

“The Wrappings of Ozzie’s Baseball”

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Sermon Series: Stoked Week 1:

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The Woodside Church

September 10, 2023

He is one of the greatest shortstops of all time. In 1987, the St. Louis Cardinals paid him baseball’s highest salary at the time. His trademark was an airborne somersault at every game. So it was no surprise that the “Wizard of Oz” – Ozzie Smith - was inducted into the baseball Hall of Fame in 2002. What surprised many was Ozzie’s acceptance speech. He compared his journey to the construction of a baseball.

Protecting the cork center of this ball and reinforcing it are two distinct rubber shells. For me these two layers reflect two vital and affirming shells of my core dream. The first shell is my faith in God. With him, I have everything. Without him, I have nothing. The second shell is the faith I had in myself which came through my mother's love and encouragement...

The second part of the construction of this baseball is the wrapping of over 200 yards of wool around the core. I refer to it as the strands of love and faith that so many other people have wrapped around Ozzie Smith as a person and wrapped around my dream. I will never forget the faith my high school coach, Art Webb had in me. When I was questioning my ability and expressed thoughts of going home, Art got wind of my feelings, called me up, and sternly told me, "Oz, you're not going to quit. You're going to hang in there and weather the storm!" And because of that call and his faith in me, I stayed.¹

Ozzie Smith will be remembered as long as there’s a Baseball Hall of Fame. But who remembers Art Webb? Yet without Art, there would be no “Wizard of Oz.”

Around your core, God wraps a shell of love. The Holy Spirit is closer to your spirit than you’ll ever know. Next God winds countless strands of love and faith. He surrounds and covers us with mentors. Who were your mentors? Who taught you life lessons? Who carved, chiseled and sanded your character? Who put courage into you and pushed self-pity out of you? Whose opinion matters most? Who stood by you when you felt all alone? When you were falling apart, who put you back together? A parent, coach, teacher, pastor, coworker, friend?

One of the great tragedies of today is a lack of mentors. I hear it from business people, homemakers, seniors, teens. Sure they have friends and acquaintances. Yet so many feel alone in their pain. There are oceans of lonely people in the world. Every follower of Jesus needs a coach or mentor. Every follower of Jesus needs to coach or mentor another believer. Why? Like Ozzie Smith, there are moments in life when we question ourselves and want to pack it in. Many of us burn up or burn out.

¹ www.baseballhalloffame.org/hof_weekend/2002/speeches/smith_ozzie.htm;

Take for example a young man who feels he is running on fumes. Promoted to be the regional director of one of the largest and most critical territories for his organization, he is overwhelmed by the divisions, the oppositions, the attacks. He's faced it all before. He's come to see disease, dissension, danger as just part of the job. The difference now: he must endure it alone. His direct report, his mentor, is not only thousands of miles away but doing jail time for a second time and this time facing a death sentence. His mentor is the Apostle Paul. His name is Timothy. In the last letter we have from Paul, what we call 2 Timothy, the Apostle writes to Timothy,

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:6-7

The fire of faith in Timothy is dying down to embers. It's AD 66. At this moment, Timothy is timid. Afraid. Timothy oversees the house churches scattered throughout the province of Asia – westernmost Turkey. Centered in the city of Ephesus, the churches are growing and spreading but so is the persecution from without and the divisions and false teachings from within. At times it feels like everyone is deserting the faith (2 Timothy 1:15). Worst of all, Paul is near the end of his life in far off Rome. Execution awaits him by order of the unstable Emperor Nero. Timothy must continue to spread the Gospel without his mentor. He needs the Spirit to stoke the fire of his faith.

In our September series “Stoked” we will follow the life of Timothy one of the great unknown heroes of the faith. Over the next three weeks we'll learn from this young leader how to recapture the spark and spread the fire. It will prepare us for a deeper look at the mission of Paul and Timothy in Acts called “Share” which starts October 1.

As Timothy reads Paul's last letter, I wonder if his mind travels back to his childhood when he first met the fiery preacher. Timothy is a hybrid – the son of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother. Both religions frown up, maybe even forbid, such a union. Timothy's mother Eunice chose not to circumcise her son as the Law commands. Maybe her husband refused to allow it. Maybe Eunice likes to break the rules. I can't imagine her mother Lois liked her daughter's rejection of their Jewish laws and customs. Whatever the reason, Timothy grows up as a Gentile in the Gentile city of Lystra in the Province of Galatia in the heart of what we call Turkey. This is probably where Timothy would have lived and died without leaving a mark.

Then comes the spark which sets Timothy's life on fire. Two travelers visit Lystra and heal a man handicapped from birth. It causes such awe and wonder, everyone assumes the visitors must be the gods Zeus and Hermes in disguise. Yet the minute the priests and people try to worship them, the men shout,

Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. Acts 14:15

They explain the man was healed by a Jewish prophet named Jesus who died on a cross, rose from the dead, reigns in heaven and now offers salvation to Jews and Gentiles. As the fickle mob listens it turns from praise to persecution even to the point of stoning Paul. Thankfully he survives and soon leaves town with Barnabas but not before they baptize a few new believers – including Lois and her rebellious daughter Eunice. Their house is likely the first church in Lystra.

Over the next years, Timothy sees a change in his grandmother, mother and himself. A passion is growing within. The Christians in Lystra and Iconium notice it. So much so that when Paul returns they recommend he take Timothy on his mission to spread the Gospel. As Paul, Silas, Lois, Eunice and other leaders lay hands on Timothy the fire of the Spirit descends on the teen. The Lord calls him to go.

Try to imagine how difficult this is for Timothy. Until then he probably never ventured more than a few miles from his village. He might never see his grandmother or parents again. He will be traveling to strange lands filled with unfamiliar customs. And it is dangerous work. Timothy saw how his neighbors stoned Paul. All he has is the Father, the Son, the Spirit...and Paul. Over the years the glory and the agony Paul and Timothy endure forges an unbreakable bond. Timothy will be listed as the co-author of six of Paul's letters and the recipient of two. Paul will call him, "my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord" (I Corinthians 4:17) and tells the Philippians, "I have no one else like him" (Philippians 2:20).

Every follower of Jesus is also a leader. Every disciple needs a Paul and a Timothy. I need someone ahead of me on the journey to guide me and I, in turn, can guide someone else. It just makes sense. Lessons are passed on better through relationships. Care is shared better through friendships. Missions are accomplished better through partnerships. We are better when we work together.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul exhibits all the qualities of a great mentor. First, he ***Regularly Prays*** for Timothy, his dear son in the faith. "I thank God ... as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers" (2 Timothy 1:3). Pray for God to send you a Paul and a Timothy and then keep praying for them.

Next, he tells Timothy to ***Remember the Foundation***. Paul continues,
I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 2 Timothy 1:5

Parents, you are the greatest spiritual mentors your children will ever have. Notice the foundation of faith Timothy's grandmother and mother laid down in his life. The greatest gift you can give your children is a strong spiritual foundation. It is more important than braces, sports or a college education. Why? It will guide them through this life and open the door to the next life. Timothy's father was not a believer. Thankfully, Paul stepped in to mentor him. Not every child will have parents who are believers. You may need to be the Paul who steps in to mentor one of our youth. Parents ask, "How do I mentor my

children in the faith?" Step one: start growing in Christ yourself. Step two: make faith a priority in your family. Pray and read the Bible daily. Worship weekly. Serve frequently.

Third, Paul ***Rekindles the Fire*** in Timothy.

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 2 timothy 1:6-7

The early years of ministry were thrilling, scary and glorious. But now decades have passed and Timothy is alone. Paul is in prison under a death sentence in far off Rome. And like Ozzie Smith, Timothy has lost his nerve. He's depressed, defeated, perhaps even persecuted. He is ashamed to talk openly about the Lord and about Paul. The fire of his faith is dwindling to embers. Then, just as Ozzie's high school coach Art called to encourage him, Paul sends this letter to build up the blaze in Timothy. That's not easy to do. Some people might not appreciate the challenges and the loving confrontation, the constructive criticism required to stoke the fire.

When Pastor Gordon MacDonald was new in the ministry he had a weekly meeting with a church elder. Whenever the elder told him something which felt like a criticism, Gordon would sulk. After several times of this, the elder leaned across the table and said, "Pastor, you have a trait you have to whip. It's over sensitivity. We're not talking about you or how we feel about you; we're talking about your ministry and how we can make it better. Stop injecting your feelings into these discussions." Gordon MacDonald says. "The man gave me a treasure of an insight. I hear it to this day— 35 years later—every time my wife, my friend or my enemy begins to say something I don't want to hear."² That's how Paul rekindles Timothy's fire.

Fourth, Paul ***Reviews the Mission*** for Timothy.

But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. 2 Timothy 1:8-9

Why did Paul willingly suffer for the gospel? He was convinced that God loves people so much He sent His Son Jesus to die for us and save. And the best way to love people is to tell them this Good News and invite them to put their faith in Jesus. He is even willing to suffer and die to share the Gospel. Love God. Love your neighbor. Share the Good News. That's the Mission.

Finally, Paul tells Timothy to ***Repeat the Pattern***.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 2 Timothy 1:13-14

Paul set the mentoring pattern for Timothy and then told him to repeat the pattern. Every generation has mentored the next up until now. Today, I want to challenge you to pray

² Gordon MacDonald, "The Gift of Rebuke," *Leadership Journal* (Fall 2002), p. 76

for two strands around the core of your baseball. Pray for God to send you a Paul and a Timothy. Pray for someone to mentor you, someone to walk beside you and hold you accountable and someone to learn from you. Everyone who has a ministry in this church must mentor another person to take over that ministry. Mentoring prevents burnout, provides companionship and promotes a healthy church. All of us, in one way or another, are blind – blind to our faults, our failings, our futures. We need mentors to guide us, teach us, and, if need be, push us along the path.

Episcopal bishop William Frey tells of a student he mentored who was blind.

One day I asked him, “How did you lose your sight?” “A chemical explosion,” John said, “at the age of thirteen.” “How did that make you feel?” I asked. “Life was over. I felt helpless. I hated God,” John responded. “For the first six months I did nothing to improve my lot in life. I would eat all my meals alone in my room.

One day my father entered my room and said, ‘John, winter’s coming and the storm windows need to be up—that’s your job. I want those hung by the time I get back this evening or else!’ “Then he turned, walked out of the room and slammed the door. I got so angry. I thought *Who does he think I am? I’m blind!* I was so angry I decided to do it. I felt my way to the garage, found the windows, located the necessary tools, found the ladder, all the while muttering under my breath, ‘I’ll show them. I’ll fall, then they’ll have a blind and paralyzed son!’” John continued, “I got the windows up. I found out later that never at any moment was my father more than four or five feet away from my side.”³

You are never alone. Your Heavenly Father wraps strands of faith and love around you. Reach out and grab their hands. Then, “let’s play ball!”

³ William Frey, "When Words Come To an End," Message delivered at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama (July 2003)