible to find the meaningful life you're looking for without trusting in the Lord. Let me unpack that just a little more. David Foster Wallace, great novelist, kind of postmodern and sometimes pretty dark, but I liked him. He took his own life. But kind of.. we talked about recently, we talked about Van Gogh and kind of how his pain fueled a lot of his art, and so often a lot of the people who have these dark times can also have some of the greatest insights about life. He gave a speech just not that recent before he passed away. It was at a university graduation, a commencement speech. He began by telling this like proverbial joke. He said, there was an old fish swimming through the water, and it was swimming by a couple of young fish. And he said good morning, boys, how's the water? And the young fish said to him.. or didn't say anything, and went away, and then one young fish said to the other, what the heck is water? What the heck is water? The idea is that the old fish knows that they're swimming through something, but the young fish are oblivious to their environment. They're oblivious that there is this material that they're swimming through that keeps them alive and keeps them floating. And so often as you get older in life, as I am; I'm at 40 and you start to notice things, and as a pastor, you ever feel like a standup comedian. You have to always be thinking about things and observing things, and you start to see the water. As you age, you start to see it a little more clearly, don't you. What are we swimming in? What's our environment? And he made this observation. He wasn't a religious man, but he made this observation – there are no atheists. That human being's worship something. They worship something. And he gave them a warning – if you worship what most people worship today and it's not God, that thing will eat you alive. He said if you worship money, you are always going to feel a sense of lack, like you never have enough. And you're going to do the best you can to get more, and the house will never be enough, the car will never be enough, you'll never have enough in investments, you just always going to need more. He said if you worship your body or your sexuality, you will always feel ugly. And as you get older, you will die a million little deaths before they put you in the ground. If you worship power, you will always feel vulnerable and weak. And you will always, always be tempted to control people around you, people that love you in order to feel more powerful and more in control. And if you worship intellect, you will always feel a little bit stupid, a fraud, just pretending to know what he or she is talking about. And boy can I tell you that this is true. And he said, unless you worship God, you will be eaten alive by some modern idol you worship in this world. Maybe another way that I can say that is you'll just never be happy because a happy life is built on a good life. A happy life is built on a meaningful life. And by the way, the most meaningful thing you can do is something that has eternal value. There's no one better to show you a life of eternal value than the king of the eternal world, Jesus Christ. He's the answer. And by the way, He did say something like that, didn't He? "Anyone who wants to save their life will lose it, but anyone who loses their life for my sake will find it." Perhaps in the examples that I gave before, He would say if you worship money and you're avaricious, and you always need more, you should give some of your money away. And if you are always struggling for position and prestige and a hierarchy, or for power and you always are tempted to control others, it's time to serve others. It's time to dress and act like a servant, and maybe even serve someone in a way that might be a little bit embarrassing for you. And if you worship intellect and you think you're a genius and you think you're the smartest person in the room, it might be good to recognize that maybe other people think of you as a snob. And it might be good to become a student again and learn from the people that you so easily criticize and belittle and condescend. Jesus invites us to lean into, not just to get rid of our idols, but to do the opposite of what the idols tempt us to trust in so that we can see that there is little to no value in those things when they are outside of God's kingdom. But that when they're in God's kingdom, they're redeemed and they're good. And that brings us finally to the scripture of the day, Psalm chapter 1. I don't know if Psalm 1 was written by King David.

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I certainly hope it was. The first Psalm we know was written by David was Psalm 3. Psalm 1 was probably compiled by Ezra, but I like to think that David wrote it, and he perhaps did. And the reason it makes so much sense is because David wrote most of the Psalms, and this one seems like if it's coming from a king to be even more powerful. Now I remember I memorized this Psalm when I was younger. Blessed is the one who does not walk in the way of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers. I memorized that, and I remember this was the first Bible verse in seminary I ever translated, and the first word is "esher." Everybody say, esher. Now if you study Hebrew, the first word that's going to come to your mind when you hear the word "esher" is happy. That's how you learn it. Like when you got your flashcards and you go through, esher means happy. So why do so many translators choose the word "blessed?" It's an option, but it's like second option. And here's Bobby talking – religious people don't want you to be happy. They want you to be blessed. Right? They want it to be blessed. I love the word blessed, too, right? But we think of the word blessed as holy, which holiness is good, right, but that's not what it's saying. Blessed means.. it's like hashtag blessed. It's like what hip hop artists talk about, that's actually getting closer. It's the idea of a good, rich and full life that yes, smiles and laughs. A happy life. And it should say, and this translation says it, too. Blessed is the one. It should say happy is the one. Just think of that. This is how the Psalms start: "Happy is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or take seat in the company of mockers, but whose delight is on the law of the Lord, and" its messing me up because I memorized a different version, "and who meditates on his law day and night." You see the picture is like.. first of all it asks the question who's your friends. It doesn't say blessed is the one who's not a sinner, it says blessed is the one who doesn't hang out with sinners. Did you catch that? Blessed is the one who doesn't walk with sinners. I can't tell you as a pastor how many times I have heard a grieving mother or father who lost a son to some thing, whether it was death or drugs or something, and they always say "he was a good boy, he just had the wrong friends." "She was a good girl; she just had the wrong friends." Their friends' parents are saying the same thing about their kids, by the way. And that's the thing, isn't it? We don't pay attention to our relationships. And it says like if you abide in these friendships, then your life.. it's not even if you become a sinner, it's like if you abide in this, if you're just going to shrivel, you're going to go from a walking person to a standing person to a sitting person who's just like those guys in the.. I wanted to say Flintstones. Muppets. Is it Muppets? So the guys that are in the peanut gallery, they're like (MUMBLING). That's what you end up like. Just sitting there not really doing anything of value or important in your life, just pointing and mocking. You get on Twitter, that's all it is, by the way. It's people pointing and mocking. You get online, you get on a newspaper comment section, just a bunch of angry people pointing and mocking. And my friend, every one of those people that's pointing and mocking has a reason to be angry, but they gave in to the thing that you are not supposed to give into. He carries on, but his delight is on the law of the Lord or the Torah of Hashem, that is the way or like the Bible, and that person's life is rooted like a tree in streams and waters. It's the opposite of a shriveling life. It's a growing life. Branches go out, and it just bears fruit in its season. Whatever they do prospers. Do you believe the word of the Lord? Is it always true? Yes it is. We're reformed! We believe in the Bible. This is a promise that a happy life comes from a good life. It's one of the most simple things, it's been preached over and over, but so often in life, when push comes to shove, and we're exhausted or we feel dread or we feel that weight on our shoulders, and the fork is in the road, do the meaningful right thing, or do the distraction. Sometimes we get just in the habit of just always going to that distraction until it just becomes the thing we do, and that dread never goes away. There's an old Russian story; I can never tell it the same way twice. It's like baking the same loaf of bread, you just can't do it. But it goes something like this.

If You Want a Happy Life, Lead a Good Life

There was a young boy who's on his way to school, and he's walking through the woods to go to school, and he felt this sinking feeling. He didn't want to go to school. He just wanted to stay home and play with his friends. A fairy godmother meets him on the road, and she hands him this silver ball, and she says this silver ball is your life. And here's this little string, and let me give you this gift. Anytime you're doing something that you don't want to do, you want to fast forward, just pull on this string a little bit, and your life will fast forward. She gives it to him and he doesn't want to go to school and he just pulls on it a little bit, and an hour passes by in the blink of an eye. Pulls a little bit harder and he's walking home from school. He got to skip the whole thing. He's so excited. He's got this amazing thing. And so he breaks his leg and he BOOM and he pulls the string and he gets to go through the broken leg. And then, he gets married but then he and his wife begin to have a fight and he pulls it, he gets through the fight. He's going through a tough time with his children POOF fast forward, and everything's fine. It all worked out. They got through it. And then he goes to war, and he POOF, pull that string. Did not want to go through the suffering of war. And just kept pulling every time things got harder, pulled harder, pulled faster, and in no time, he was still a child on the inside, but on the outside, he was an old man that was in the twilight of his life. As he's walking through the woods one day, thinking about what he'd done, he knew he couldn't put the string back in the ball. He runs into this old lady, again, and she said what did you think about my gift? He said, well, first I thought it was terrific, but now it feels like my life has gone by so quickly. And she says to him, what do you want? He says I want to go back to being a child again and I want to suffer like everyone else. That's what we do in life. We pull on that string instead of enduring the thing that God's given us that maybe will form in us something of eternal value. I'll finish with this last idea. There's this story about Moses leading the people out of tyranny. And I heard this from a clinical therapist recently, I thought it was so insightful. Even though he's not a theologian, he nailed the theology right. That the people who came out of tyranny went into the desert. They went from something that was tyranny and slavery, but it was safe. When they went into the wilderness, now they're brought into like a harsher reality. Because of that, they turned to idols, and they began to bow down to those idols to give them maybe a sense of belonging or purpose or whatever, but to pull them out of this desert experience. And then they're angry at Moses, and then here is where the story gets bizarre, and I never understood it until I heard this guy talking about it. Then they start getting bit by snakes and they go to Moses, and they say Moses, talk to God about these snakes. We're dying. Moses goes to God, and asks Him about the snakes. And you would think that God's answer to the prayer would be get rid of the snakes, right? But He doesn't. He tells Moses.. you remember this story? Put the copper snake on a pole, and hold it up. And then when my people look at the snake, they'll be healed. Do you know what the Mishnah is in that, the lesson, the ancient lesson? Is that God doesn't just take away our problems, God gives us the power to face our problems. God doesn't want to take away the thing that scares us, God wants us to look upon the scary thing with boldness, and to face it like the people we are. God's people. You're God's man, God's woman. He has not called you to slink away. Jesus Himself, when He's crucified says I will be like that serpent that is put up. What does that mean? In the same way you think about Jesus' death, that's the scariest thing in the world. God turned His back on Jesus and He suffered what most would have thought the most horrible painful death ever. And He was betrayed by His best friend. And His other friends abandoned Him. And everyone who watched knew He was innocent. And they traded the innocent man for someone they knew was a criminal. And they embarrassed Him and mocked Him while He was up there. And, by the way, He was completely naked. He didn't even have.. they always put a sarong on Him. He was completely naked. Embarrassed, humiliating for a Jew. He was the epitome of the worst kind of suffering you could face, and that gave fresh words to take up your cross and follow me. You look at Christ the way you look at the bronze snake, because you also look to the resurrection, right?

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That although Christ faced such misery that almost no human being has or will ever face, that even if we face that ourselves, with the Lord, resurrection would come. You see there's no tragedy that God can't turn around. And that is why in life we're called to lean into the cross, to do the thing that's meaningful if we want to be happy. Who would think being crucified is the thing you need to do to be happy. Who would think that? Well Christians would. That makes it sound like we don't like happiness. But the truth is, God's called us to do sometimes the very uncomfortable thing, the very meaningful thing rather than the distraction. Yes, you need to move in some ice cream sometimes, and if you go, I'll go with you. It sounds great right now. But in life, in life we look for building a happy life on the foundation of a good life. And a good life requires doing what is scary. It's like when you're shot with an arrow in the old world, you can't pull it out. You know that. You can't pull it out or it'll pull everything out with you. You've got to push it through to the other side, break it and pull it out. Isn't that terrible? So that's so often what is life, and many of you, you're hearing from the Holy Spirit even now, and you're thinking about that person you need to talk to. You're thinking about that hard decision you need to make. You're thinking about that person you need to forgive. Maybe you're thinking about a way that you need to ask for help. Or maybe for you, the hardest thing in the world is actually to take a break. Maybe for you the hardest thing is to let go. Maybe the hardest thing is to trust that your kids can go out into the world and be okay, and you don't have to control them all the time. And maybe the Holy Spirit is speaking something like that to you. I know it's abstract, but God is calling us to do sometimes that thing that's so hard. And I just believe with you that if you do this in faith and pray over it, that God will turn it into something great. Father, we love you and we thank you. I pray even now that you'd break every chain that's here, God. Your people have been through enough. I pray, Lord, that you'd send your Holy Spirit to remove burdens and destroy yokes. But in these moments that we face hardship, Lord, give us heart. Give us heart, Lord, to face the thing that we're called to do. Lord, we love you and we thank you for your joy. Thank you that you called us to be happy students of Jesus, and that is what we are. We love you. It's in Christ' name we pray, amen.