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HOUR OF POWER OF 19.04.2009

PROGRAM OPENING/TRUMPET FANFARE/V.O.

VO: Today on the Hour of Power: Filmmaker Dan Merchant traveled the country wearing a suit filled with religious and anti-religious bumper stickers to find out just how people view Christians, and is that different than how they view Jesus?

DAN: The idea behind the bumper sticker man suit was a conversation starter. What's amazing is that people don't seem to have a problem with Jesus. The Christians got a bit of a mixed review, unfortunately. Jesus doesn't.

VO: Also today, a terrific Christian artist, Jeannette Bayardelle.

JEANNETTE: In every life God has given it destiny though it's not plain to see there's a way to take.

VO: Then an Hour of Power favorite pastor Bill Hybels returns with a powerful message for all us who from time to time feel hopeless, alone and far from God.

BILL: That's how God lives, that's how God's heart beats for every missing son and daughter with regard to those who are far from Him, those who are outside the family. He doesn't care skin color, He doesn't care what they've been through, He doesn't care, He just cares that they're missing, you see.

VO: Join us today for the best hour on television, the Hour of Power from the Crystal Cathedral.

HYMN - "Joyful, Joyful.."

Joyful, joyful, we adore You, God of glory, Lord of love; Hearts unfold like flowers before You, opening to the sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; Drive the dark of doubt away; Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day. Amen! Amen! Amen!

OPENING SENTENCE - RHS

RHS: This is the day that God has made! We're going to rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

HYMN - "Medley – Praise to the Lord/Great is Thy Faithfulness"

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the God of creation! O my friend, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation! To all who hear, now to His temple draw near, join me in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, Who in all things is always beside you; As on the wings of an eagle, He surely will guide you. His own He keeps; He neither slumbers nor sleeps, under His wings He will hide you.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him! All who have life and breath come now with praises before Him! Let the Amen sound from His people again; Gladly, always we adore Him.

Great is Your faithfulness! Great is Your faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed, Your hand has provided. Great is Your faithfulness, Lord unto me!

SCRIPTURE – Philippians 4:4-9 - RHS

RHS: You may be seated. The scripture this morning is read from the New Testament where Paul repeats his usual opening line. Listen to what Paul wrote: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to all people for the Lord is at your hand. Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will bless your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

Finally, to you whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report if there's any virtue and if there's anything praise worthy meditate on these things; The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in Me. These do and the God of peace will be with you.

This is the word of the Lord.

ANTHEM - "How Glorious is Your Name"

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your name through all the earth! O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your name throughout the earth!

Your glory adorns the heavens above, displayed in the dawn as it breaks through the clouds. The voices of children chanting proclaim Your glory and Your splendor, and silence Your foes, and silence Your foes.

When I behold, when I behold the heavens, the work of Your hands, the moon and the stars You have set in place; Who are we, who are we that You are mindful of us, and our children, that You take care of them?

You have made us a little lower than the angels; And adorned us with glory and honor. You have given us dominion over Your handiwork. You have laid the world at our feet.

All the animals that roam the earth, the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the ways of the water, all are gifts, all are gifts, all are gifts from You.

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your Name throughout the earth! O Lord, our Lord, how glorious, how glorious is Your Name throughout the earth! O Lord!

INTERVIEW – DAN MERCHANT

RHS: ROBERT H. SCHULLER DM: DAN MERCHANT

RHS: And now my special guest today is Dan Merchant. Dan spent a few years of his life traveling around the country and has become known as bumper sticker man. He's wearing an appropriate bumper sticker. He simply went around this country asking people what do they think about Jesus. What do they think about Christians? And he began a loving dialogue with members of different faiths and he details his journey in a new film called, "Lord Save Us from Your Followers." Take a look at a clip we have up on the Jumbotron.

(VIDEO ROLL IN)

DAN: This division, this separate-ness isn't getting any of us anywhere so I set out across the nation divided to stimulate a conversation with anybody willing to have one. But what impression does America have of Christians?

MALES: Forgiving. Going to church. Fanaticism.

FEMALE: Being really snobby. To be holy, I guess.

MALES: Selective hatred and tolerance. Try to live the right life, try and do the right thing. They're a lot of hypocrites. Historically.. warfare but we try to forget about that.

DAN: Name something that Jesus Christ is known for.

MALES: I'd say forgiveness. Forgiveness.

FEMALES: Saving the world.

MALES: Christmas.

FEMALES: Loves.

MALES: Jesus saves. Dying for mankind. Turning water into wine.

FEMALES: Caring for the least of people. People in greatest distress.

DAN: Name something Jesus Christ is known for.

MALES: Healing the sick, loving the poor.

(END OF VIDEO ROLL IN)

RHS: What a trip he's made!

DM: Thank you.

RHS: Dan's been featured on the Today Show with Matt Lauer, USA Today, has been invited to speak at some of the most liberal academic institutions in the United States and he also has a book out called Lord, Save us from Your Followers. Very important title. Why the gospel of love is dividing America. Welcome now Dan Merchant as he answers my blunt questions. What did you find out?

DM: You know what, I found out many things. One of the most important things I found out is that for many of us in the faith we don't know how we sound to other people. We don't know how we sound to people who don't share our faith and that creates a communication breakdown and I think that's part of the divisiveness we've been seeing in America in recent years is because of that communication failure.

RHS: I agree. I can take off and preach a sermon on that but what in the world, that's my next question, what is this suit you're wearing?

DM: Well the idea behind the bumper sticker man suit was a conversation starter. You know as the divisive rhetoric has gone around our country in recent years, it's been very difficult to have a conversation about politics, religion, you know they say you're not supposed to be able to talk about those things in polite company but I beg to differ. You wear a suit like this, it somehow is possible. The trick to this bumper sticker man suit is basically it represents competing ideologies. As you'll notice I have the Jesus fish and the Darwin fish. I have pro life and pro choice. I have pro Christian and anti Christian. And so on the street, people would come up to me and you know they'd see a bumper sticker that they agreed with or recognized and smile and then they'd see one that they'd firmly disagreed with and they'd kind of short circuit and the next thing you know, we're having a conversation about America and faith and Jesus and as we saw in the clip, what's amazing is that people don't seem to have a problem with Jesus. The Christians got a bit of a mixed review, unfortunately. Jesus doesn't. Even the demon bat guy seems to get Jesus, you know, he understood that Jesus was about healing the sick and loving the poor. That's what He meant to him. And I was fascinated by that that a guy who dresses up like a bizarre character from Lord of the Rings thinks Christians are about warfare, but he understood that Jesus was about love and forgiveness and salvation and boy there's a lesson in there.

RHS: What do you think is so important about our conversing specifically with non-believers and non-Christians? Isn't that true?

DM: Yeah, no absolutely, well you know we are called to be the body of Christ.

RHS: Now why doesn't everybody in America want to join the movement?

DM: Well unfortunately I'm afraid we're not showing them our best side. I'll speak for myself. I know I've spent unfortunately too much effort trying to be right about everything. Trying to win the arguments rather than trying to connect with people and trying frankly to represent the body of Christ as I'm instructed to do. I mean the new commandment after you know the last supper the Lord tells us to love one another. Wow! What do I do with that? Love your neighbor as yourself? I'm supposed to love somebody else as much as I love myself? How do I do that? Well those things are difficult and I'm afraid we've maybe brushed them by a little bit and you know there's not as many examples out there as there should be. You know the Pope Jubilee speech where he apologizes for the sins of the Catholic Church. A fellow I watched on TV as a kid who would sign off with God loves you and so do I. You know things like that.

RHS: Is that me?

DM: That's right. As my memory serves.

RHS: I didn't know you were young enough to be watching.

DM: My mother and my grandmother watched every week, as a matter of fact, and those words rang with me. So what if Christians were known not for what we're against, but known for the love? Known for what we're commanded to do? I think it would change some things. And so that's the conversation we're trying to start with Lord Save Us from Your Followers.

RHS: What is your ministry?

DM: Well I'm a filmmaker. I'm a goofy guy who dresses up like this so I wrote a book about this and my background is in television and film. And in this "Lord Save us from Your Followers" film was really a meshing of my career as a writer and a director with where I was in my life. I had a trip to Africa, I was on a film shoot in Africa and I met a young man there, an Ethiopian Christian and he explained his faith to me. We were talking hey; you love Jesus, so do I. What he said to me was, and I said please explain it, and he says well my mother she died of AIDS, but not for me. And my father, he also died of AIDS but not for me. But Jesus Christ He died for me. And it knocked me over. You could have knocked me over with a feather because I have to admit to you, the first thought I had after that was wow, this kid sounds like he believes this stuff. And the next thought I had was wait, isn't that what I believe? And I sure wasn't trusting in God the way he was and that was really the start of the "Lord, Save us from Your Followers" journey and boy we've been saying all these words since Sunday school but if we live them and we believe them in a way where we're really willing to let the power and the truth rest on God rather than in my own strength, it changes your life.

RHS: If you want to leave something behind and you want these people to take something from you, number one I'm proud to say that is a new book. Is it on the shelves?

DM: Yeah, yeah the book is out and you can go to lordsaveusthemovie.com to find the movie and the book as well.

RHS: Or they can call this ministry.

DM: Or hourofpower.org as well.

RHS: Very good, but you're into something very important and I congratulate..

DM: Great, thank you Dr. Schuller.

RHS: ..you.

DM: Pleasure to be here.

RHS: Thank you.

DM: Thank you.

RHS: Thank you.

SOLO – JEANNETTE BAYARDELLE – “Try Again”

Like the frost in the winter has to give into spring; Like the heart that’s been broken takes the time to mend; Like a day filled with sunshine sometimes turns into rain there’s a lesson in failure: Simply try again.

In every life God has given it destiny though it’s not plain to see there’s a way to take. Seek His face in all that you do even in times when you make the same mistake. Like a marathon runner knows the distance is long, yet the race isn’t given to the swift nor the strong. It is given to those who will endure till the end. Though the road includes failure, simply try again.

In every life God has given it destiny though it’s not plain to see there’s a way to take. Seek His face in all that you do even in times when you make the same mistake. There’s a place in His promise that’s assigned to my name. Though the road includes failure I will try again. There’s a place in His promise that’s assigned to my name. Though the road includes failure I will try again, I will try again, I will try again, try again.

RHS THANK YOU TO JEANNETTE BAYARDELLE

RHS: Thank you so much.

RHS INTRODUCES BILL HYBELS

RHS: Bill Hybels! Thank you, Bill. I first met you, you were walking out of a theater with some people you brought there for your little class of the bible class, I think. And you’ve gone to the greatest heights for the ministry of Christ that God has called you to. And I tell you, I am so honored that you have not forgotten who we are and that you come to be with us today, Bill. God loves you, so do I. Give it to them.

BH: Thanks!

MESSAGE/PRAYER – BILL HYBELS - "Influence"

BH: Good morning everybody. I think you probably, those of you who at least have walked with Christ for a little while, understand how important the subject matter of influence is. Jesus talked about it a lot. He said that every one of My followers is a person of influence. Every man, woman, every boy and girl, and in one of His key passages, Jesus said think of yourselves as a light and there’s a dark world to ignite. There’s a dark world to light up. Don’t ever put anything over your flame, don’t do anything to curtail your influence, rather figure out what kind of lamp stand you can put your light on so that there can be light as far and as wide as you can possibly make it go.

I’ve been thinking a lot about the subject of influence in the past weeks and months. And one of the little spiritual disciplines that I have is each day when I get up I kneel next to my bed and I turn my hands over and I ask God to use me. I thank Him for another day of life, but I also say God if You want me to cross paths with someone this day, that I could influence, that I could say a word for You, if You would cause that to happen, I want my light to shine. I would like to make an impact, no matter how small, but I’m available if You want to use me in that regard.

A few years back, I said one of those prayers. I was on vacation and I had access to a boat and I decided that that day I was going to take it from the Michigan side of Lake Michigan, which is a very large body of water, all the way over to the Wisconsin side. It was about a hundred miles to take that boat. When I got over to the other side, it was about dinner time, I tidied up the boat, found a slip for it, organized everything and I got the charts out to see where I might go the next day. While I was looking at the charts, I noticed that the little harbor that I had gone into in Wisconsin was only about ten miles from the little Christian camp where I had become a Christian when I was 17 years old. And as I looked at that chart and looked at where that little camp was, I felt a prompting from God, kind of a whisper from the holy spirit and the whisper, as best I could understand it was find your way out to that camp and stand in the place where we met, God speaking. Stand in the place where I changed your life when you were 17 years old. After I prayed about it a few more moments, I thought I really do think this is God whispering. I think this is something He wants me to do. But I had arrived by boat so I had no form of transportation.

So I went to the little marina area there and I asked if I could use the phone. There's one tiny little cab company in that town. I called them and to my dismay they said ten miles was too far for one of their cab drivers to take me. In Chicago, I mean, we take ten mile cab rides for recreation. But this was too far for them, so I pleaded with the dispatcher and I said really I reel like I must go to this camp for reasons I don't need to explain to you but how might I get there? Could you help me? And the woman said well I do know of a guy in this town whose a little down on his luck, and I think he might do just about anything for money. Now that should have been a clue but I took down the number that she graciously gave me and then I made a second call. And by the way this young man answered the phone, I think it was the first phone call he had received that day and I think again it was 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon. I think I maybe awakened him out of a dead sleep. But I described that I just wanted to go ten miles outside of town for just a little while and that I would pay him handsomely if he would do it. And when he heard the word money, just as was suggested to me, he was interested and he said I'll be there in 15 minutes.

Well I got ready and I stood in the parking lot by the marina and in drives a car that looked very unusual to me. No four rims or tires were alike, a couple of the windows were smashed, one of the doors was sprung; this car had been through a lot. And when the young man got out of the car to shake my hand, he was a very colorful looking young man. He had clothes that were torn where I don't think it's cool to be torn. New clothes sometimes you know you get them torn from the store, but this wasn't like that. And I remember, I don't think I'd ever seen anyone more committed to the art form of tattoo than this young man was. I could barely tell what skin color he was, not that it would have mattered to me. But this was a very unusual individual and I said now are you the one that's going to take me out to this camp that I need to go to? And he said well if you'll pay me. I said all right, well let's go.

So I get in the car, we're heading out of town and I look over and I see that the gas gauge is reading below empty. Now this is a little bit of a problem but there was a gas station coming up soon and I said you know in addition to the money that I'm going to pay you for taking me to this camp and back, I would like to offer you some gas for your car. And he said really? I said yeah, on me, if we can pull into this station here. So we pulled in, he ran around and he put two dollars in it and then stopped. And I said well listen, two dollars isn't going to get us very far these days. Why don't you just fill it up. I'll pay for it. He said it's

never been full before. And I said well just fill it up then. Go crazy. And so he did and I ran in and paid the attendant and we got back in the car and we started driving down the road. He was smiling from ear to ear and driving and he said it handles different on a full tank of fuel. I said just hang onto it if you can, my friend, and so we eventually found our way out to the camp that I was looking for.

When we got to the parking lot I said if you wouldn't mind, if you would just stay here for a little while, I just have something I need to do and I'll be back shortly. So I walked which was only maybe 300 yards from the parking lot. I walked to the exact place where I became a Christian when I was 17. I grew up in a Christian church but I never heard the true message of the love of Jesus Christ in a way that made sense to me in the church of my youth. I'm not saying they didn't preach it, I'm just saying I didn't hear it in a way that made sense to me in my youth. And I had figured out or I had understood my whole life growing up being born into a family business and a hard working father and so my idea of how you become a Christian is that you straighten up your act, you fly straight, you live the best life you can possibly live, you strive to please a God that you know you've disappointed, but you give it your absolute best effort and someday you'll find out if you made the grade. That was how it got all distilled into my mind. But when I was 17 years old and I was walking on a path from one side of a Christian camp to another side of the camp I stopped on the side of a hill and God brought to mind a bible verse that I had memorized as a kid. The verse is "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to God's mercy He saved us." Not by works of righteousness which we do; ceasing, striving, climbing, flying straighter, jumping through more hoops, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to God's mercy through His death on the cross, He saved us. And I remember being 17 years old walking down the path on the side of that hill. When that verse gripped me and I stopped, it hit me that hard, and I'm the kind of guy who isn't easily moved to emotion, but I was moved to enormous emotion that day. No one had preached to me, nobody had tried to talk me into anything, I was all alone on the side of a hill and God met me there with that verse, and He said Bill stop striving. What you needed most, which is forgiveness from your sins, I have provided on a cross through Christ. And salvation I'm making available to you as a gift because I love you and I want to make this redemption available for free. And as strange as it might sound to some of you, I felt that burst of the love of God this early. It felt like something shifted inside of me, like geological plates that shift, then earthquake and quite frankly the plates never shifted back from that day forward.

And so I was walking out to that place where that experience had occurred to me and I stood there, I found the exact piece of ground and I stood there and got emotional all over again. I was like God of all the places in the world this is where You met me. And then I thought of the life trajectory that I had been on in my late teens where it was absolutely certain that I would take over my father's business and that I would get a degree in economics and business administration and go into the marketplace that was predestined for me, I think. And I thought of how my life has changed so much because of what happened on that little patch of real estate. So I stood there for almost 20 minutes and poured out my heart of thanksgiving to God. Some of you know exactly where you were when heaven touched earth, when Christ touched your life, when salvation was made clear to you. You remember the moment of time. Sometimes it's an era and sometimes you don't have that exact geography but many of you do remember where that was. And I would encourage you, if you ever have the opportunity to go to that place sometime, stand in that place, sit in that seat, go to that exact place where

God touched you and do a little review, thank Him afresh for what He did. But that's all I was doing that day was standing in the place where God saved me through Christ. And after about 20 minutes, then I thought oh my goodness, I wonder if I still have a driver, you know, I was a little nervous.

And so I ran across the parking lot and sure enough he was still there. And so I got in the car, I said I'm all done if you could take me back to the marina now, I would be very grateful. Part of the way back to the marina, this young man looks over at me and he said may I ask you what you were doing on the side of that hill? And I said well do you really want to know? And he said yeah I do. I said right there on the side of that hill, that's where I met God. He went oh, oh. He said how does something like that happen? And I said well I can tell you how it happened for me. And I reviewed what I just told you, that I'd grown up in a church and knew about God, I'd just never been in a relationship with Him. I told Him about that verse that God had brought to my mind and how I had opened my heart to receive Christ that day and then I told him the difference that it made in my life. He said oh. That's cool, he said, that's cool. And he said does God still do that kind of thing today? I said well I know for a fact that He does. And then he said something I'll never forget, he said, but would He still do it for a loser like me? Would He still do it for a loser like me? And my reflex reaction was here's a young man who doesn't understand the heart of our Father. He doesn't understand heavenly father love. I can only imagine what his earthly father love was like.

And I said well first of all, my young friend, you are not a loser. Okay let me just tell you that. No matter what you call yourself, you're not one. You're made in the image of God, God's love has flowed towards you since the moment you sucked breath. He is every bit as concerned about your life as He is my life and anyone else that you see. You must understand you are not a loser. You are made in the image of God and you're someone that God would love to meet and redeem and adopt into His family. The guy goes well like how might that happen? And so I explained what had happened to me and what could happen to him. We had a fantastic discussion all the way down to the marina parking lot at which time I said well do you think you're ready to be adopted into God's family? He said well this is all come on pretty fast, he said, I really appreciate the conversation. He said a guy was knocking on doors around here recently and said he's starting a new church and he thought it would be one that I could relate to. He said I will tell you this, I promise I'll start going to that new church in town, that's about all I can promise. And I said well good for you. Maybe that's all we can do today. I said a brief prayer for him, paid him very handsomely and then he drove away. I've never seen him again.

I went back to the boat, I sat down in the boat and just started shaking my head going oh my gosh, what was that all about? This morning I had gotten up and turned my hands over and asked God to use me, asked God that maybe I could have influence on even one person to point him toward faith in Christ, did God really prompt me to go out to that camp site to stand where I had gotten saved because He wanted me to do that or was it because He was aware that in so doing I would need to pay a driver who had lost his way. I don't know. But when I went to bed that night, I said God this is something I love about the Christian life. Every day when we surrender to You every day, as we're going about our way, if You open certain doors, if we have our antenna sharp, You speak to us, You prompt us and sometimes You give us perfect opportunities to talk to people about faith in Christ. And if we go through those doors, you never know what might happen.

Jesus tells three stories to the religious officials and He doesn't even go to great pains to explain them, He just thinks at a later point in time, lights are going to go on and you're going to understand why I told these stories. You all know the stories. The stories are recorded in Luke 15, the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the wayward son. In each of those three stories, something wound up missing, and then maybe He was saying that these are like missing people from my father's family and they really matter to the heart of my Father.

I have two children. I have a 31 year old daughter and I have a 29 year old son. This kid has loved water all his life and when he was about five years old, I took him out on a windsurfer. You all know what that is, a windsurfing board. Neither of us were wearing life jackets, I know, but I was out with him and he used to like to stand on my knees and then when I got the board all steady, he used to like to swing one of his legs around my neck and then he would sit on my shoulders as I would windsurf on Lake Michigan. We did this for hours and had great fun doing it. We were doing it one day and a downspout, kind of a sudden storm, a sudden blast of wind hit us and I saw it coming with just a few seconds left and I knew it was going to blow both of us off the sail and my major concern, because Todd didn't have a life jacket on, my major concern is that he would get caught under the sail and he wasn't a very good swimmer yet at that point. And so just as we were starting to go over, I physically threw him as far as I could to make sure he wouldn't get caught under the sail. In the throwing of him as far as I did, when I went into the water, I got under the sail. It's happened to me many times before; it's not a cause for panic if you kind of know what you're doing. So I pressed up on the sail and got some wind and then I tried to extricate myself from my harness and all this other rigging and when I finally did get myself out from underneath that sail, I looked around and there was no Todd. That's his name, Todd, there was no Todd.

And the waves had started to build and so I thought well sure, he's on the other side of the board, so I swam as fast as I could. He wasn't on the other side of the board. And then I started screaming. And I screamed with such vocal intensity that I actually blew out my vocal chords, had a hard time talking for about a month. But I was screaming his name at the top of my lungs over and over and over again. And I can tell you this with great parental assuredness, when you feel like you've lost your only son, when you're right there in that moment, and you think he's gone forever, it's an overwhelmingly narrowing kind of thought that comes into your mind. In other ways, there's not ten other things in your brain at that time. And then I look on the other side of the sail and just then Todd popped up, I just saw his little blonde hair and I swam over to him like I was an outboard motor and wrapped my arms around him and he was sputtering. And I put him up on the board and I got the rig arranged and eventually hauled him and the rig all the way back to the beach. When I got him on the beach, man I hugged that kid and when I made sure that he was all okay, I said your mother does not have to know about this. This is between you and me. It's a guy thing right here, okay?

But you know I have never had a moment like that before that time or after. I had never known what it was like to have a singular all powered up father love for a missing son. This might be hard for some of you to understand, that's how God lives, that's how God's heart beats for every missing son and daughter with regard to those who are far from Him, those who are outside the family. He doesn't care skin color, He doesn't care what they've been through, He doesn't care, He just cares that they're missing, you see.

And what the Pharisees didn't understand that day as Jesus was hanging around with irreligious people but they were people whose absence made the Father's

heart ache. You know anybody who's far from God? Do you ever catch yourself, if you're a Christ follower, do you ever catch yourself being annoyed by someone because they use profanity? Do you ever find yourself getting annoyed by somebody because you don't agree with their lifestyle choices? And you don't agree with the way they vote, then you don't agree with this, then you don't agree with that and pretty soon these people become an annoyance and you wish you could vote them off the island. That's not a feeling familiar to the holy God. The person who annoys you most is still someone for whom the Father's heart aches and breaks and if there was an ounce of willingness in that person to turn toward God, He would do toward that individual what He did to the thief on the cross who moments away from His last breath said would you remember me and Jesus said today you'll be in My kingdom. That's the nature of the Father's heart. So these religious leaders are like okay, Jesus told three stories and in each story something was missing and that which was missing really mattered. You know what, in two of the three stories; there was an all out search that went on. The shepherd went seeking for the lost sheep and the woman tidied up the whole house to find the lost coin. The father, well he waited, he searched the horizon for the coming home of the son. There's a lot of searching going on. Maybe one of those religious leaders awakened and thought you know what, not only might I not have the right attitude if I'm annoyed by someone who's far from the Father, if I have the right attitude, maybe I ought to actually figure out how I could search some wayward people out and see if I could put my arm around them and help them find their way back to God somehow.

I'm going to be very candid here. I don't think you came to church to play church today. You self selected. You wanted to be here. You wanted to get reconnected to the God you love and you wanted some kind of encouragement and maybe some challenge. When is the last time that you've been in search mode for someone far from God? When's the last time you've prayed by name for someone who you know has walked away. When's the last time you've turned your hands over in the morning and said today God would You just help me cross paths with someone whose lost their way so that maybe You would give me the opportunity to say a word or give them encouragement of some sort or help them with a resource to help them toward God.

One thing I've loved about the Crystal Cathedral for as long as I've known it is that it has always had an eye and a heart for the outsider. It's always had as one of its chief values that we exist to help people far from God understand the transforming love of Jesus Christ. One of the reasons I used to raise my own money and fly from Chicago to come out and sit in the old auditorium before this one was built, was because Bob Schuller would stand up and talk about a church as a mission. A church who isn't just trying to rev up the already committed but a church that was trying to reach out to people who had lost their way. I love churches like that. I think God loves churches that always keep an arm outstretched. It's always in seeking mode, you see, always seeking.

When the lost shepherd finds the sheep, you can read this in Luke 15, he brings it back joyfully and he calls his shepherd friends and he says you must come and rejoice with me, that which is lost is found. When the woman finds her coin, she calls her lady friends and she says you must rejoice with me. I found the coin. And you all know in the story of the prodigal son, when the son comes home, that father scoops him up and he calls for the largest celebration, the sacrificing of the fatted calf and the ring on the finger, the new clothing, the whole nine yards, and he says look lets just forget about the stupid things this kid did. He's back and I love him. He's back. Retrievals bring rejoicing.

When I was a much younger man, I read these stories and I was in the rental offices when our church was in a movie theater and I remember realizing that the scripture says in Luke 15 that there's great joy all across heaven when a single far from God person repents and receives Christ. In the imagery that came to my mind, is there's a cosmic celebration, there's a party all across heaven so I'm thinking about it that day in this little rented office and I closed my eyes, I leaned back in my office chair and I imagined this you know raucous celebration in heaven, tens of thousands of people and then for some reason I thought about a head table, maybe Jesus was at the head table with disciples and great heroes of the faith and all that, and then for some reason the spirit of God made me think of the banner over the head table, the banner, and the name on it was mine, Bill Hybels. And something broke in me like a spiritual dam. I cannot even grasp the magnitude of a cosmic celebration happening all across heaven and the name on the banner being mine. I can't be loved that much. Impossible. And that dam kept breaking, I don't know how long I stayed in that office, but it was a long time just letting the love of God and that picture wash and wash and wash over me.

Now again I want you to try to do something and it's hard for you to do. But just take a moment and try. Picture in your mind the most raucous celebration cosmic wide that you could ever imagine tens of thousands of people, music and dancing, wine and food, the whole thing going on, Jesus at the head table, you got it in your mind? This whole thing going on all across heaven and there's a banner hanging over it and the name on it is yours. The name on it is your name. That's how much your love, that's how the Father's heart ached for you before you opened it up to His love. And that's how joyful the Father's heart is for all of you who have received Christ and you have entered into the relationship that you can enjoy every day and throughout all eternity.

My closing comment to you is one of challenge. You have between this day and your last day to influence people who are far from God. To let them know what the Father's heart is really like. You have from this day to your last day to live in that great love, to let it purge you from prejudice and purge you from evil and purge you from hate and purge you from greed, it's the love of Christ that transformed people, that transforms people, you know that. As you live it in, it changes you and as you're changed, you see things differently and you see people differently and you start to understand that the greatest privilege in life is to make an introduction for people who are far from God to the God who has that unique and unbelievable amount of Father love. I hope you live in that love today. I hope you let it change your mind and change your heart and change your marriage and change your relationship with friends and family. And I hope you get fired up to spread it. Shall we pray?

Father in heaven we sometimes lose all perspective on the magnitude and the beauty and the comprehensiveness of Your great love. And we need to be reminded from time to time that there's no losers in this world, that every man, woman and child is made in the image of God and the Father's heart aches until every single person is redeemed. Please Father, move in this church, move in this ministry, move in churches all around the world, move in the lives of Christ followers all over the world, to live in the power of Christ' redeeming love, and to spread it as You give us opportunity and we pray this is the name of Jesus Christ, and everyone agreed and said, Amen.

RHS THANK YOU TO BILL HYBELS

RHS: Thank you so much, Bill.

HYMN - "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below.
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen!