

Catching Your Second Wind

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When I was in Jr. High School I ran track. And the event that I ran was the 880 --- the ½ mile. Today they call it the 800 meters. Back then ... way back then in 1972 there was a collegiate runner who also ran the ½ mile. His name was Dave Wottle. There may be some of you who remember Dave Wottle. Dave Wottle was my hero.

He was famous for two things. The first thing Dave Wottle was famous for was his headgear. You usually don't think of headgear when you think of track --- but that's what Dave Wottle is maybe most known for. He wore a hat when he ran. An old golf hat. You always knew where Dave Wottle was in the race because you could see his hat. But the other thing that Dave Wottle was famous for was his kick. People called it the Dave Wottle kick. Now a kick in track is the extra burst of speed a runner puts on, if he or she has it to put on, at the end of the race. It is that last sprint to finish line. It's called a kick. And Dave Wottle was famous for his kick. Because the way Dave Wottle ran a race is that throughout the first two thirds of the race he would languish at the end of the pack. You would be watching and you would see this man in the golf cap get further and further behind. And half way through the second lap of this two-lap race you would be convinced that there was no way that Dave Wottle had it in him to make up the ground ahead of him and catch the leaders. But then all of a sudden you began to see the kick. And it was as if the man in the golf cap was catching his second wind. And before you knew it he would begin to pass one guy after the other and within 200 yards of the finish he would often pass like ten guys until all of sudden he would be

neck and neck with the leader. He won the gold medal in the 1972 Olympics just that way. The famous Dave Wottle kick.

Now the amazing thing about Dave Wottle --- is that when he ran he almost always ran the second lap faster than the first. He always seemed to get a second wind --- and the second wind is what seemed to carry him to the finish line.

The second lap better than the first.

Now in life it doesn't often work that way, does it? I'm not talking about track ... I'm talking about life. Usually it is the first lap that's the fastest. You start out young ... you have energy ... your indestructible --- you're racing around that first lap pretty fast. But then the years add up, your body starts to give way a little. You get tired and the second lap gets a little tougher and the pace gets a little slower.

It happens that way in careers sometimes. You come out of school with the freshest ideas and the willingness to work the longest hours. You rise up the ladder pretty quick. And you are racing around that first lap. But then comes the second lap and all of a sudden you see people passing you and you wonder if you can keep up. And then you learn that they might not even want you around for the second lap. The world doesn't really much believe in the second lap. And the reason the world doesn't believe in the second lap is that the world doesn't understand much about the second wind.

It's what I love about the Bible. The Bible believes in the second wind. The Bible is filled with stories about people getting their second winds. The Bible is filled with stories about people running their second laps faster than their first. Abraham and Sarah, old man and woman finishing their first lap in the land of Ur preparing likely for a slow second lap --- but then they got their second wind. And they were off to the land of Canaan, having a baby at age 90 and becoming the father and mother of many nations. And their second lap was further than their first. Moses had a pretty good first lap. The heir apparent to Pharaoh of Egypt. But then he ends up out in the wilderness --- literally it seems out to pasture. But then came the second wind. The burning bush. The call to go back and deliver the people of Israel. The

second lap awaited him. And the second lap was a whole lot faster. He caught his second wind.

The people of Israel. What a glorious first lap they had run. The great judges and kings of their past --- Joshua and Deborah and David and Solomon --- hard to run a better first lap than that. But then because of their disobedience they are taken into exile. Taken away from their home ... captive in a foreign land. And Ezekiel the prophet calls out to them and says that when he looks upon the people of Israel all he sees is a valley of dry bones. The people of Israel do not believe that they can have a new life. They have run in their own minds what they think is the end of the race. No second lap. But then God says to Ezekiel, "Prophecy -- prophecy! Tell them about the wind." In Hebrew the word is "ruah" --- and it means wind or breath or spirit. "Tell them," God says to Ezekiel, "tell them about the second wind --- tell them about the breath of God that can raise up the valley of dry bones and make it live again ... so that they can run the second lap faster than the first." And sure enough the people of Israel come home from their exile and they rebuild again ... and they prepare for the coming Messiah.

And then what about the disciples? Can you have a better first lap than the disciples? Three years with Jesus ... learning from his teaching ... given power to cast out demons and heal people ... personal encounters with the resurrected Christ. You can't get a better first lap than that. So they come to Jesus and ask, "Is the race over? Aren't we all through?" And Jesus says, "You have another lap." "Another lap?" they say. Jesus says, "Another lap. But guess what? You get a second wind. And if you can believe it ... the second wind will give you power to do far beyond what you could have thought about doing up until now." And so Jesus says, "Wait ... wait for the second wind ... because when the second wind comes ... the Holy Spirit ... you are going to turn the world upside down." And that's what happened --- the world got turned upside down. The Bible is the book of the second wind.

I'm not sure where you are in the race --- you might be just out of the blocks. You might be having an incredible first lap ... you might be slowing down on the second lap ... you

might feel like you're not even being given a chance to run the second lap --- but do you know what today is? Today is Pentecost and Pentecost is the day of the second wind. Do you know what tomorrow is? Tomorrow is the day of the second wind. The day after? The day after is the day of the second wind. You see, my friends, we are living in the era of the second wind. We are living in the time when God is seeking to pour out his spirit upon all people. We are living in this time when God has this second wind ... for all our second laps. We are living in a time when God says to us ... it doesn't matter how good or how bad your first lap was --- it's time to catch your second wind ... and let me fill you and use you and have you do far more abundantly than you could ever ask or think.

Now there is a second part to the story I told you about Dave Wottle. Several years ago I made mention in one of my sermons, much like I did today, of my interest in and inspiration from Dave Wottle. When church was over I put the sermon away and forgot about it. It was about three or four months later that I got in the mail a large envelope – it was from Rhodes College in Tennessee and I almost threw it away because us pastors get lots of marketing stuff from colleges. But by grace I opened it up and found a handwritten note on Rhodes College stationery from the Director of Admissions of the College and this is what the note said:

Dear Pastor McConnell,

My son Mike, who was a computer science major in college and is always surfing the internet it seems, came across your sermon about my running. I was flattered to be mentioned in your sermon. It's ironic that my pastor at Germantown Methodist Church made reference to the Olympic race last month in a sermon he delivered.

Having been an 880 runner yourself, I thought you might enjoy the enclosed photo. Your new church facility looks beautiful and it's obvious your church family is being used by God to successfully spread the gospel of Christ.

Sincerely,

Dave Wottle

He signs the picture: "Steve – Best wishes as you continue to spread the Gospel of Christ. Dave Wottle"

Now you can imagine that I was not very much thrilled to be getting a letter and a signed picture of my #1 track hero of all time. Hardly. But I tell you that second half of the story for two reasons. First, Dave Wottle had a second chapter to his life. Maybe more than that he would say. He won the gold medal at age 22. He did not compete in the Olympics before or after. Now you can argue perhaps that there couldn't be a much better first lap than that – winning the gold medal. Everything is downhill from there. But I am guessing, and it's only a guess, that Dave Wottle would say that his 30 plus years of working in higher education and affecting the lives of thousands and thousands of college students, raising his own children, loving his wife and being a good member at the Germantown Methodist Church, at the end of the day, is a better lap. He got his second wind. Go home and find the movie *Chariots of Fire* - learn about Eric Liddell - 1924 Scottish Olympic Gold Medalist - fastest man in the world. And what was his second lap? Missionary to China - which lap was better?

The second reason I share that letter with you – is that when that second wind fills you and moves you and inspires you – it usually means you have someone – someone in particular to touch. Someone to whom you can be a blessing. Truth is Dave Wottle didn't have to write that letter. He didn't have to take the time to handwrite a note and sign a picture and send it to a complete stranger. No one would have known had he chosen not to and no one would have thought the lesser of him. But he did it. Maybe it might be a blessing. Maybe it might be an encouragement. Maybe it might be a little boost along the way. So from person to person the second wind, dare we call it that, blew. One brother in Christ was blessed by another brother in Christ.

I was in Honduras this past week, meeting with some of our mission partners, and at the hotel we were staying at I ran into a guy - a retired business man from Indiana - and I asked him what he was doing down there. And what he was doing was leading a mission he had started after his retirement to find homes and families for Honduran children. His ministry is

called "Hope for One Child". He has brought hope to dozens and dozens of children. He said to me "My life didn't begin for me until I was 65." Your second lap can be faster than your first.

I have an old friend whose father for over 60 years was a giant of a pastor. He was a great churchman, a college President and a great preacher. He served the Church faithfully for all those years – but the last chapter of his life was a struggle. He suffered a couple of heart attacks and grew very weak. He spent most of his time at home and was disappointed not to be as active as he once had been. Finally, it came time for him to go to the hospital where he would in a few days die. His daughter struggled with why did he have to suffer so and why was it taking so long, as she put it, for the Lord to take him home? The day before he died he received a visit from the newly ordained pastor at the church where he had been attending. Pretty wet behind the ears, and somewhat intimidated by this giant of a man, the young pastor visited with him for a bit and then prayed. When the prayer was over, the great preacher kept holding his hand. He pulled the young man close – and then he whispered to him, "You are a great pastor." That's all he said. But that's all he needed to say. It's all the young man needed to hear from the great giant. A blessing. It was the movement of the second wind.

We who live in the season of Pentecost live with the promise that at whatever time, whatever stage, whatever age – no matter how well the first lap has gone – the promise is that the second lap may have something even greater. We just need to catch our second wind. That as long as we have breath there will always be another breath – ruah – blessing us, that we may be a blessing.