

The Gift of Winter

By Bobby Schuller

I don't know if you guys know this, I plan all of my sermons out about a year in advance. I have them all on a map and so that I can think when I get there, and every once in awhile I change it and I sort of changed today's sermon a little bit. I was thinking this is my last sermon of the year, and I just felt like the Lord was like just slather them in grace. Just grace them up, you know? Grace them up. It sounds like grease them up. Grace them up.

And my charge to you this week is to really rest; is to just chill out, to relax and to make sure you open this time to the Lord and allow Him to do something in your life during this gap.

So I want to begin, this creed we just said. If you've never said it before, it might have troubled you a little bit, especially if you're religious. We say it every single week and nobody takes issue with any of it except the first line. It's always that first line – I'm not what I do.

I remember when I was invited to actually speak at the Staples Center to all these people with this church, great church. And I said I want to say this creed, and they said well you can't say that first line. They said we want you to say I'm not what I've done. And I talked to one of the pastors about it, and he's like okay. It means not by works. So I just want to start there.

Many of us, when we say that first line, some of us skip it because well we do think we are what we do. Some of us, we say it but it stays here, it doesn't go to our hearts. And yet others of us actually believe that we are not what we do. If you've grown up in this tradition and as evangelical or reformed church, you probably grew up hearing things like not by works, or hearing things like we are saved by grace through faith alone. And those are really thick, kind of legal doctrinal dogmatic ways to say things so I often feel we can keep them in our heads and not let them move to our hearts.

When they were first written, they were written in language that people understood. The language of Paul and of the reformed doctrine, it wasn't language that was, I don't know, academic, it was real. And I feel like when we move saved by grace through faith, not by works, by faith alone, when we move it into real, everyday people language, I'm not what I do, I'm loved by God. When it becomes real, tangible, there's a part of us that goes oh I don't know, I don't know. Because it feels like we're saying well what we do doesn't matter, or well works do kind of matter, and oh man, they for sure matter. Works matter. You're going to do great things. You are. I mean you're not what you do, but you're going to do great things. You're going to change the world. God has called you to amazing things. And you're going to be a moral person. You're going to have character and integrity at the heart, and you already do. You already do so much good because you know God.

But at the heart of it we have to let go of proving ourselves to our religion, proving ourselves to society, or even proving ourselves to our parents, or our siblings, or our competitors. Today, God has a word for you and this is the word – you do enough. You are enough. You’re a beloved son or daughter of God. You are loved. You are so loved. And you’re doing so much better than you think. Yes, we’re saved by grace through faith.

And grace, by the way, grace doesn’t mean mercy. Mercy: God is merciful, but grace is so much more than mercy. It’s the overflow of God’s love and favor towards His Son Jesus Christ, given to all of us through Him. That God just says to you, you are my beloved sons and daughters. You’re forgiven. You’re loved. You’re called, you’re blessed, you’re favored. Do you believe that? You do believe it. You do. And my dream is that every year you come here, you believe that more and you live from that place of God’s love and God’s power, not your own power, and not from a place of being exhausted and trying harder.

Beloved child of God, you do enough and you are enough, and I’m so, so proud of you. And today, you can just relax. Today you can Sabbath. There’s a reason God commands us to Sabbath. It’s one of the Ten Commandments. It’s a sin not to rest and that’s hard for industrious Americans to hear, isn’t it. That’s hard.

How does it feel when I say something like you do enough and you are enough? Comforting? If you didn’t reject it, and many of you probably

did, I'll do more. Just let it go. If you didn't reject it, it probably felt pretty good. Because it's contrary to all the other voices of society that say prove yourself. Try harder. Pick yourself up by the bootstraps.

I think the world is terrified of death. Society is terrified of death. There is actually really strong evidence in psychology that many people who are afraid of death and afraid of the void of nothingness of death, work tirelessly to build for themselves a hero complex, a legacy so that when they die, their death has meaning. But for us as Christians, we're not afraid of death. Death is a doorway to a whole other amazing life. Death for us is not falling asleep, death for us is waking up! And we don't live to fulfill our legacy, we live to grow the legacy of Jesus Christ. We live for others. We don't have to prove ourselves to anyone. We instead can learn the easy rhythms of grace and that's what you do. You are learning to listen, to discern, to trust, to hear the voice of God. You're opening your body and your heart to the Holy Spirit and man, is that a good thing. That's such a better place to be.

Our world is so stressed out. Man, are they stressed. Not you, though, right, you're not stressed, but everybody out there, they're stressed. Everybody's so busy. Always hurried. Our society is not only super busy, it's made busy somehow a virtue. If I say to you on the phone, 'I know you're super busy,' that's a compliment, isn't it. If I say to you 'I know your calendar is wide open, you probably don't have anything to do.' That's pretty much an insult, isn't it. So we've made this

thing that whether we know it or not in our culture that being busy, having a cluttered schedule, never resting, always going, never stopping is the right way, and walking in rest, rhythms, saying no to certain projects, saying no to certain contracts so you can have more time with your family, saying no to certain international trips so you can be with your friends or just have some time for yourself, well why would you do that. And the reason is so many people, even the most successful people in the world are moving so fast, they're missing out on life. And they're missing out on eternal life, the life that's made available in Jesus Christ.

So a lot of people are trying to prove themselves and trying to make a legacy and trying to be a hero, but not you. You are learning to slow down, and you're learning what the scripture says. Jesus says to rest. Come to me. All you who are weary and burdened. Do you feel weary and burdened? Jesus says come to me if you're weary and burdened and I will give you rest. For I am gentle and humble of heart. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me and I will give you rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. You can let go today of having to prove yourself to the world, or prove yourself to anybody. God's proud of you and I'm proud of you, and you're doing a lot better than you think. I'm proud of you for even being here. Just being here in church is taking a practical step in the right direction. To turn your back on the world and turn your heart towards God and say that is what I want, and that is a good place to be. Child of God, you do enough, and you are enough.

Can I tell you something that I've learned over 13/14 years of pastoral ministry? I believe this with all my heart. Shame leads to death, grace leads to life. Most churches I go to, pastors can't help but say something in order to shame the people listening. To say something along the lines of try harder, you don't do enough, you aren't enough, prove yourself. In fact whenever I write a sermon, I always ask that question. Am I telling people to try harder? Sometimes you have to say those things, and I do for sure, but I believe that shame, this idea that I'm not enough, that somehow I got to prove myself to God that that is the greatest thing that comes between you and God, and is the greatest thing that comes between you and the people that love you is this feeling of shame. Let it go. You're doing great. I'm proud of you. You do enough and you are enough. You're so, so terrific.

Isaiah chapter 9 talks about the many names of the coming Messiah, and my favorite is in here, the Prince of Shalom, the Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9 says "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned." Wow. "You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you, as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder." I always think of pirates when I read that part. "For as the day of Midians defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warriors boot used in battle, every garment rolled in blood will be

destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For unto us a child is born. To us a son is given and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and He will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

I’m laughing, Don, because you don’t know what I’m going to ask you to do. Now you guys didn’t come prepared for I don’t have the music, but would it be cool; they weren’t here in the first service. Could you guys sing the Messiah, like this part of the Messiah? I know you don’t have the music, but.. (SINGS – for unto us a child is born.) You guys just did it! Come on just.. just do your best. (CHOIR – unto us a song is given. Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given, unto us a son is given) (SINGS - unto us. And the government shall be upon His shoulders. And they’ll call Him counselor, almighty God, the everlasting Father) come on guys, just the last line. (The prince of) come on! (CHOIR – peace!) There you go nice, all right.

DON: He deserves the hand because no other minister anywhere that could do what he just did.

BS: All right. I guess so. I don’t know, my dad used to do that stuff all the time, but he has more of like an opera voice, anyway. We digress, don’t we. I’m supposed to be preaching a sermon right now.

Yes, Isaiah chapter 9 talks about these names of the coming Messiah. And my favorite is in here, the Prince of Peace, the Prince of Shalom. You know in a day in which all princes describe themselves as

violent warriors of death, and they used skulls and blood and banners, the prince of conquest and the king of king.. you know these types of things that they would use, the Assyrians and others when this time was written, there's this message that one is coming who will sit atop the throne of the earth and He will be called the Prince of Peace. And this word, in fact in Hebrew, Shalom means way more than peace. It means wholeness, completeness. It doesn't mean just a lack of war, or a lack of violence or tension, it means that everything is in its right place. It's Eden. It's heaven. He is the Prince of Peace. And when He comes, He will bring with Him peace, this sense of shalom in your life.

Now when Jesus enters in the scene, the sort of thesis of His sermon is this thing called the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. And everywhere He says the kingdoms of this world are like this, but my kingdom is like that. And when you enter this kingdom, this is what will change in your life, and this is what will change in the world. And on Christmas, the kingdom of God was inaugurated in Bethlehem in the very person, body and life of Jesus Christ who like a needle poking into a sick body, He was injected, the great cure to all of us. This word, the Prince of Peace, all of us we're prince and princesses or kings and queens of our own kingdoms. I've got my own Bobby-dom. Don has his own Don-dom; the choir. Hannah has her own queen-dom. We have our own sphere of influence, where our power and our will is exercised. And to become a Christian, a disciple or a happy and whole student of Jesus

Christ means to take the crown off your head and to lay it at the cross, and to say my wealth is here in the cross. And to say my king is Jesus and I am going to stop proving myself to the world, even proving myself to my religion, and I'm going to submit my life to Him. And as you do that, and you are doing that, you're learning, instead of hustling and trying to make things happen, you're forming into your life the easy rhythms of grace. You're opening your body to the Holy Spirit, and you're learning what it means to discern, to listen, to look to the word of God before you look to the newspaper. Newspaper has a lot of bad news, but the bible has a lot of good news. And to keep hope alive by living in incarnational community like this. And as you keep submitting your life to the Prince of Peace, peace will enter into your life, into your family, into your city, into your work, and in your very body you'll bring peace with you everywhere you go, and that's what you're doing. And that 15 feet of space around you, you'll bring the light and the goodness of the Holy Spirit. And you're doing that. I'm so proud of you.

You know we are always trying to hustle, we're always trying to make things happen, but that's not what Christians are supposed to do. Christians are supposed to obey with joy the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit. And sometimes the Lord says just chill out; just stop. I think for a lot of you, He's saying that today. Like there is a part of us; you can't be a fruitful Christian and never stop. That's why Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. People are exhausted. People are exhausted. We're

always looking, always comparing up, never down, always thinking about how people are at a better place in life than we, and I just want to say that that's not you. That's not who you are. You don't have to prove yourself to me, you don't have to prove yourself to the world, you can let it go. Set your eyes on heaven. That's what matters.

I was watching this video of these moms. They were interviewing these young moms with these little kids between two and ten, and they asked these moms how are you doing as a mom? And all of them beat themselves up. They all said all the negative things, oh I wish I could be more patient, or I don't feel like I'm really there for my kids, or I don't cook enough, or I don't give my kids a listening voice when they need it. I wish I could be more patient. And then they showed these moms recordings of their children when they asked their children how's your mom doing. And one kid was like my mom is awesome. And the other was like I love jumping on the trampoline with my mom. My mom gives me kisses and hugs. I mean I was watching it, I posted it on my Facebook. I got all choked up because I was watching how these moms who think they are doing so poorly are doing awesome. We beat ourselves up way too much, especially when at the heart of our faith is grace. I see this with Hannah. Poor Hannah, and a lot of moms that are young, always think they're not doing enough. They're doing great. Hannah, you're doing great. You're an amazing mom.

So child of God, I just want you to know you do enough and you are enough and God is pleased with you and proud of you in spite of your mistakes. We get over those things, right? We get over them and we let them go.

There is a true gift in winter that we here in California don't always understand unless we came from somewhere other than California. In California we like our weather here, don't we. I mean it's pretty awesome. We like our weather a la carte. If we want snow, we go up to the mountains. If we want some warm weather, we go out to Palm Springs. We want it just kind of even, we stay here.

I'll never forget when I went.. and it was like April, there was a late snow and I went snowboarding and surfing on the same day and I was like man, I live in a really special place. And then I moved to Oklahoma like an idiot and I remember there, I went to Oklahoma to go to school. Hannah, Oklahoma is great. It is great. I love Oklahoma. Everything about Oklahoma is awesome except the weather, and even Oklahoman's I think agree with that. Anyway.

There was a low point and the low point was it was the dead of winter, it was like three degrees outside and a wind chill of like negative a million. And there was a thick sheet of ice on the windshield and I had to like start the car early, and I went out with those.. I didn't even know what this was, some stupid plastic scrappy thing that you're supposed to use to get the ice.. I tried to pry it off at first and I barely like was

scraping the window and I nicked like just my knuckle on part of the car, and in excruciating pain fell on my knees, screamed into the sky “why am I here!?” Why did I leave California?

You know the winters in our life, though, in all seriousness can be that way. And maybe you’re in a winter in your life. Maybe you’re unemployed right now and you’ve been looking for a job forever and it’s just not happening or you have a nagging sickness or your relationships, maybe you’re going through a divorce, maybe you’re at an in-between, maybe you’re just coming back to faith or whatever it is, there’s something about the winters in life that we find ourselves when we’re there, we’re asking this question – why am I here? And we ask God, God, why am I here? And the thing that we forget so often is that although the winters in life can be sad because they involve loss, very often it’s the rhythm of rest. Winter is the season when the earth rests and the land rejuvenates. I’m Dutch, and these tulips, we love tulips and tulips have to be put in the ground before winter. They have to frost. And if tulips don’t frost, they won’t grow. If you take a tulip to California, put it in the ground, it won’t grow. You have to put it in the freezer a little bit, or something, I don’t know how to do it, I don’t have a green thumb.

But I think a soul is a bit like that. I think like rings in a tree, the winters of our life make us stronger. They galvanize us. They give us soul armor. Rest is good for you. Rest is even productive, if you need a word like that, because rest is the birthplace of vision. When you rest and take

some time away from your work and your life, sometimes you think it's a curse but you recognize, man, I need this. You stand back from the narrative of your life and you're able to get a fresh perspective of where you are and where you're going, and sometimes you need that to make the key changes in your life to reach your calling, to reach a destiny God has for you.

Rest is so important because it is the thing that gives us healing, gives us rejuvenation, and maybe sometimes you get so stressed out you find yourself tossing and turning at night, thinking that oh I shouldn't have said that, or I shouldn't have done that, or I messed up here, or I'm not going to get this project done in time. Friends, I just want to tell you let that stuff go. Come alive in your rest. Surrender, give it up to God. Go with His flow. Go with His flow. The life of a Christian is supposed to be like a sailboat that catches the wind. Like glides along with the water. Sure, storms come, but it's the wind that moves us. It's the wind of the Holy Spirit that moves us to our destiny, not us making it happen or manufacturing.

As you grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, you learn what it means to be like the summer grass that receives just a fresh wind. You'll just feel the spirit blowing through you. You'll be able to know the voice of God, know what He wants from your life and move with that, and know that He will do the pushing. He will do the hustling. He will do the making.

I remember when I just started doing that in ministry, that was when my ministry really.. I just said I'm going to stop trying so hard. I'm just going to listen to this Holy Spirit and be obedient and be in this place of rest and it made all the difference in my life.

So let go. Let go! Let go. Let go. You do enough and you are enough, and it's time to just relax and trust the Lord in the in-between. It's time to get a good night's sleep. It's time to when you're doing something that's fun, to not feel guilty about it. It's time to stop being the responsible one that has to worry all the time about everybody in your family. Amen?

So maybe you're in a winter. Maybe you're feeling sick. I just sort of feel like even the Lord saying to me just even now, I want to just say to you if you're here today and it's your kids, and you have a kid or kids who have gone a way that you didn't think they would go, and you feel really bothered and worried by that, I just want to say to you it's not your fault. It's not your fault. You did the best you could, you worked hard, and it's going to come around for them.

In fact, I just want to stop for a second, and Lord, I pray whoever that person is who's here that that message was for, I pray in Jesus' name, Lord, for their son or their daughter, for their kid and thank you, Lord. We remember the story of the prodigal son. We know that when we were young, we made mistakes, and we did things that we're not proud of, and I pray, Lord, for your favor and your spirit, in Jesus' name to

break every chain, in Jesus' name, all God's people said, amen. If that's you, we're behind you, we love you and we love your kids.

In order to let go, we need to see clearly the ways in which things are holding on to us. And here are five things that really helped me, and I'll finish with this. The first thing that Americans don't do well is rest. When we rest, we still find a way to be kind of busy. So like even though we're not doing anything productive, we stay in motion. And so the first thing I want to say to you is just rest intentionally. A good example of this was recently I had a little break, the kids were gone from the house, Hannah was gone. If you're a guy with young kids, there's nothing like having the house to yourself. It's amazing. It's the best thing ever. And so the first thing I did is I went into my office and I got on Facebook, and then I got on Instagram, and then I got on Twitter, and then I went on Facebook and then Instagram, then Twitter again, and then I checked my email and went onto Facebook. And then like I checked a Google news site and then I checked my Instagram. And then I was like what am I doing? For like a half hour, I was literally staying busy doing nothing. And it was like I'm going to just try and rest and create some space to hear from God or just enjoy my life.

So I started a fire in the fireplace. In the fireplace. Yes, sorry, let me clarify. I started a fire in the fireplace, made a little cup of tea, and it was awesome. And at first I thought how long can I go without wanting to reach for my phone? So left my phone upstairs and by ten minutes I

was like really tempted to go upstairs and grab my phone, but I just sat there and drank my tea and thought about life and prayed for Hannah, prayed for my kids, and prayed for you, I pray for this church every day. We pray for this church every day and it's just good. When you rest, do it on purpose. Think about ways in which your training is pulling you out of rest into busy stuff that's not good for you.

The next thing, and this is from Dallas Willard, my hero, ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. Just eliminate it. Just cut it out. Cut the hurry out of your life. You know you can't be in a hurry and be kind to people. It's impossible. You have to choose. When Dallas was talking about this, was walking with a friend of mine, Bill, he asked Bill, 'Bill, if you had one word for Jesus Christ, what would it be?' And Bill really racked his brain. He thought about loving, all powerful, things like this, sacrificial, the servant leader. Dallas looked at him and he said 'well Dallas, what would your word be?' And Dallas said 'Jesus was relaxed.' I mean there's a lot of words I'd pick for Jesus, but that wouldn't be one of the first things I would think of.

But that's an interesting way to think about the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, that as He walked and talked, He never was in a hurry. And we think that when we're in a hurry, that somehow makes us seem important, when we're rushing from one meeting to another, and cram our schedules full of stuff. That makes us seem like we're valuable. But man there's nothing like the person who is centered and unhurried that

seems kind of powerful. They seem like the master of their lives. They practically seem like the master of time. They just aren't hurried and they go when they're supposed to go. Hurrying doesn't make you faster. Hurrying makes you clumsy. It makes you stressed out. And you don't hurry. You don't hurry. You know what it means to just walk every day in the restful, easy rhythms of grace. Letting God, by His power, do what needs to be done.

So rest intentionally, eliminate hurry from your life, and leave gaps in your life. I don't know about you, but I am very tempted to, like if I have a meeting at noon, to plan my day and life that I get there at noon. Like I'm not going to get there at 11:58, I'm going to get, like at noon, I'm pulling up, noon. Right? And this is what we do. And so if there is traffic, or if something happens, now we're late, now we arrive stressed. Leave gaps in your life.

There's actually a spiritual discipline called *stachio* where monks would actually arrive at a location early, and the reason they would do that, and many people practice this today, is that when I get there, I get there the way I'm supposed to be as I'm there. Right? So arrive five/ten minutes early and sit in your car, or go for a walk under a tree or something simple, and just pray. And pray about your meeting, and that way if something happens, you're interruptible. You can minister to someone or pray with someone or you can have some traffic and that's not a big deal, so leave gaps in your life and watch as God can fill those

gaps with really meaningful things instead of TV or Facebook. Un-clutter your life. Leave gaps in it.

Clearly define and keep boundaries in your life, as well. Christians are not good with boundaries. Pastors are even worse. When I started pastoring I wanted to make everybody happy and please everyone, so I said yes to everything. And you know what happened? It was like I was sweet to everyone, but I was also like judgmental and passive aggressive, stressed out, a little bit angry, but I was sweet. I was sweet, and this is what happens. When we don't maintain our boundaries, we violate our boundaries, we lose a sense of ourself. Boundaries actually allow you to be more compassionate. So define your boundaries and keep them. And you can keep them kindly, and you ought to, and you do. But keep your boundaries.

And finally, if you hear anything I say, just hear this: live to please God and not people. People pleasing leads to shame. It's not going to get you anywhere you want to go. Live to please God. In every big decision you make, just ask what does God want from me? And do that, and you'll be walking in the easy rhythms of grace. Did you know there isn't one person in the gospels that Jesus didn't disappoint at least once? That's okay if you disappoint people. Just keep your eyes on heaven and on God.

Friends, more than anything I just want to like the Lord said, just slather you in grace. If I had a big grace bin, I would just want to butter

you up, and grace you up, right? I want you to know this Christmas season, that you do enough, that you are enough, that you're not what you do, and that you're beloved children, beloved sons and daughters of God, and that your sins and life and everything has been taken care of, and God is just saying here it is. I hold in my hands life. Just receive it.

And so today, before you go, I'm going to give you an opportunity to become a Christian. Today is a wonderful day to become a Christian. It's the best day ever. I can't think of a better day to make a decision to become a happy and whole student of Jesus Christ. Look, let me ask you, just straight up. If your heart stopped beating right now, are you at peace with God? Are you at peace with God? The Lord wants to give you an opportunity right now to receive Him. And so today, and one of the things we do in this church is we offer you the opportunity to come before the church in front of everyone and say I need Jesus in my life.

You know a lot of pastors when they do this, they say every head down, every eye closed. Every head up, everybody looking around. All right? Look around. Look at the person next to you. Look at the person behind you. I think becoming a Christian requires an act of courage. And so if you need to be at peace with God, and you need to make a decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ right now, I want you to stand up and walk down here in front of everybody. Just as you are. Just stand up and walk here. I'm not here to condemn you. I'm not here to condemn

you. I'm here to give you a new opportunity to be a new person in Jesus Christ. Thank you, come on down, guys.

It is so hard. You're saying but Bobby there are all these people here. It's embarrassing. The Lord says if you stand up before me in front of men, I'll stand up for you in front of my Father. But if you deny me before men, I'll deny you before my Father. If we can't stand up for God in church, how are we going to stand up for the Lord out there?

And so maybe you say I'm not at peace with God, I need to get my life right with Him, I need to become a Christian, just one more time I want to invite you, whoever you are. Your family will wait. I know what the enemy is saying to your mind. I'll do it some other time. I'm not going to do it right now. I'll do it later. The scriptures say today is the day of salvation. Look, you may not get another chance. I want to invite you, get your life right with God and have peace with Him. Yes, I love that attitude. That's great. All right. Amen. Okay.

So friends, I want to just tell you, God is so proud of you, that you're taking this practical step for Him, and I want you to know, you come here today and you're doing something that's incredibly brave and vulnerable, which is saying I need Christ in my life. I need to be at peace with God. And today, I want you to know you're already forgiven. You're forgiven even before you got up and came down here. It's always been available. All you have to do is like.. there's a lady who reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' garment for healing. Christ just wants you to

just.. you did it, you reached out and eternal life is yours. You put your trust in Him, grace is yours.

And so I want you to pray with me. Hold your hands out like this to receive the goodness of God and say Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Give me your Holy Spirit. I say yes to your call. I love you, God, in Jesus' name, amen. And I just proclaim over you every chain is broken, your sins are forgiven. You are regenerated, renewed, restored in the name of Jesus. And I thank you, God that your Holy Spirit is here. Fill every single person here, and every person in this church with your Holy Spirit. Lord, we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.