

“Finger Lickin’ Good”

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I have already had too many jokes, so as you’re walking out today you don’t need to say, “Gee that was or was not a figure-licking good sermon,” because of what’s on the cover of the bulletin. [Laughter.] I have already been hit by that a couple of times.

I was reading a book this week on leadership, and as I was going through the book, all of a sudden, it named off about 3-4 people that were people who persevered in their leadership, and they threw out these names – and one of them was Colonel Sanders – and I’m thinking, what in the world? So I go and look it up in Wikipedia – because frankly I love Wikipedia. But, the only problem is that Wikipedia wastes a lot of my time [laughter]; because something will make me think of something, then I have to look it up on my phone, and then you go from here to there.

Well, I kept zooming through it. It took me about more than 30 seconds I was on this thing, because I couldn’t get over all that went on in his life. Until the age of 65, this man was a failure at everything he tried. He was awful and he wasn’t even that great a human being, sometimes. So I put down my little cheat sheet because, frankly, there are 25 or 26 failures in this man’s life that I just couldn’t get over.

He struggled. Not all of the failures were his fault. He struggled because his father died at a young age. He was the elder of the children, so even when he was only about 8 or 9 years old, he was making the meals; he was cleaning the house. He was doing everything to raise those children so his mother could go out and work; because in those days you didn’t have life insurance, you didn’t have *anything*. You were destitute.

She had to go work. The oldest had to do the caring around the house – that continued until the age of 13; and, at the age of 13, he had to get out of the house. Either he was getting to be too expensive, with one more mouth to feed – Mom was home so, like so many other poverty-stricken children, they farmed him out to a local farm. He was there a couple of years working on that farm, for nothing more than a place to sleep and a little food to eat.

So, at that time, he read in the paper about the opportunity to become a streetcar conductor. So, he left the farm – was sick of the farm – and he went as a streetcar conductor for a few months. Then he read somewhere about the U.S. Army needing people; so he lied about his age and became a member of the U.S. Army at the age of 15. (See what you could get away with before computers?) [Laughter.] He went through an entire 12 months and was honorably discharged, after that year.

He decided to go out again. He had an uncle who worked for the railroad, so he would clean ash pans in the railroad cars to keep them running. It was dirty, filthy, awful work, but it paid something, and he was that desperate. So, he continued to do that for a short period of time, until they saw he was actually a hard worker, and he then started working as a fireman. He talked

about one time, in one of the rail cars, there was a fire and he put it out himself, and they were so impressed with him.

He was still a young teenager and already he had had all of these jobs.

He was working as a fireman and then, by the time he was a ripe old age of 18 years old, he got married. Oh, good Lord! [Laughter!] So, he gets married and they have a son, Harland, Jr., and here is when it all starts to fall apart. The son ended up dying from infected tonsils – something today that would be so easy to fix – but in 1911 or 1912 they didn't have anything, and he died.

About this time, he was working to try to do something and he started practicing law. Now, that was a good time to be alive, Gary, because he had a 7th grade education. You didn't have to go to Drake Law school then. You just had to pass the bar. Apparently he was pretty darn smart.

But, one of the first cases he was working in the court room – he was fighting for this guy, and apparently the fighting got carried away – because he ended up punching his own client in the face. They started fighting with each other, and the judge threw not only the case out, but threw both of them out and Harland Sanders right out of the court room, and out of the legal field. So he had to go back to being a laborer on the railroad again. One thing after another.

Then he found out that there was need for ferry boats running from Louisville up the Ohio river, so he scraped together, over about a year and a half, all of the money he could and bought a little ferry boat and, because he had worked on the railroad and knew how engines worked, he did this – and did it for a couple of years. He was starting to make money again. But, somebody talked him out of it, because it was extraordinarily hard work, and he said, "You can work a simple job as a secretary for the Chamber of Commerce in Columbus, Indiana." Now, Columbus is about an hour and a half north of where his ferry boat was, by Louisville, so he said, "Sure." After just a couple of months he resigned because, he said, "I really stink at sitting behind a desk," He was terrible at it.

So he said, "What am I going to do now?" So, he sold his ferry boat. He made in today's money over \$324,000 – in today's money – on the sale of that ferry boat. All of a sudden, they needed them everywhere. He finally had a success and he didn't know what to do with it. So, he decided he was going to invest in acetylene lamps. You have heard of the acetylene torch? These were lamps like that. The only problem was, the day after he bought the company for \$324,000, Delco came out with the first electric lights. [Laughter.] He went bankrupt and lost every penny of that money.

Now, he kept going, and tried to work as a salesman for Michelin Tire Company. Two months after he got the job, the plant where he was in New Jersey shuts down, and he loses his job again. Now, he meets the General Manager of Standard Oil in Kentucky, and he says, "We are trying, and cannot start gas stations – with the advent of the car – fast enough. We will allow you to start and run a gas station in Nicholasville, Kentucky; and, you can run it and just pay us a small pittance back. We need to build all of these."

Well, everything was going along just fine, and then the Depression hits and he loses his gas station. By this time (he was born September 9, 1890, and this was 1930) he was 40 years old and still has not accomplished a thing. He is flat broke, without a penny.

Later in 1930, somebody at Shell Oil hears about him – and what Standard Oil was trying to do. He had experience where they had nobody with any experience and so they offered him another gas station; this one in North Corbin, Ky., that will later become famous. He starts it, but the problem is that in Kentucky it is so poor, there were so few cars, yet even in 1930, running through Kentucky, that they were having trouble making enough money at the gas station in this area.

So, he was given this broom closet to live in – just enough room for a bed and hot plate that was attached to the gas station. He starts making food and selling it like a little restaurant out of his bedroom. And, he is making fried chicken on the hot plate. [Laughter.]

So, pretty soon, people are coming around – especially at noon hour. Man, he is frying that chicken, because people needed someplace to go. The workers that were doing all of this stuff needed someplace to go for lunch.

He had breakfast. He was flipping all sorts of eggs and bacon, anything to keep people coming to his gas station. Now, everything was going alright, but the problem became that he got into a problem with the neighbor, who was a competitor at the other restaurant in town. And, right in the middle of Harland Sanders painting this great big sign coming into town, the competitor got mad. brought a gun and started shooting at Harland Sanders. Sanders, who had a gun – because, frankly, this is rural Kentucky – started shooting back and the competitor shot Harland Sanders' only employee right through the chest – killed him dead on the spot.

Harland Sanders was happy as a clam, because the competitor went to jail for the rest of his life. Now he [Harland] was the only game in town. And, he is making chicken, and he is selling gas, and there is no competitor, and he is doing *so* well that the governor of the state of Kentucky – and only in Kentucky do they do this – gave him like a coat of arms. It is a special thing; and, in the state of Kentucky, when you receive this you are blessed. Kind of like the Queen knighting you as a Kentucky Colonel. That is how he became Colonel Sanders.

The man was never more than a buck private in the Army, but he was a “Colonel” in the state of Kentucky. So, he is doing that, he's selling everything, and it is going well.

Thank goodness the guy gets shot. He [Sanders] has so much money, now, that he buys a motel that he heard about in Asheville, North Carolina, because it is pretty there. (I have been there and it is gorgeous there,) but the minute he buys the property in Asheville, North Carolina, he gets a notice that the motel – the little one room – and the gas station, (he had bought a motel in the meantime), all in Kentucky, burned to the ground.

So, then he goes back to try and rebuild that gas station, and motel, and restaurant and, while he was doing that in July 1940, he came up with a secret recipe. The secret recipe was: you can't fry chicken fast enough with a pan, even a whole bunch of pans, to keep up with all of the people

who want to come to your restaurant. His secret recipe wasn't herbs and spices, it was a pressure cooker. And, in a pressure cooker – a big one – you can dump a whole lot of stuff into it and cook it up fast, and haul out a whole lot of chicken.

Now, I thought I found out something really cool, and I met with Ken Arentson on Thursday. (Don't ever talk to Ken, because he has [always!] done it before you have.) [Laughter.] Yes. I went to Lake Superior and I saw oar boats. Ken Arentson worked on an oar boat. [Laughter.] So, I tell him this week about the Colonel Sanders story, that I'm going to tell the congregation about, and he said, "Oh, yea, I used to work with Colonel Sanders. [Laughter.]

Ken went, you know, to seminary in Louisville. While he was going through seminary – along with being an oar boat captain, along with working in a mental institution and all the other things this man has done – he worked for Kentucky Fried Chicken with Colonel Sanders! He said it was so amazing what Colonel Sanders did; because if you set that pressure cooker at 390 degrees you get soggy chicken. But Ken said, if you set that thing at 410 degrees you have burned, dry chicken. He said, you have to set it at exactly 400 degrees if you want the perfect chicken. Well, this week. Jill and I are going to have a whole lot of fried chicken in the pressure cooker. and find out if Ken is telling the truth. [Laughter.]

He [Ken] said one day Colonel Sanders came into his [Ken's] establishment and spent the day making chicken, and Ken said, "Yep. Colonel Sanders made *really* good chicken." so I still have yet to stump Ken Arentson. [Laughter.]

Then World War II happened, and no one could drive their cars because of rationing, and Colonel Sanders lost the Ashville store, and everything else. Again, he is destitute.

So, he picks himself up and tries to scratch together a living working, for an ordnance factory, during the war, in their cafeteria, in two different places in Tennessee. His family gets so frustrated with him, for all of the bouncing around, and all of the poverty – and none of the money – and he ends up having to go through a divorce. Then, in the divorce, he had to sell everything – what little he had – and he was totally destitute. Because he was known and, he already been a Colonel in Kentucky, the next governor felt so bad for him, so to try and boost his spirits, they made him an honorary second Colonel in Kentucky, just to try and lift him up.

Here he is 62 years old and doesn't have a penny to his name. He starts to franchise the chicken in the pressure cooker. He goes along, and he is making that chicken and franchising it. He, though, starts out trying to franchise chicken in Salt Lake City. Utah is not what I consider the hot bed of fried chicken in the United States of America.

Surprisingly enough, he is franchising left and right. They are buying his chicken, but he didn't know how – because he was only a lawyer a few months before he punched the guy – he never figured out how to franchise properly.

Now he is really stuck. He is 65. He only has maybe \$100 a month, if that, in a small Social Security account. That is all he is living on. He can't even provide enough for one room for himself, and enough food to get through the month at 65. So, he hops in his car and heads out to

Canada and, on a promise, he flies to the UK, and he starts selling his chicken overseas, as much as here; and, it takes off, and he finds a friend who knew how to franchise him properly, and he became one of the wealthiest guys around. But, it wasn't until he was 65 years old – through a whole lot of perseverance and 26 failures – before he actually made it.

Now, the reason that story jumped out at me, because at the same time I'm reading 2 Timothy, and in 2 Timothy you have the Apostle Paul sitting in prison, knowing that he is about to die in a Roman jail, but didn't give up, didn't curse God and die; didn't cry, "Oh, me." He is nurturing Timothy, so that Timothy will have the strength to do the hard job for Paul, to be his replacement: "to fight the good fight, to finish the race and to keep the faith." Because, if you are a person of God, you are going to have your dark night of the soul, and you had better have the strength to overcome it.

He pounded that into Timothy and, all of a sudden, Timothy began to be the one like Paul, who not only finished the race, but ran through the tape, and every minute of their lives, until the day they died, their faith was nurtured, their ministry succeeded, and their message continued.

That is what we are called to do. Here we are at Westminster. We have a task, and a time and an age where churches are dying; where we have a ministry that we are sharing – and you just saw it for five minutes up on that screen. The difference we are making. We need to continue to do that, and instead of what Paul is saying to Timothy, Paul is saying to each one of us: "To worship with Tradition; to Nurture 21st Century Disciples; to Connect as a Church Family; to Nurture each other the way that Paul nurtured Timothy; and, to Engage in Mission, so that we can continue to show the world outside these walls that, not only is the church relevant, but it is transformative in the way of God Almighty, and we have to run through the tape as well.

If Colonel Sanders – and he wasn't a perfect guy by any stretch of the imagination – can have the stick-to-itiveness and the perseverance to continue into 90 years of age, look at what we can do – every single one of us, to make a difference in Jesus' name and transform the world around us. We have the Holy Spirit nudging, pushing, guiding, kicking us forward.

Let us pray that we never give up; but that we run through the tape; and, we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

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