**How to Keep Your Heart Burning Hot for the Gospel**

So glad to be with you here today!

Welcome to our first every Gospelize podcast. Our goal is to help you build youth ministry with a kick, a Gospel kick, that will change everything!

So excited for the Gospelize podcast…nationally we have hundreds of thousands of youth leaders accessing our website every year and last year we had over 70,000 youth leaders outside the United States accessing our material!

I’m blown away by what he’s doing. I’m blown away by what he’s done!

And, to be honest, I feel like an unlikely candidate to be preaching to you. I don’t feel qualified in many ways. I was a roofer for 8 years and never got a seminary degree. And my upbringing was far from your typical Suburban Christian’s.

I don’t come from a family of church-going, pew sitting, hymn-singing family. I come from a family filled with body-building, tobacco-chewing, beer-drinking thugs…and that’s just the women!

Seriously, three of my uncles were title winning body builders, the fourth could bench press 500 pounds and the fifth was a Golden Gloves boxer. And they all loved to fight.

Here’s a picture of one of them! **Picture of Jack**

I come from a family of street fighters, not street preachers.

My whole family, even the women, had fighting stories. Everyone except me!

**I wasn’t a fighter, I was a reader. I didn’t like to crack skulls, I liked to crack books.**

So all of my family thought something was wrong with me.

I’ll never forget when I was in elementary school and the whole family was together, one of my uncles looking at me from across the room and said to one of my family members, “What’s wrong with that kid? He reads books.” And I was like, “I can hear you.”

And all of this played into my psyche. It felt like I belonged to another family. It felt like somebody forgot to slip steroids into health shake...like the rest of my family members.

I actually wondered if I had any of their fighting DNA at all.

But then one day in high school gym class something happened that changed everything for me. At the Christian high school I attended they’d focus on a different sport every month. One month it was football. One month it was track. One month it was wrestling. And one month it was boxing. Yes, boxing. Nothing says, “I love Jesus how bout you” like putting on the boxing gloves and beating the tar out of each other .

And, lucky me, I was picked to box **Steve Salazar.** Now Steve Salazar outweighed me by 20 pounds and he also knew how to box. Everyone knew he was a boxer. Rumor had it that he had been training by a Golden Gloves boxer.

And Salazar didn’t like me because I used to call him “Salad Bar.”

I found out on Monday that I was supposed to fight him on Friday so all week I prepared. Although I came from a fighting family I didn’t really know how to fight. I had been in pushing matches but nothing like my family. So I did what any teenager trying to learn how to box in a week would do in the early 80’s.

I rented the movie **Rocky** and watched it every night.

I mimicked the moves and shadow boxed in my basement and imagined myself as Rocky Balboa and Salazar as Apollo Creed.

On Friday all the 9th-12th grade boys sat in a big square and became the edges of our unofficial boxing ring as match after match unfolded before us…with all of our teenaged boy man pride on the line with each match. Finally Salazar and I were called to fight. We put on our regulation sized gloves and head gear and prepared to fight.

I was thinking the whole time, “Okay, jab, bob and weave. Stay light on your feet. Just keep jabbing, keep dancing, keep moving.”

And all during this time Salazar just stood there doing this (hitting gloves together) and smiling. Then the thought hit me like an uppercut, “There’s no way I’m going to win this fight. He is trained and I am not. I got my training from a movie. He got his training from a real boxer. I’m going to get killed.”

But then I started to do something, I started to think to myself, “There’s only one way I can win and it’s not by trying to outbox him. But he can’t box without a head and if I knock his head off then he won’t be able to hit back. So, that’s what I’ll do. I’ll knock his head off.”

In that moment a switch was flipped. Something snapped in me and I felt it**.**

So when the bell rang I ran out to meet him and hit him in the head with a right hook as hard as I could. I hit him so hard that his head gear completely turned around and covered his eyes. so **I didn’t do what Jesus would do**, I did what Moses would do…I hit him again. Then I jumped up in the air in some kind of Matrix slow motion type move and landed right over him and pummeled him relentlessly…for the glory of God.

The gym teacher pulled me off of him and I think I was drooling at the time.

After he got up from the ground I just chased him around the ring saying, “Salad bar…I’m hungry. Let’s fight salad bar.”

Nobody wanted to box me after that.

**I discovered that burning fighter’s ember down deep inside my soul**, the burning ember that I didn’t really know that was there…until that very moment. It was simmering there the whole time, a burning fighting ember just waiting to be fanned.

The same is true of many youth leaders when it comes to the Gospel.

**Maybe you think of yourself as just a regular old youth leader, nothing special**. You love Jesus and love teens but, down deep inside, you don’t really think God can use you to knock out the devil and reach the teenagers in your community for Jesus.

Maybe you read the stories of great men like the Apostle Paul you are intimidated. Maybe you think you don’t have what it takes to shake your city for Jesus. Maybe you think you’re too typical to really make a difference.

If this describes you don’t be alarmed because Timothy relates. He was the bookish type. **He was not nearly as intense and bold as his fearless mentor, the Apostle Paul**. So when the great Apostle writes his final letter to Timothy he gives him a powerful reminder to fan that burning Gospel ember into an unstoppable flame.

Today we are going to look at 2 Timothy 1:3-8 together and, from this passage, pull out three action steps that will help us rekindle our Gospel passion in youth ministry.

*“I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.**Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am 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.****6****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. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”*

Paul is telling Timothy to find, fan and fuel that burning Gospel ember and the Holy Spirit is challenging us to do the same thing. It is my prayer that today that God will help you turning that burning Gospel ember into an unstoppable fire today.

I assume that most youth leaders, when they first got into ministry, did it because they love Jesus, love the Gospel and want to see teenagers transformed by this message.

But then they start, at some point, to just go through the motions. Perhaps it’s the politics of policies or the machinery of ministry that slowly wears down their resolve to do whatever it takes to reach the next generation with the Gospel. Whatever it is, that burning ember down deep in their soul that once burned so brightly is down to a slight sizzle.

Today I want to help you keep your heart burning hot for the Gospel! And it all starts with the burning Gospel ember that is sizzling down deep inside all of our souls!

1. **FIND IT!**

In 2 Timothy 1:5 Paul tells Timothy, *“I am 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.”*

Paul is reminding Timothy of his spiritual heritage. His grandmother Lois was a believer and so was Eunice his mother. Timothy’s spiritual heritage was rich and Paul reminded him to be grateful for it.

In the same way….**Never get over your story!**

You see all of us have a powerful transformation story to tell. Paul did. By his own admission he had been **a murderer and persecutor of the church** but God met him on the road to Damascus. He got struck blind by the light of Christ and ended up converting to Christianity.

But Timothy’s story seemed more typical. His grandmother was a believer. His mother was a believer. So he became a believer. And some of you need to be reminded of that today. If you were raised in a Christian home by Christian parents then God delivered you from years of wasted living.

But Paul holds up his story as a spectacular story of God’s grace.

Every story is a spectacular story of God’s grace! Sometimes we hear these radical stories of transformation and think to ourselves, “My salvation story is lame. I just trusted in Jesus when I was a kid in Sunday school” or something like that. But every salvation story is spectacular because every salvation story is the story of an enemy of God becoming a child of God through faith.

As I saw on someone’s Twitter feed not too long ago, “*On the day we got saved God turned a criminal proceeding into an adoption ceremony*.”

Have you gotten over the Gospel? Have you gotten over the shocking gift of God’s grace and overwhelming nature of salvation? The Gospel is not just good news, it is the best news, the best news that Jesus died and rose again on the cross to pay the price for our sins. By the way if you’ve never put your faith in Jesus then today is the day.

Never get over the Gospel. Never get over the love story. Find that Gospel ember, then…

1. **FAN IT!**

In 2 Timothy 1:6 Paul tells 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.”*

**Paul laid his hands on Timothy to impart the Holy Spirit, a spiritual gift and a divine mission**…the Great Commission…the ultimate cause….the last and lasting mandate of Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations. And that mission is given to us every bit as much as it was given to Timothy or to the Apostle Paul.

How do you fan the Gospel ember? First of all you **say “yes” to the mission!**

Have you come to the point in your youth ministry where you have said, “Here’s why I’m here…to advance the Gospel to and through the next generation!”? Because that’s why this podcast is nicknamed Gospelize! It’s the old English Word for evangelize…but it’s much more rich than just that…Because, not only do our non Christian teenagers need Gospelized but our Christian teens need Gospelized too! And so do we!

When we Gospelize we immerse our teenagers into a Good News culture that is focused on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus! We give them both a message and a mission! We point their lives toward the cross, the empty tomb and the vision before us!

That’s what happened with Jarrod…He got Gospelized!

Right now, there are nearly **200 documented gangs** in the city of Memphis. Gangs have transformed Memphis from a thriving southern metropolis into a broken, paralyzed city.

In the middle of this brokenness is a youth leader named Jarrod. Jarrod’s a former semi-pro football player who settled in as a youth leader in one of the higher crime rate areas of his city. Up until this point he was going by the youth ministry book… Play games, invite teens, quick lesson, dismissed.

He was quickly becoming disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of this approach. So I trained Jarrod to lead a transformation of his youth ministry. I helped him unpack what it meant to have a Gospel advancing ministry, how to move from just having meetings to being on mission.

I told Jarrod that in every other area of life teens are being challenged. They are being challenged in sports and academics. But, in church we don’t challenge teenagers, we coddle them. It’s time to raise the bar for teens.

Jarrod took it seriously. He started challenging and equipping his teenagers to pray and it caught so much momentum that they had hundreds of teenagers at their local high school for **See You at the Pole**. Jarrod decided to host **Dare 2 Share Live** at his church in inner city Memphis last September. He was one of 68 satellite sites across the nation who I’ll never forget him telling me how **the shyest girl in his group** led someone to Jesus, gave her testimony and ignited a firestorm of excitement in all of the teens who attended!

His goal is to unite and ignite the churches of Memphis and use Dare 2 Share Live as a catalyst for the Gospel. His goal is to start a Gospel gang who will take back the city of Memphis block by block, armed with prayer and the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

It’s time to take our cities back block by block one Gospel conversation at a time. It’s time to energize our churches to mobilize their youth to Gospelize their world. It’s time to fan that burning ember into flame.

As Paul reminds Timothy in verse 7, “*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”*

Fan the flame by saying yes to the mission and yielding to the Spirit…because **the Holy Spirit brings holy boldness!**

Think of what happened on the Day of Pentecost (**Tongues of Fire**)…the Holy Spirit wants to set our teenagers’ tongues on fire for the Gospel

I can’t help but think of Kathy….she got Holy Spirit boldness in a visceral way! (tell her story)

But it’s not just the Kathy’s out there…it’s us too! When was the last time you shared the Gospel with someone outside of youth group?

We must find that burning ember. We must fan it. And, finally, we must…

1. **FUEL IT!**

2 Timothy 1:8 reminds us, *“So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”*

Look at those words *“Join with me in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God.”*

Christians all over the world are dying for sharing their faith. Many are murdered or mangled. At the most, in the United States, you may be mocked or marginalized. But Paul calls us, along with Timothy, to join with him in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, no matter how intense or light that suffering might be.

It’s that fear of suffering that often keeps teens from sharing the Gospel, the fear of being mocked or marginalized …if you give the average teenager a choice of going on a mission trip to the Amazon to build mud huts for the poor while fighting off Pythons or…

Don’t be ashamed to share the Gospel. Don’t be ashamed to build a ministry that advances the Gospel. **I know the buzz word today is discipleship but there is no real discipleship without evangelism**. After all Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” **The core call of discipleship is to pick up your cross**, die to yourself and follow him and that first death he calls us to risk is not a physical one but a social one…the social death that your teenagers could experience if they publicly identify with Jesus and invite their peers to do the same.

If you want to build this type of ministry it will take gritty courage and unflinching determination. Again Paul reminds us in **1 Timothy 1:8** Paul writes, “*Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”* When you choose to build a Gospel advancing ministry you are choosing to invite suffering into your life.

Story of John Curiale…

It’s time. It’s time to get gospelized once again. It’s time to find that burning Gospel ember down deep inside your heart. It’s time to remember the greatness of your salvation.

And then fan it…unleash the Holy Spirit who is in you to give you the boldness you need.

And then fuel it…join with the great line of sufferers throughout church history and endure hardship by the power of God.