

HOPE WIINS PART 5 CONTAGIOUS HOPE

Introduction: Good Morning and Happy Mother's Day.

We are talking today about contagious hope. Clearly, we've heard a lot these days about things that are negatively contagious. In fact, we have seen that not only is a virus contagious but things like fear can infect people in harmful ways. I thought it was funny last week when we were talking about the promise-land and Anna described it as a land flowing with toilet paper and Clorox wipes. Fear causes people to hoard and disregard other people.

There are other negative attitudes that can take over in people's lives. A spirit of complaint or a critical spirit can dampen others spirit and pollute the atmosphere. I heard a funny story about a salesman who went to a negative barber. The salesman goes to his barber, sits in the chair to get his hair cut. Salesman is excited, "I just want you to know I am getting ready to take a business trip to Italy. Barber says, "Oh my what airline are you going on?" He tells the barber and the barber says, "Oh I wish you wouldn't go on that airline. They have a terrible safety record; you won't get there on time." Barber asks, "Where are you staying?" Salesman told him the name of the hotel. The barber says, "I was station there for a year and half. I know that hotel; it is terrible, service is bad. You will be lucky to get towels." Barber asks, "What are you going to do over there?" Salesman says, "I have a sales presentation..." Barber says, "Oh I wish you weren't going there for that reason; Italians don't buy much. It is not going to be good." By this time the salesman is discouraged and mumbles to himself something about the Pope. The barber says "Did I hear you say Pope?" Salesman says, "I was hoping I would be able to have a private audience with the Pope." Barber says, "You are so unrealistic, bad airline, bad hotel, bad reason for going and now you want to see the Pope. That will not happen." Salesman leaves discouraged.

A month later he comes back. The barber asks, "How did your trip go?" Salesman replied, "Greatest trip I ever had; I fell asleep for 6 hours on the airline. It landed 20 minutes early. A taxi picked me up and took me to the hotel. They greeted me at the door and handed me a fresh set of towels. I loved my room. I looked out the balcony and could see the Vatican. The next day I went to the sales meeting; they loved my product and bought everything. I need to go back with another order." The barber is sinking lower and lower. Salesman: "The greatest thing that happened, I got to see the Pope. They took me in this beautiful ornate room, down a red carpet. I saw the Pope waiting for me. It was so humbling. When I got to the Pope, I went to my knees and kissed his ring. He put his hand upon my head and said, "My son, my son" "Where did you ever get such a lousy haircut?"

All kidding set aside the sad truth is that there are many who may survive the physical virus but lose things like relationships, mental health, or sobriety because they allowed the enemy to plant some kind of spiritual virus in their hearts and attitudes. We are sadly seeing the enemy trying to take advantage of this time by stirring up seeds of strive, hopelessness, anxiety, addiction, and anger, and abuse.

But there is good news! The good news is that God wants to release in us a contagious power that cancels and replaces the negative virus' in our hearts; it is the power of *contagious hope*. We learn all through God's word that when the enemy comes in like a flood the Lord raises up a standard against him. I love what Romans 5:20 says. In the second half of the verse it says, *"Where sins increased, grace increased all the more."*

God has a grace for us that is greater than the power of fear, strife, anxiety or anything else that would try to infect us. This series is all about how hope wins. If we learn to live in hope, we can overcome anything. In 2 Cor. 5:20 we read, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

On the cross Jesus took the viruses of sin, shame, hate, hopelessness and all of the other influences and powers of the enemy and disarmed and destroyed their power to hold us captive. When we accept Jesus, His Spirit lives in our spirit. I like to say, "Never underestimate the power of the human spirit united with Holy Spirit." I John 4:4 says, *"Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world."* His power not only can fill us with hope and joy, love and peace but it is powerful enough to change the atmosphere around us.

A group of us from the church went to Mt. View hospital with signs and to wave to a dear sister who was being transported to Albuquerque. About 30 of us gathered. Her brother came and asked who we were? We told him we were from her church. He said, "O I feel God's presence here in the parking lot in an overwhelming way."

In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus said, *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world A tower built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

Jesus is telling us we have an infectious power but we need to get the salt out of the saltshaker and the lamp out from under the bed and let people in the world around us feel the hope and light we have in Christ. We can change the destiny of the hopeless and their families and awaken a frightened world to the hope they can have in Christ.

There has never been a time in history where the world has needed hope more. Many of our neighbors have come to realize that the hope of this world disappoints. Some who may have been hoping in material things, were comfortably looking forward to their vacation or retirement and now they are wondering if they can even pay the rent. People are seeing that physical health can be taken away in a moment. People need to know Jesus alone can bring hope that never disappoints. He is a Rock and an Anchor for our souls. He gives the peace, power, and promises that allow us assurance that we won't be disappointed but we will live to see *"the goodness of God in the land of the living."*

I like to say if one virus in one person from China could spread and infect the whole world, how much more can hope, inspired by the Holy Spirit in believers, be activated to inspire a world-

wide revival in our day. It has happened before. It happened on the day of Pentecost with 120 Christians filled with the Holy Spirit. I was reading how in 1806 it happened with a group of college students in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Five of them would meet in a field to pray for a revival. During a short thunderstorm, they took shelter on the lee side of a haystack and continued to pray. What happened went on to be called the “haystack revival.” It has been said that this was the birthing place of the modern Protestant mission movements. Scores of missionary groups, including: InterVarsity, Disciples of Christ Missions and many more trace their beginnings back to that haystack. I believe God wants that to happen today. Who knows, maybe it will be called the Las Cruces Pecan Orchard Revival or the Hatch Green Chili Revival!

I love to tell people of the power of hope in the feeding programs we’ve helped start and sponsor over the years. Sue and Russ Yeager lead Hope Centers International. They host Sunday School like programs along with lunches. The real power of Hope Centers is the teachers, who bring Jesus to kids and families who hurt the most and have the least. These teachers are on the frontlines of poverty. It is as they mentor kids in the power of the hope of Jesus Christ that transformation happens. We noticed that in places like the Philippines the cycles of poverty so easily continue. Most of the girls drop out of school very early. Sue was telling me about one girl named Ruthie May. She was not only in the feeding program but the Dream Release Program that our missionaries Brenda and Pong lead. Dream Release provides scholarships and mentoring for kids.

Ruthie May was part of that program for seven years, has now graduated from high school and is in her second year of college. But beyond that she is now the kids’ pastor, teaching kids in her school to have hope. She recently went to her hometown to help with a Coronavirus relief outreach. She taught children while she was there. The principal of an elementary school was so impressed, she told Ruthie May that when she completes college, she already has a teaching job at the school and doesn’t even need to apply. The hope that was brought to those kids has become contagious and is changing the history of generations.

So how does hope in us become contagious in and through us? I want us to look at the story of Nehemiah for some answers. Nehemiah is an incredible story. He was a cupbearer for a Persian King Artaxerxes around 450 BC. About 90 years or so before, the Jews had been taken into captivity by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. After the fall of Babylon, the Persian King Cyrus released the Jews to return to their land. Some like Nehemiah’s family stayed behind but several thousand of the Jews went back and mostly settled in and around Jerusalem. Even though permission was given them to rule over that area, they lived for decades as oppressed, persecuted, and poverty-stricken victims. Local authorities in the area intimidated, threatened, and discouraged them into submission. The city was never fully reclaimed and remained in ruins with the Jews scattered, living in fear. Fear and hopelessness kept them from claiming and living in possession of the promises God had spoken was theirs.

When Nehemiah heard about this he was devastated. He went into deep prayer, eventually receiving the boldness to ask the king if he could lead a mission to return to Jerusalem and with the resources and authority of the king to rebuild the walls. He was given the green light, went back and gathered the leaders. Though a difficult time with much opposition, he helped the people unite under God’s purpose to restore them. They came together in amazing unity and

started the job. Through the favor of God and the hope that was inspired by Nehemiah, they rebuilt the city in just 52 days. They became self-governing as a people and able to live the life God wanted them to live. By embracing hope, the powerless and empty threats of the enemy were exposed and they conquered triumphantly.

1. **The first thing that made their hope contagious was prayer.** Here are a few of the verses that describe Nehemiah's prayer.

"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven. Then I said, 'Lord, the God of Heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments. Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you night and day...'"

"I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you."

...But (you said) if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my name." (Neh. 1:4,6, and 9)

Ways prayer helps us become contagious with hope.

- a. **Prayer helps us be purified and returned to spiritual potency.** Jesus said, "If the salt has lost its savour what good is it." Many Christians have become spiritually asymptomatic. I heard of a church leader who was speaking of how during times of persecution the church grows. Someone asked him what was wrong because the church was stagnant and not having an impact. The leader said, "The thing that's wrong with Christians today is that no one wants to kill them anymore." In other words, the church was not a threat to the enemy and had become irrelevant. If we want to be contagious, we need to own our sin: our compromise, being lukewarm and complacent. I love how Nehemiah didn't just own his own junk but confessed the sins of a nation he wasn't even with. This is called "intercessory repentance." This gets stuff out of the way so contagious hope can take over.
- b. **Prayer also influences others:** praying for there to be in a new place of receptivity to God.
- c. **Prayer puts God in the middle of the equation and opens the door for miracles and revivals to take place.** We said before, "never try to find a solution for a problem without putting God at the middle of the equation." I love how Nehemiah goes on from confessing sins to claiming promises. The people of God were heirs of promises they never claimed. They had the treasure of God's promise buried in their backyard; promises that gave them access to total victory in their land but they never claimed it. How many of us, "have not because we ask

not?” Salvation is a great example. Salvation/eternal life is a gift already paid for. We simply need to ask and receive. How tragic so many never appropriate that.

Because Nehemiah prayed, God gave a miracle of favor with the king. He was granted a year off, a squadron of soldiers to protect him, and all of the money needed to rebuild the walls. Hope begins to rise and become contagious when we begin to see miracles and “God wins” take place on our behalf. One of the things that gave me hope to write my book, “Plenty Too Much,” was what happened with the last book I wrote in 2010 called, “Kissing the Face of God.” I wasn’t sure that writing the book made much of a difference but I prayed that God would use it and show His glory. Through some amazing set of circumstances, I was invited to do a book interview with Gordon Robertson on the “700 Club”. It was an amazing experience that allowed me to impact people all over the world. It was one of those “only God” things that built my hope that God could use my writing.

2. That leads to the second way hope can become more contagious in our lives. **Hope becomes contagious when we testify to ourselves and others about what God has done.** The Bible says, speaking of last days Christians, *“They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony...”* (Revelation 12:11) Every time what God has done is retold; it creates contagious hope. That is why giving thanks for what God has done is so important. I love how the Psalmist in Psalms 103 gives testimony to himself. He says, *“Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all of His benefits.”* He goes on to remind himself of how God healed him, redeemed him, lifted him from the pits.

It is our testimony that is our greatest tool for leading the outside world to Christ. We mentioned I Peter 3:15 which says to be ready to give people a reason for the hope that is in you. God tells us to be witnesses. I’m glad He didn’t say we have to be prosecuting attorneys that convince people they should believe. If we just tell people what God did for us, they can’t argue with our experience and that testimony may just give them faith to be saved.

When Nehemiah traveled the 600 miles to Jerusalem, the first thing he did was to gather the elders of Jerusalem and tell them how God’s hand had been on him to gain favor when he talked to the king. That caused faith and hope to rise in them to join together in the vision to restore Jerusalem.

It has been said that our testimony is the way we prophesize to others of their future. Jesus said, *“freely you have received freely give.”* When we testify to others what God has done in us, it can plant the seed that God can do it for them. An example in our case is how God has provided for the church. When this pandemic started and we had to close the church services. I of course had concern about the church finances and how we would be able to pay bills, salaries, and support the missionaries and projects we have. One expert said that you should immediately expect your offerings to go down from 24-35%. I remember how fervently we prayed and claimed God’s promises. Just last week I heard from our

accountant that our offerings were actually up in April, we received \$1000 above our budget and on top of that over \$8000 to give for emergency Covid-19 relief to pastors and ministries of other churches that were suffering.

I was so amazed but I also knew I needed to share that with others so that could become a prophecy for their businesses or financial needs. I am prophesying your future through this testimony.

3. **A third way hope became contagious was when the people understood God's purpose and decided to unite around His purpose.** I love these words that Nehemiah shared.

"Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be a disgrace." (2:17)

"Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and daughters, your wives and homes." (4:14)

Hope never becomes contagious if we are just in survival mode, thinking of ourselves. Hope becomes contagious when people unite around a purpose bigger than themselves. During our war for independence, hope that America could be a free nation became contagious because our founding fathers united around the ideal of creating the "home of the free and the land of the brave." This hope allowed them even under the hardships of war to have contagious hope that led to victory.

Our purpose is great. It is to unite as a people in a time of hopelessness to proclaim and show the world that the God of hope has a plan and a purpose for them, to give them an alternative to the spirit of fear, the power of strife to divide their families, or addictions to come and take over their lives. We can show them the way to the God of hope and the future they were created for! This is our moment and this is our hour! Let the thought of a saved and redeemed world fill you with contagious hope.

4. **Fourthly, hope becomes contagious when we stick together and fight for each other's hope and encouragement.** Together-hope is the most powerful hope, when we really know that we are not alone but together with God in an unstoppable triangle. It is bigger than anything the enemy can bring against us. Scripture says "*a threefold cord cannot be broken.*" You, your church family, and God locking shields are invincible in this crisis.

Nehemiah brought all of the people together for the work. They had been scattered everywhere, but he brought them together to work shoulder to shoulder. They had one working, one carrying a sword to defend, another with a trumpet. They didn't have texting but they did have trumpets. That meant if the enemy attacked any of them anywhere on the wall, the trumpet would sound

and they would all run to defend the person and place that was being attacked. This is what ultimately demoralized and defeated the enemy, whose whole strategy is based on isolate, separate, and destroy. When we connect, unite, and fight together the enemy is the one who is destroyed.

The Bible says bear each other's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2) Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either falls down one can pick them up but pity the one who falls and has no one to pick them up.*" Uniting to care and pray for each other allows God to be in the middle and fight for us. That's what Jesus meant when He talked about "*where two or more are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them*" (Mat. 18:20). Hebrews 3:13 says we are to encourage each other daily so that our hearts do not become hardened by sin. There are some devastating blows we will receive. Without support we can become cynical, hard, or discouraged, and hopeless. Together we can remain strong. I like this little poem I read some time ago called "*Lend Me Your Hope.*" (author unknown)

Lend me your hope for awhile, I seem to have mislaid mine. Lost and hopeless feelings accompany me daily, pain and confusion are my companions. I know not where to turn; looking ahead to future times does not bring forth images of renewed hope. I see troubled times, pain filled days, and more tragedy.

Lend me your hope for awhile, I seem to have mislaid mine. Hold my hand and hug me; Listen to all my ramblings, recovery seems so far distant. The road to healing seems like a long and lonely one.

Lend me your hope for awhile. I seem to have mislaid mine. Stand by me, offer me your presence, your heart and your love. Acknowledge my pain, it is so real and ever present. I am overwhelmed with sad and conflicting thoughts.

Lend me your hope for awhile, a time will come when I will heal, and I will share my renewal, hope and love with others.

I have to be honest with you. As a pastor this is one of my great concerns. My concern is that some of you would slip into spiritual isolation. It is my constant prayer for you that we won't let that happen but we will find ourselves able to walk through this side by side with shields locked together. One of the major efforts for accomplishing this is our various Zoom Groups. We are getting ready to do a spiritual growth campaign based on my book, "Plenty Too Much." Please check our website at hftw.church for how you might connect with others in this campaign. If you'd be willing to host a group wherever you are, geography doesn't matter. You can gather online from anywhere. We will have a PTM host training this Tuesday night at 6:30 PM. Please email us your address at hftw.prayer@gmail.com so we can invite you to the Zoom Group.

I love how the story ends with an unimaginable victory. The utter transformation of a city, a people, and a nation comes about because of contagious hope. In Nehemiah 6:15-16 we read, *“So the wall was completed... in 52 days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost confidence...”* Hope exposed the powerlessness of the adversaries and revealed the power of God to fulfill His promises.

God wants to do the same for us and through us. Will you allow God to fill you with contagious hope today? Begin with prayer. Tell God about the areas where hopelessness has taken over and a spirit of fear, addiction, strife, complaint, bitterness or whatever it is that has been able to hold your hopes captive. Tell God your confession; let Him free and deliver you. Begin to claim His promises and ask for miraculous breakthroughs. Testify to yourself and others what God has done for you in the past and what you are expecting to happen in the future. Give thanks and boldly declare the faithfulness of God.

Then make a bold decision that you will unite with the church to fulfill God’s purpose during this time. Offer yourself to take a position on the wall and use your gifts and opportunities to build the wall or bridge of hope for other people. If you are an encourager, offer to encourage more than ever. If you’re an intercessor find a way to unite with other intercessors. If you are giver, give like never before.

Let us look to be one in spirit with other believers in this time. Stand with others. Join a support group. Lend and receive the hope of others willing to stand with you and by you in this time. It isn’t a time to separate but to stand together. United with God and one another, hope will be contagious.