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GOOD MORNING/INVOCATION – Bobby & Hannah

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

HS: Yes, good morning church family and visitors. We really love being with you. Thank you for being here. Concern and worrying will not change a situation, but prayer and faith will. So let's enter in this morning with a full wholehearted worship and faith. Thank you for being here. We love you.

BS: Amen. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, thank you so much for your Holy Spirit. Thank you, God that you're here now. We're praying in Jesus' name for all the trials and things we face, that Lord, you would have the victory first, but second, that we would come out of every victory stronger, more full of wisdom, more full of life. Lord, we love you and we thank you. We're gathered here to worship the name of Jesus, and it's in His name we pray, all God's people said, amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – James 1:2-9 – Hannah Schuller

Would you open your Bibles with me to James 1:2-9. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

INTERVIEW – Paul Daugherty (PD) with Bobby Schuller (BS)

Paul Daugherty is a pastor, author, and songwriter. He and his wife, Ashley, currently serve as the Lead Pastors of Victory Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His songwriting has been featured on several worship albums, including a couple of personal albums. He's written multiple books, and his newest book, *Mind Games: Winning the Battle for Your Mental and Emotional Health*, helps readers find victory in the midst of anxiety and depression.

BS: Paul, welcome! How are you, my friend? It's great to see you.

PD: Hey, I'm doing good. Great to see you, too. Thanks for having me on.

BS: So Paul and I have been great friends. I want to encourage you, if you live in or around Tulsa, Oklahoma, to visit my friend Paul Daugherty at Victory and we're hearing a lot of good things about what you all are doing down there.

And for those who maybe aren't super familiar with your story, you're a young pastor, you've got a huge church and God is doing amazing things in your life. Why don't you tell people a little bit about how you got where you are and what's happening in Victory.

PD: So my dad and mom started the church in 1981. It quickly became one of the fastest growing churches in the nation. I was born in 1985, so by the time I was born, they were renting out the largest arena in our city, Oral Roberts University Maybe Center, and I grew up in this mega church, this huge ministry. My dad and mom started a school, a camp, a college, a dream center to help the poor in our city. And then in 2009, the year before he passed away, he built this 5,000 seat auditorium. We were a mobile church for 25 years, or 28 years, and then all of a sudden this auditorium's built in Tulsa, and then he dies tragically of cancer.

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And when he died, I had been the youngest of four siblings, serving in the church. When you're a pastor's kid, you're free labor, and so I just served every day, and I had finally come on staff the year before he passed, as the college pastor, and I felt the Lord leading me that one day I would help my parents pastor this church, I just didn't know what that looked like. And so when he passed away, I remember hearing just the Holy Spirit telling me, Paul, get ready. You're going to pastor this church and you're going to lead these people, and the best days are not behind you. They're still in front of you. And that was something I felt in my heart a word from God, and yet we walked through so much pain. For the next five years, we lost thousands of people, they left the church, they left the school by the droves. And my mom stepped in as an interim pastor during that time, and she led our church for about four and a half years through all of the loss, and all of the difficulty.

And so then I step in in 2014, and I remember during that time just feeling like is there going to be anything left when I step in? Because the board and my mom had told me, hey Paul, you're called to pastor this church, but you're really young. I was in my 20's, early 20's, and so I said okay, I'll wait until its time. But I felt like it was something I was called to do. And long story short, I tell the whole story in my book, Mind Games, which I just came out with, but basically my wife and I felt this calling to pastor people and really help people win the battle between the ears, that the battle for out here is won between the ears.

And so I start preaching in 2014, stepped in as the lead pastor, our church was in a really rough place. By the goodness of God, we were able to regrow. We had laid off 200 employees during that time across all the entities: the school, the church, the college, the camp. I met you the year I stepped in as pastor at a Joel Osteen event..

BS: That's right.

PD: ..and both of us felt like just overwhelmed, we felt like..

BS: I had just started, too. I remember that, yes.

PD: ..we had just started and we were both like needing encouragement, and Joel looked at you and me, we were both sitting at a table, and he said God's not finished with you guys. God's not finished with your family.

BS: That's right.

PD: God's not finished with your churches. And I grabbed hold of that because I was like God, mentally and emotionally I felt defeated. In my new book, I tell the story of a night I stood on a bridge, and I contemplated taking my life, and I was feeling overwhelmed with depression, I was overwhelmed with fear. For me, depression is like I walked into a house, I went down into the basement, I found another door, went to another basement, another basement. So when I describe depression in the book, I say I was seven basements below where everybody else was at. I was not happy, I was not excited about life, I didn't know how to enjoy anything. I had lost a sense of like wanting to live. And so in the book, I talk about the pain of the church led to my own mental and emotional pain, my marriage, my family. My wife and I, we had miscarriage, and so walked through all of this, and by the grace of God, we were able to see everything turn around to where now the church is in a great place. The school – I thought we were going to have to shut down all of these things. I talk about in the book this fear of just like I'm going to be a failure, I'm going to fail my dad's legacy, just all the feelings of insecurity and fear and anxiety and panic attacks and depression and suicidal thoughts. And so that's kind of my journey, my story and so fast forward 2024, been pastoring for 10 years, I got five kids, we're healthy, we're good, we're thankful.

BS: I remember that time at Joel Osteen's event, and it was pivotal for me, too, and I feel like it almost like kind of bonded us as friends. I remember your story, too, thinking how similar your story and Joel's story is in the way that his dad died when he was young, and they didn't know who was going to take over. And your dad, Billy Joe Daugherty was and is a legend in the faith. And when he died, I remember there were shock waves because nobody knew he was sick. He was like in his 50's, wasn't he? He was a relatively young guy for how successful he was, probably in the prime of ministry. Died of cancer. And everybody was just like what? And of course for you, too, I mean I feel like you probably didn't have time to say goodbye to your dad, whom I sure you're super close to, and so it's interesting when you go through these things in life, these shocking events that just grab us. I'm excited about your book, Mind Games because this is where it all begins. Tell us more about that. Tell us more about how success in life, having victory in life, in your walk with God, it's not just about overcoming depression, right? There's other things that are going on. A lot of people don't struggle with depression, but they're still fumbling up in their mind games.

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PD: Yes, and I talk about in the book how even like success can lead to depression, can lead to trauma, can lead to just feelings of burnout. So like there's all kinds of levels of mind games. Even after writing this book, I faced the mind games of like is this book going to be good? Will it impact anybody? So we face the mind games of wanting to impress people, wanting to live a life that we feel like we're proud of, and then asking those questions in our head, like am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing? Am I doing good at what I'm supposed to be doing? Am I supposed to be doing something else? And all of the mind bubbles that we draw in our head on a daily basis. So I just talk about insecurity, I talk about the fear of man, I talk about the fear of failure, what stops us from taking risks in life, what stops us from living with faith, what keeps us in a holding pattern of anxiety. I talk about in the book how do we get through those things? How do we come out on the other side and win the games so that if we can win in here, then we can start winning out here. And I've heard you talk about this on your social media posts that you address. So many people in the church are afraid to talk about mental health and emotional health, and yet, that should be the safest place for us to talk about these things. But let's find some tools that can help pastors, churches, congregation members walk in victory in their mind.

BS: There's a story of a 28-year-old guy who jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge and he survived, but he said that as he jumped from the bridge, he was 28, he felt totally overwhelmed by life, and as he jumped, he realized that all of the problems in his life he thought were unsolvable, were totally solvable, except for the fact that he just jumped from a bridge. And very often, I think that's a good thing that we understand that sometimes we're overwhelmed, it's good to just like step back, and you're helping people do that. I want to encourage you if you're watching right now and you need some encouragement, some help in your own mind games, and if you want to understand how your thoughts change your world, and if you want victory in life, get a copy of Mind Games by my friend Pastor Paul Daugherty. Paul, thank you so much. We appreciate you, my friend. God bless you.

PD: Thank you, Bobby. Thanks for having me.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Would you stand with us? We're going to say this creed together as we do every week. Hold your hands like this as a way of receiving from the Lord. Let's say this together: I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with my neighbor. Thanks so much, you can be seated.

MESSAGE/PRAYER – If You Want More, Become More

Today, I want to ask an interesting question. If you're in business, it might be a fun question for you. How do you create a profitable, although not successful, gym? Good question. This question was asked years ago by a business we call Planet Fitness.

Now before we get to Planet Fitness, I want to ask you this question: what does it mean to have a successful gym? Well, when I think of a successful gym, I think of a gym full of people! People working out, people getting healthy, people reaching whatever their fitness goals might be, maybe losing some weight, maybe just feeling better, maybe getting more flexible. Hey, maybe just meeting some other gym rats, or whatever, that's what they're called. Having testimonies, having energy. Now that's a successful gym.

But that's not the question this business asked. They asked how do we create a profitable gym, and here's what they found out is get memberships from all the people that don't go to gyms. Why is that? Because people who actually go to the gym cost us money! So Planet Fitness put it together – wait a second, if we can get people to subscribe to our gym and never come, we're going to make tons of money.

So here's what they did. They literally say, don't come to our gym if you're into gyms. Come to our gym if you're a beginner. Nothing wrong with that. I still remember seeing once at a Planet Fitness, they had a pizza day for all the newcomers. Come get your pizza. They have this thing in the gym called a lunk alarm. That means if you drop any weights in the gym, this big alarm goes off to embarrass the lunk. Now keep in mind, when you work out with weights, you're actually taught that sometimes you're supposed to drop them. If a weight is too heavy for you, you don't want to lower it with your body because you can injure yourself, so you drop it, right? And so anybody who's into working out with weights, well they don't want to go there and be embarrassed, right, if they drop the weight. So they have a lunk alarm.

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And apparently they give a trophy for your first heart attack. No, I'm just kidding. I made that one up. I made that up. I made that one up.

But here's what they predicted. They said hey, if we can get people to join our gym and just pay us \$10 a month and it's always there if you want to use it, we think we can make a super, super profitable gym, and guess what, it worked. The average Planet Fitness has thousands and thousands of members who pay ten bucks a month and never go. And by the way, how do you get back at Planet Fitness? You go. Get back at them, okay.

Here's what's annoying about this story for all of us. It's this: we human beings are so predictable. There is this weird thing about a human being that they'll keep paying month after month, never going, but always thinking every time they think of canceling, you know what, I'm going to go.

Here's what I learned, which is a weird thing, is that people don't leave gyms, they just stop going. And I learned this a long time ago about churches. See, when I started churches, I thought that I would preach a sermon, and it'd make somebody mad and they'd leave. Or I would drive the church a certain way and people wouldn't support that, so they'd go to another church, and that almost never, ever happens. What I found out is that people don't leave churches, they just stop going.

And then I started to see in life that there are many things in life that we as humans, we don't leave, we just stop. People don't leave their calling, they just stop showing up for their calling. People don't leave their spouse and their family, typically, they just stop showing up for their spouse and their family. People don't leave this or leave that, they just stop showing up.

Today, what I want to talk about is the importance of showing up, the importance of seeing these stressors as a good thing, and to not live a Planet Fitness kind of Christian walk, amen? We beat Planet Fitness by actually going.

And Jesus describes to us that life is available to everyone. But there's two roads. There's no middle road, there's no middle average road, there's two roads. One's super easy, and that leads to death, and what He means by that is not just death, but it means a dead kind of life. And then there's another life, a narrow road, and that leads to zoe, eternal life, the fullness of life. The kind of life you were born to have.

So if you come here today and you want to be more alive, you have to understand that between you and that life remains a narrow road for every human being, and it's one of the most annoying things about being a human, is that we need the narrow road.

It's amazing, in the United States right now has the highest GDP, it's a market indicator, or economic indicator of economic health for a country. Highest GDP of any country in human history. Many people can make the effective argument that the United States, in turn, has the highest quality of life of any civilization in human history. You can say this about many other modern countries. And yet, at the same time, with all of that money this country is making, and all of that quality, we have the highest debt of any country in human history. Isn't that weird?

Here's what we learn from that – abundance is harder for us to handle than scarcity. Abundance isn't bad. We serve a God of abundance. But with the abundance, with the blessing, comes a warning that there's also something inside of it that can harm us.

Here's the scriptural warning – it's about comfort. It's not really about riches. When we read about the dangers of riches, what that's really talking about for the ancient reader is the person who has enough to stay in their comfort zone constantly. Here's what the scriptural warning really is, is that comfort can be bad for us if we have too much of it. I think we all know that. I think we all know pizza parties don't belong at gyms. And yet there's this thing that we're drawn to it. Comfort can be, isn't always, but can be bad for us. It can be bad for our families. It can be bad for our country. It can be bad for our walk with God. It can be bad for our health and it can be bad for our faith.

So how do we reconcile that? And with that, we turn to James 1, which is over there, but it's going to be on the screen so I'll read it from the screen. James chapter 1, verse 2. "Consider it".. I know this is an annoying passage. This was picked for me in 1992 by a bunch of Presbyterians, okay? I'm just going with it, all right? "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." Who wants perseverance? Nobody wakes up in the morning going oh, I want to get some perseverance today, right?

But here's what perseverance does. It says "let perseverance finish its work" why? "So that you can be mature, you can be complete" by the way, that word complete is a huge word in Greek in philosophy and in the Bible – teleios. It's the same word that Jesus uses when He says be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

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It doesn't mean that you're perfect like you do everything perfectly, it means you're perfected. It's like when a puzzle piece finishes a puzzle. It's like your life is what it's meant to be – complete. Okay. So you can be mature, you can be teleios or complete, “not lacking anything,” an echo back to Psalm 23. So see that's the promise of perseverance – maturity, wholeness on the inside and sort of inner peace, and not lacking anything. “If any of you lacks wisdom, ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it'll be given to you.” Isn't that interesting? Now I would think if I wanted wisdom, I would read a book. But here the Bible is telling us if you're going through trials, and you need to get through, and you need some wisdom, what do you do? What do you do? Ask God. You ask for it and He'll give it to you.

Isn't it amazing how many times when you're going through a trial, you're trying to solve the problem yourself, you're trying to fix it yourself, you're trying to do it yourself, and then you stop and you pray and you go God, I just need some wisdom, and very often just BLOOP right there, there it is. You got what you needed. “But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt.” Why? “Because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double minded and unstable in all they do.” So when we live a life of doubt and disbelief, we become like a wave that causes harm to other people, like an agent of chaos. I have been that person before, I've been around that type of person before. So, the first question we want to ask at the beginning of this thing, “consider it pure joy when you face trials,” here's a good question: how do trials create joy? I don't think of trials really creating.. when I'm going through a trial, I'm like yeah, I'm going through a bankruptcy or lawsuit. Right? Nobody thinks that. But in order to get to the bottom of this important statement, why don't we invert the question.

Here's a good exercise: how does the lack of trial create despair? I've been a pastor for many years now, part of our job is to observe people. We're like doctors with patients. We watch people lead their lives, and we want to apply the word of God to give guidance to people as they walk, and here's what I've noticed: people without problems are often in despair. Isn't that weird? How can it be that a person with no problems in a room that has a perfect temperature, air conditioning and heating, has three square meals every day, delicious meals, and maybe doesn't even have a job, but has enough money and can watch TV all day, has limitless internet, how is it that that person can be full of despair? That's a good question. And my hope is at the end of this lecture is to hopefully get to the bottom of that question.

I think many of us can see that. Can see that the comfortable person often falls into despair. So why? Here's why – we all really want a meaningful life. A meaningful life. Not a relaxed life, necessarily, a meaningful life. You want a meaningful life? Unfortunately, it doesn't come cheap. There's a cost to a meaningful life, and this is it: the greatest source of meaning for human beings is responsibility. Just think about it. And responsibility comes with trials. Trials.

First dog, I remember my first dog, Mya Puppies, and I was so excited to have this little puppy. That's some responsibility for a boy is to have a dog. And I did not picture any of the trials. I didn't picture poop, I didn't picture feeding him, I didn't picture him howling at three in the morning because he wants to get out of whatever, the garage, or wants to come into the house. And yet, that dog was my best friend. What a great experience, right? See, isn't that weird how responsibility and trials.

First children. I remember, gosh, all of you who are parents, no matter how good your kids are, having children is a trial. Just even a baby, taking care of a baby, the cost of diapers, being up all night. My friend Evelyn Freed who I just saw, I don't know if she's still there. Oh she's hiding behind the camera. Says parenting is a life sentence. That's right, Evelyn. Yes, and we all feel that. And yet, what parent who loves their children would want to be without their children, and the answer is almost no parent would want that. And so with children, right? Trials? But what? Children, relationships, the heart of your life. When something's wrong with your kids, all the other peripheral things that you thought was a big deal, it just shrinks to whatever is going on with your kids.

And for those of you who don't have kids, even still, if you have a mission, maybe you're going on a missionary trip, or you're going on a humanitarian aid trip, you're going to face all sorts of trials. If you're a leader, you're going to face trials. If you have a project you love, you're going to face trials. Then why do it? Why do these things? Because that's what life is all about. Going for it, caring for someone, making an impact, creating something. It comes with trials, and those trials are just part of the package. Again, how does a lack of trial create despair in a person? It creates despair because deep down inside that person is lacking meaning in their life.

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The resume at the end of your life is really going to be a collection of all of the hard things you did. Isn't that interesting? So why avoid hard things?

Think about all the hard things that you faced ten years ago, and how hard that was when you were going through that challenge. And think about how it feels now. That's how it'll feel ten years from now when you're going through hard times or whatever.

It's interesting because very often at a funeral, like I went to a funeral not long ago, I had a friend in his 50's, and this is so true, is that so many rich kids, many of them do very well, and some of them don't do very well at all, and it seems to be almost in the extremes. I had a friend in his 50's who died a few years ago, very young, a surprise nobody expected it; he just had a heart attack, and it was interesting because he came from a very, very wealthy family, but he was also beloved by so many people. They had five people speak, and four of them did a very, very good job, but there was one guy who was probably like his fun friend, and in his story, he talked about all the fun things they did, and he said 'my friend,' this guy, we'll call him John, 'John went on over 200 ski trips.' And then 'John ate at every five star restaurant in Southern California.' And as he kept going on like this, it weirdly felt sad in a bad way. It just was not fitting. There was something about it that felt weird. I was thinking to myself, I didn't come to John's funeral because of his eccentric diet. I thought to myself, I came because he touched my life. He touched my life. We experienced it.. probably a trial together. So the point is this – that although fun is great, meals are great, traveling is great, all this stuff is great, at the end of life, it'll be the impact we made, the responsibility we took on, the trials we faced, the dragons we slayed, the projects we built, that's what's really going to matter. And even when we're going through it, it feels overwhelming sometimes, you're like I just need a break, I want to encourage you, my friend, you and God will get through this together.

Here's the scriptural warning. So often we see in scripture warnings to the rich, but a better way for a modern person to read that is not being rich, but being comfortable. Every person that reads something about the rich in the Bible thinks well not me. I'm thinking of the person richer than I. I met a billionaire who told me he wasn't rich. Did I tell you that story? I won't tell you again, because I've told it too many times. But he literally said to me, I got into the billionaires club, but I don't feel rich because I'm not like Bill Gates.

So, all of that to say 90%, if not more, of the people in this very room would be considered rich in the Roman world that Jesus was born into. Any person in the Roman world that is guaranteed three square meals, air conditioning, Novocain, commercial flights, two cars, is considered in that world richer than the emperor. So to be rich in Jesus' mind was a life in which you could be relatively comfortable most of the time, which is not something that really existed until the industrial era in human history.

All of that to simply say, the dangers for the rich are dangers for most Americans because the danger is really about being comfortable in the midst of your calling for God's kingdom. Again, not that comfort is a sin, and we all need some creature comforts, nothing wrong with that, and there's nothing wrong with being rich, but just a warning, watch out when your life gets too comfortable, you might be missing the mark.

John Mark, who wrote the gospel of Mark, was rich. Lydia from the book of Acts was rich. Even the Apostle Paul, there's some indicators that he might have been, at the very least, well to do. Most Pharisees were well to do or wealthy. He was a Pharisee. And we can see that he was traveling all around constantly. That's an expensive thing to do. So it's not necessarily bad. What's dangerous is what? The need for comfort. The constant desire to be comfortable.

One of my favorite philosophers, famous philosopher Seneca, who was actually born the same year that Jesus was born in Rome, was a funny guy because he was one of the richest guys in the world, and yet he was writing all of his famous letters and books about how great it was to be poor. Here's this guy, as Taleb said, writing from one of his five hundred desks, and hundreds of villas around the world, about how great it is to be poor. But see Seneca understood something. One time he was in a shipwreck, and the adventure he had from that shipwreck getting home was so beneficial to him, he made it a regular rhythm to get in a shipwreck and to wander and find his way home. Smart guy. He did this other practice where two or three times a month he would dress up and act like a pauper and leave all of his money and go to a random town, and just exist there as a homeless person, and here's what he would say to himself: is this what you so feared, oh Seneca. See? To train his life to not be dependent on comfort, even though he was very, very wealthy.

All of this to say, and this was his quote, and it's often been attributed to JFK, Jim Rohn sure said it a lot, my grandpa said it and quoted them.

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Here's what he said: don't wish it was easier, wish you were stronger. And that is the point of the message today. That is the point of what's happening in James. We get joy in our life when we get stronger, not when it gets easier. We get happy in life when we become more capable, when we're full of the skills and the knowledge and the wisdom, and most of all, the spirit of God, which shines the brightest as a fire when we're facing obstacles.

In Christ, stressors make us stronger. Troubles make us stronger. Challenges make us stronger. Setbacks make us stronger. They give us more faith, they give us more hope, they give us the advice we can give to our neighbors when they're going through struggles. They give us the kind of skills we need to go even farther in life. And most of all, they give us an inner calm every time we get through it where we can say to ourselves, God's got this.

Anybody need a reminder today that God's got this? Maybe you're being sued, maybe you're going through a financial problem, maybe you're going through a health problem, a relationship problem, maybe you just lost someone, and you are like I cannot handle this on my own. You're right. You don't have to handle it on your own. God's got this. He's got the whole world in His hands. Who in this room is included in the whole world? And let me tell you, my friend, He loves you more than you love yourself. He's more worried about.. or not worried, He's concerned about your problems more than you are. He's got this solved.

What God is asking from us is to not shy away from the trial, but to get stronger, to get better, to get the skills, to get the wisdom. Life gets better when you get better. And you can get better! There's no limit to the person you can become if you work on yourself.

Isn't it strange, everything in life that is a life, benefits from stressors? A tree gets all its branches cut off. What do we call that? Pruning, and BOOM, the tree comes to life in a new way. Saw a documentary about a wine maker who said the key to making delicious grapes for wine is to put the grape under stress. Give it just barely enough water and barely enough sunshine. It has to struggle, and that's how you create great grapes.

Recent studies have shown that older people who do Sudoku, which is very taxing on the mind, because you have to think. It's like a math problems in puzzles; that they don't age as much in the mind as other people do.

Here's a question: if a fire is burning in the wilderness, how does a fire ever go out? How come the whole world doesn't burn down when there's a big massive fire in the forest? How does it go out? The answer is, it runs out of obstacles. That's how fires go out, I mean before smoke jumpers. Remember those guys?

You know I was going to bring Marcus Aurelius into the chat. Here's what he said: the burning fire makes flames and brightness out of everything thrown at it. Here, here. How much more than the Christian who's full of the fire of the Holy Spirit. Amen! If you got the fire of God in you, then the things that are thrown at you are going to make you brighter. They're going to make you hotter. They're going to make you better. Amen. In fact I would argue, if we ask the question when was the church at its best, and when is a church at its worst, we would probably say the church was at its worst when it was the most comfortable. And the church was at its best when it was being persecuted.

Here's what Tertullian said, the famous saying, when he was watching his friends and his family and his heroes being killed and murdered. Wonderful saying: the blood of martyrs is seed. Now does Tertullian want blood? Does he want death? Absolutely not. But this was a comfort to him. He saw that the more that Christians were persecuted, the faster the church grew. Interesting.

Okay. All of this to say for you, I know this is a little annoying if you're going through tough times, but just let me remind you, the absence of stressors or challenge degrades the best of us. We know that sitting for long periods actually causes harm than working and using your body. We know that today more people are dying from over nutrition than under nutrition. We know today that most back pain is caused because people have stopped using their backs. Isn't that strange? In fact, I used to have kind of like chronic lower back pain. Here's how I got rid of it – I started doing dead lifts. Supposed to be the opposite. My doctor told me not to do it, and a friend of mine said it would work, and my friend was right. My lower back was weak and when I started working it out, my back pain went away. Now keep in mind I was only 30, but.. so all of us face different things.

But all that to simply say, a smooth sea never made a great sailor, amen? Life will not get easier for you until you get stronger. But as you get stronger, life does get easier.

If You Want More, Become More

As you get smarter, as you have the experiences, as you face the trials, as you grow, life does get easier and life does get better, and that's where the hope is. Life gets easier when you get stronger, so don't ask for it to get easier, ask that God would make you stronger.

Ask for more from life! Ask for more experiences, and more memories. Ask for more and you'll become more. Amen. Do hard things. Just do the hard things. Do hard things, and life gets easier. Do easy things, and life gets harder. Hard choices, easy life. Easy choices, hard life. That was Jerzy Gregoric who said that. Don't chase fun, chase purpose, and the fun will just come along. I realized that a long time ago. Don't avoid the difficulty, just rise up and meet it.

And with that, it brings us to our kids. How shall we raise our kids? I'm so tempted as a parent to protect my kids from everything, to solve all their problems, to make sure they never face a danger, a trial or a difficulty. But recent studies from, especially Jonathan Haidt at NYU are showing that this is creating an anxious generation that because we don't allow our kids to explore, to solve their problems, to make mistakes, to mess up, they're turning into anxious adults who rely on their parents. The lack of exploring, lack of independence, lack of social media.

When I was a kid, they used to say 'don't talk to strangers.' But take this with a grain of salt and some wisdom, but I've started to teach my kids, talk to as many strangers as you can. We can all debate this afterwards. But I think it's great for kids to talk to strangers.

In Disney's "Tangled," there's a story about Rapunzel. The villain in Rapunzel's a woman named Gothel, she's a witch, and she abducts little baby Rapunzel and pretends that Rapunzel's her actual daughter. As a teenager, this villain mother uses Rapunzel's youth to keep herself, Gothel, young. And this is what so many parents today are doing. Some parents are just scared for their kids. There's other parents who are saying I'm not going to let my kids make the mistakes I made. I'm not going to let my kids go through hard times. And yet weirdly we harm our kids when we do that. That's a temptation for me.

I remember when I was in first grade, my dad had me walking to school two miles each way in first grade. And I remember when I was.. I think it was fifth grade, my mom would like drop me off at the train and be like here's \$20, I'd just get on the train and go to San Juan Capistrano. Did anything bad ever happen to me? And the answer is not really. I experienced life, and I'm so grateful. And now the idea of doing that with my kids, I'm like OH! How our world has changed.

What am I getting at? Another Disney story. I'll get to my main point, but another story. "Sword in the Stone." Not as well known, young Arthur, Wart, he's supposed to be King Arthur's.. is mentored by Merlin, and what does Merlin do to make him into a man, to make him into a king, into a winner? What does he do? He puts him in constant danger. Turns him into a fish, almost gets eaten. Right? Turns him into a bird, almost gets eaten again. Turns him into a squirrel, and another squirrel falls in love with him, and I'm not going to lie, those of you who've seen it, that female squirrel was very attractive for a cartoon squirrel. And I'm not saying I'm into squirrels, I'm just saying that he had to break up with her, and that takes something, too, where he has to say look, if I was a squirrel, we could totally be a couple, but I'm not a squirrel, I'm a boy, and da, da, da, da, da. She's crying. She's not hearing. He's trying to comfort her. Merlin's like you did your thing, just have to go.

Here's my point – my point is this – I think we're all nodding. This is how we kind of feel like we want to raise our kids. We want our kids to experience these things, the difficulty, the trial. We don't want them to get hurt, but we want them to experience, to explore, to do.

So then why not for ourselves? When did we stop exploring? When did we stop talking to strangers? When did we stop facing danger and stop facing risk, stop taking chances, and when did we stop turning towards rejection and fighting dragons? It's hard to pinpoint, isn't it. There's just somewhere in most adult's life where we just stop doing that.

Do it again. Touch more lives. Experience more danger. Take more risks. Risk rejection. Risk difficulty. Risk your job. Why not? Risk a business, risk a ministry, risk a mission, risk a peace of art, why not? Why not? Well, because of trials. Trials bring joy because trials come hand in hand with responsibility and adventure.

Final thought – what about some balance? As Nietzsche said, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. That might be true, but what kills you won't make you stronger, right? You don't want to die. And many of us, we feel like we're going through like Chinese torture where it's that just drip on the forehead constantly, and you're like when is this going to stop? That's not good, either.

So, church is not meant to be a place for stressors and rejection and failure and difficulty. What do we call this building that we're meeting in? Some call it a church, but it's actually called a sanctuary. A place we can come to get a break from it all.

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And in many ways that's the point of Sabbath, of Sunday, of resting, is we come here to recharge, to encourage one another. See, this is where churches mess up. Too many churches think this is the place to beat up on people, this is the place to reject people, this is a place to make people feel guilty. As a pastor, I assume you feel guilty enough already, am I right? As a pastor, I assume you're tired enough already, am I right? That you're failed enough already. So what do we do here? We comfort each other, we fill that tank, we draw close to God, and then we leave here full of energy to take on the world, and we come back here and we recharge again. This is where we recharge our batteries. This is a place of rest and recovery.

So my last encouragement is to you is when you come here, rest. Don't judge people, just love people, and enjoy good meals together, and then when you go out there, just give it all you've got. Face every trial, face every monster, face every dragon. Be bold in your life. Don't be timid. Give it all you've got, and then come back here and recharge. Amen? That's what Shepherd's Grove is, a place to recharge.

All right. Final thought, I think it's my eighth final thought. Final thought: so often in life, because we feel guilty, it feels like we're running a race with a parachute on. Too many people, even if you're a believer, you don't really believe God loves you or He's forgiven you. Many of us, we're carrying this weird past with us everywhere we go. Cut that parachute off today. Be at peace with God. Jesus laid His life down on the cross that you could be saved. I want to encourage you today to believe in Him and you'll be saved and your home will be in heaven, and you can get rid of that burden, get rid of those wet socks of all the guilt and shame, just let go of that, and do your best and forget the rest, and trust in the Lord, amen? If you make a decision to follow Christ today, I want you to text me the word HOPE to the number on the screen.

Lord, we're asking that you'd make us stronger. That you'd make us smarter, that you'd give us the skills, that you'd give us the wisdom, that you'd give us the answer, that you have the solution; that you have all that we need. And Lord, we thank you, God, in Jesus' name that you love us, and that you're for us, and that you've not abandoned us, and it's in Jesus' name we pray, all God's people said, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

Amen. Great. 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 and give you His peace, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.