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Sermon Transcript: Final Words of Wisdom

Do you ever wish you could have a redo where like maybe you said something to someone and you're like, "Ooh, I wish I could just hit the rewind button and try that one more time"? I would like to have that for just about every time I dropped off my kids at college, because every time I did it, I felt this urge to try to summarize all of the teaching and wisdom that we had tried to impart as parents and cram it all into that last lunch we shared together as we dropped them off. I think I got better at it, though. I think Autumn, you got a pretty good version, but boy, Ally and Nathan had to suffer. It was just—I, you know, and and it wasn't like when I dropped them off, it was filled with all this wisdom. It really was just filled with fear: "Here's all the stuff I'm scared to death is going to happen. So, let me just try to cram in a few words of wisdom, how just don't do this and do—don't do this and avoid this and..."

But I was pretty smooth about it. I think I do—because like it's—I didn't say it like that. That was what was going on in my head. What came out of my mouth was like—you know sometimes when you're on your own and you know, it came out pretty—I'm pretty sure though that the sharing of noodles at the Korean fusion restaurant with Nathan when we dropped him off was one of the most awkward moments of his life, as I in between slurps—I don't—I was just trying to like sneak it into the conversation there.

I wish I could have those as do-overs, because it just feels like a hurried bunch of things that like—I mean, honestly, if you haven't imparted it by then, it's not like over the udon noodles at lunch you're suddenly going to make a big difference on drop-off day. They're probably just thinking how long 'til they leave.

As I read this last chapter in Hebrews, I thought, it feels like this leader is dropping their kids off at college. It's like we've had these big discussions through the book of Hebrews—I know some of you have gone back and read that because you knew we were doing a series on it—and it's, you know, this is the grand priesthood of Jesus Christ as the perfect priest, and oh, and here's the life you should live, and oh, and these big grandiose statements. And then you get this last chapter and he's like, "Okay, okay, all right. So, all right, there's this thing about make sure you keep being affectionate to one another, and oh, and also be good to the strangers. And oh, what else? Oh yeah, and you should—if someone's in prison you should visit them. And oh yeah, and in your marriage, you know, you should be—have fidelity in your marriage. And then oh, and don't love money too much."

And it does—it's just like it didn't—it just seemed like it was kind of all over the place, was getting thrown in there at the end. And then it ends with this whole thing about like, "Okay, and then when it comes to the leaders, you know, you should follow the leaders," because it later says that because the leaders are concerned for your souls, so you should seek to be a follower of your leaders.

So, just to be clear, this is not a passage about your political leaders. I don't want to burst anybody's bubble, but most of your political leaders are not concerned about your soul. It's talking about church leaders. And I have to admit, I was a little nervous because I knew that my liturgist today is a former congressman, and I'm talking about how political leaders don't really have your soul. But he was very kind after the first service; he actually said to me, "I'm really glad you said that in your sermon about the political leaders." So, there's that.

And but no, it's talking about the spiritual leaders that you have in your life, the spiritual leaders—so, pastors, not just the ones you have now, but ones you have had, and elders of the church. And the idea being that if they're doing their job right, if they're answering their calling, well, they're actually concerned about the state of your spiritual self, of your soul, of your connection with God. And on our best days, that's what we're trying to do.

So, this is a text that's—in the past has been misused. There's another doozy in there that we've misused in there, too: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." That one's been abused as well. That's one that's been quoted at all the wrong times: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And that's why the carpet should remain blue!" No, Jesus Christ remains the same, but we don't. We have to adjust through time. But it's hard, because we're trying to sum up this infinite wisdom, this infinite love that is for us and that we're invited into. And it just—it's sometimes hard to find the right words to capture that.

If I got that redo with my kids, I don't think I would worry so much about giving them a quick speech about all the fears I have. Instead, I'd try to impart something to them. Maybe tell them a story about something that I learned that really helps me hold it all together. I think that would do a little bit better. I don't know, maybe a quote from Dune. I'm not sure. It could be more likely Lord of the Rings, right, Bill?

The Bee Attack at Dutch Brothers Coffee

So, something happened to me yesterday that I'm like, "Ooh, this is a story though that I think I would have used." I decided to try that Dutch Brothers coffee, drive-thru coffee. Have any of you tried that? Dutch Brothers. They told me it's a windmill is the logo. To me, it looks like a wizard bunny. Next time you look at it, it looks like it's wearing a robe, and then these are the ears. Just—you'll know it when you see it.

But Dutch Brothers coffee, it seems like nobody's there. So then you pull around back to the drive-thru and it's like a four-lane highway they got back there dividing out everybody. And you get in line and there's one poor person running around taking everyone's order, and then you have to remerge back into one lane. So there it's just like they hide you in a parking lot behind the building and then they remerge you together. And we sat in that line, and I'm going to tell you that it was no less than a half-hour from start to finish. Closer to an—my wife is mouthing "more like an hour." I know, honey. I know, honey. I know. Do you know how much grace my wife has? Do you know just what an angel she is? If you delay her an hour to her coffee, it's a different version of Sarah—different version.

So, we're in this drive-thru lane and it's like—I began, the young lady who was taking orders would then run inside and then she would take the trash out, and then she'd run inside and then she takes—I was thinking like, "Is she making the orders also, cause this line is barely moving?" It got to the point where I got a little snarky, because we're sitting in line and I'd be like, "Watch this." Okay, car pulls up and then I would do like this narrative: "Now they're steaming the milk. And okay. And now, okay. And then there you go, now this the coffee. Now they've poured the first drink. Okay. Now—" Because it would be all this time, and then all of a sudden the little window would open and you see them hand two drinks out. You're like, "Are you making them on the spot when the person pulls up?"

And it was just taking forever, and we're getting closer and closer, but it's like being in a parking lot after a concert; you're just like this. So, after nearly an hour, we get up there, we're behind, we got one car in front of us, and they're waiting. And while I'm waiting, I'm looking and I'm like, "There's a lot of bees around here." And there were like eight bees all going around the car in front of me. And I thought, "Oh, great. Well, when I

get up there, I can't put my window down. I might get a bee inside of here. I don't want a bee inside the car with me. That would be awful, to have a bee in here. That wouldn't work."

And I'm watching this, and eventually, you know, the person gets their two drinks that took like 10 minutes it felt like to get. And then we pull up and I'm looking, I'm like, "I'm not opening the window. I got these bees going around." And then I look into the little shack that these people are making drinks inside of, and it's a swarm of bees in there with them. I don't—it wasn't like, you know why there were eight bees outside? Cause there were 50 inside the little coffee shed.

And I watched these poor people as they're trying to make drinks and they're—it's like this the whole time, pouring it. The guy making our drinks three times, he just threw stuff down and walked out of the room, and then came back in like this and tried again. But everything they had to grab, they had to watch for. So, you know why the line was taking so long? Cause there's a bee attack happening inside Dutch Brothers coffee!

And I thought, "Wow, that must be really awful for you." And then when he brought the coffee out, when he held it out and there's the swarm of bees around him as he's trying to hand it out to me, and then there's the outside bees as well... and I just thought, "I'm just putting the window down, I don't—" So, I put it down because I felt bad for the guy. And then I took it from him and I said like, "Oh my gosh, that must be awful in there for you." And at first you could tell he got this really like apologetic look, because he thought I was going to complain. And I bet that there were plenty of people who went through the line that day who complained cause they were also sitting in the hour-long line.

And I realized that like the gift I can give this young person is to say thank you and I feel so bad for you. And then my angel of a wife, despite being an hour behind on her initial coffee intake of the day, still said, "I feel like I should look—we should call, like, I feel like there's somebody I should call to report. That can't be safe working conditions in there." And it just goes to show you: you never know when somebody is dealing with a bee attack.

Do Good and Share With Each Other

And that's the kind of wisdom that I wish I had imparted to my kids when I dropped them off at college. Because honestly, when you realize that you never know what's going on inside of someone else's world, it makes you a little bit more patient, a little bit more loving. All that teaching about grace and forgiveness and understanding that Jesus has been trying to pour into us—when you understand that some people have got a bee attack going on, some people have heavy burdens in their lives, it helps you be a little better version of yourself. And I think a teaching like that would have been maybe a little bit more helpful for my kids.

I think that as the author of Hebrews wound down his letter eventually around verse 16, I think he found his beehive story, because he finally just says these words: "Look, do good and share with each other." He uses that as a summary of telling the full story of how Jesus lived a sacrificial life of teaching. And the emphasis wasn't on all the little rules of what you should eat or what you shouldn't eat; the emphasis of what Jesus taught was this sacrificial kind of love. This full presence that would always be there with you.

There may come a day where you have to drop someone off, leave someone behind, but you know that God is still with them. And for us, we know that God is still with us yesterday, today, and forever. And the example that we have of Christ is one that invites us into a life that is sacrificial. And that's the leadership lesson that the writer of Hebrews winds up the whole thing with. And after this kind of like all-over-the-

place listing of some good ideas—and I mean they're all good; it's good teaching, but it's just a little all over the place—after talking about seeing Christ as our leader, as our pioneer and perfecter of the faith, winds it all down into just a few words: How about you just try to do good and share with each other?

We could do a lot worse than to summarize our faith that way. I think once again the kids nailed it: Love everybody. I mean, just run it through that filter before you start shouting your mouth at the kid who didn't make your coffee quick enough. Just try to love one another. Do good. Share with each other. These are some good basic ways to bring our faith together into something that maybe we can hold on to in the midst of moments when you're just starting to lose your right mind.

Informal Spiritual Leaders

But I'll bet that each one of you has someone in your life who was a leader, a spiritual leader, maybe formerly. Maybe it was a pastor. Maybe it's just someone in your family or just someone that you grew up with who at some point said something to you about God or faith or life as a person of faith, and it stuck with you. It might be just a phrase that you repeat to yourself every once in a while when you're ready just to let someone have it, or something that you remind yourself of when you're in one of those dark, lonely places, and that person said something to you that you just whisper to yourself and it brings you right back.

Those are the kind of leaders that this passage is talking about, too—those informal spiritual leaders that have taught you a way to go. And it says in this passage, when you find those kind of leaders, imitate them. Imitate the way they love. Imitate the way they do good. Imitate the way they share with others.

Some days we just need faith to be a little simpler. Maybe it could be that simple for you, too.

May God be glorified in all that you do.

Amen.