

Sharing Hope

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN
February 20-21, 2010

Sharing hope must be two of the most wonderful words in the world. Look at the pictures that phrase **sharing hope** brings to your mind.

Here's a family in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.
They have lost everything in the earthquake.
A worker from the Haiti Baptist Mission arrives and says
"Come with me. We have a place for you to live, clothes to wear and food to eat."
They are **sharing hope** in a situation of hopelessness.



Here is a young woman in Mamou, Guinea.
She is a member of the Maninka Tribe.
She is expecting her first baby but she has been in labor for 48 hours and the baby won't come.
She notices the baby is moving less and less.

She is in agony and despair.
She has seen her friends experience this sort of thing and die as a result. A doctor arrives and says to her, "I'll take you to the Compassion Evangelical Hospital. You and your baby will be fine." That doctor is **sharing hope**.

Here are Ken and Adele Zimmerman from Autumn Ridge leaving for Guatemala today. For the next three weeks they will be teaching a Christian missionary how to do simple dentistry.
They are **sharing hope**.

Here are Mark Topazian, Randy Marks, and Cheolsu Shin from our own congregation leaving today for Cameroon, West Africa to work at a Baptist teaching hospital. They will impart encouragement and new skills to the medical personnel there.
They are **sharing hope**.

Here is a column from last weekend's Post-Bulletin.
"Dear Answer Man,
I was shoveling snow in the storm on February 8 when this stranger pulled up in a vehicle and got out his snow blower.
I said "Hi". I just figured he was here to do the rental property next door.
He said this was his good deed for the day, so he cleared my driveway and sidewalk. I have never met him before. He said he was a member of Next Chapter Ministries."
That man was **sharing hope**.

ANSWER MAN



Dear Answer Man, I was shoveling snow in the storm on Feb. 8 when this stranger pulled up in a vehicle and got out his snowblower. I said hi and just figured he was here to do the rental property next door. He said this was his good deed for the day, so he cleared my driveway and sidewalk. I had never met him before. He said he was a member of Next Chapter Ministries.

He asked me to write to you and see if you know anything about Next Chapter Ministries!
— Julie Tudahl, Rochester

Thanks for sharing your story, and nope, I didn't know about Next Chapter until now.

Next Chapter Ministries is what used to be known as the Rochester Network for Re-Entry, founded more than 10 years ago as a religious ministry to men and women coming out of jail or prison. It offers residential homes for intensive "discipleship and aftercare," as well as Network for Life, a weekly support group for people coming out of prison and their families.

In October, the organization's board approved a name change effective on Jan. 1 of this year. The new name reflects "our desire to help men, women, youth and children turn the page from a bad beginning to begin a new life story with the ending God intended for them."

For more information, call 529-5799.

The next chapter in the Answer Man's continuing saga of excellence will appear in Monday's Post-Bulletin. Send questions to P.O. Box 6118, Rochester, MN 55903 or answer-man@postbulletin.com.

Or here is a boy from our own community who can't keep awake at school because he shares a bed with his sister and they only have one blanket. He is so cold at night that he keeps waking up.

A child from our church fills this envelope with money and labels it "Kids blanket." That child is **sharing hope**.



OFFERING FOR THE LORD'S WORK
AT HOME AND ABROAD

Church Ministries \$ _____

Name KIDS BLANKET

Address _____

Evangelical Services, Chester, WV

Because of the power of these two words we have chosen **Sharing Hope** as the title of our Capital Campaign that starts today and concludes in a month's time.

We approved this project at our Future Directions congregational meetings at the end of January. I want to commend you for your faith and generosity because as a fellowship we voted to give away a lot of our money so that others might have hope.

Now you will find details of this campaign in RidgeLines but I want to outline the main points because some of us have been away and others have missed the presentations that have been made over the past few months.

Sharing Hope has several aspects.

First we want to build a surgical wing for the Compassion Evangelical Hospital in Guinea, West Africa.



This is our first Bold Initiative.

Already we have built two wards and a nurses' station.

We have sent containers of medical equipment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. We have sent several teams to the hospital. The next team is due to leave in April.

The first \$150,000 of our campaign will go to build these surgical rooms.

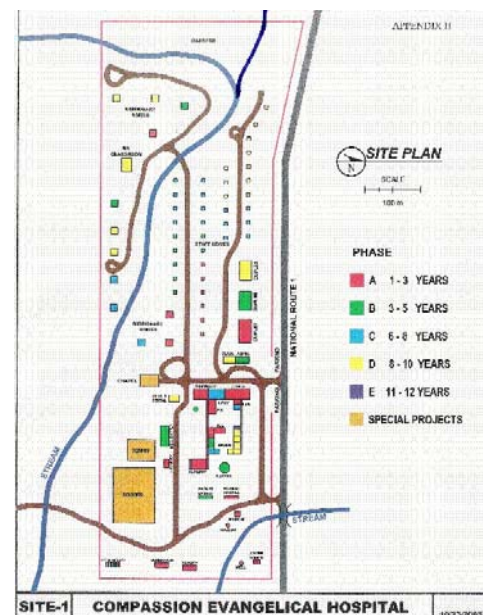
They will result in hundreds of lives being saved every year. People who are presently dying in that region will live, once those operating rooms are up and running.

We have doctors ready to go and perform surgery themselves and teach African physicians their skills.

This surgical wing is the next step in our partnership with the Compassion Evangelical Hospital.

Every year we will provide additional resources.

There is a master plan that will cost 4 or 5 million dollars to complete but we have been advised that we need to develop this incrementally.



We want to staff the hospital with Christian nurses and there are only a limited number of these in the country.

If we built the entire hospital now it could not be staffed adequately and much of it would lie unused. So our goal is to complete the hospital over the next decade or so.

The second part of **sharing hope** is to build The Center here at Autumn Ridge. You have seen the model of this in the lobby.

The major part of this is a large multi-purpose room that is the size of a double gymnasium.

We need this space right now for our children, our teenagers, and our adults.

It will be used for recreation but also for many other purposes.

Five hundred people can enjoy a meal sitting around tables.

Nine hundred people can be accommodated sitting in rows.



It is a place where we can **share hope** with Next Chapter.

It is a place where we can **share hope** with two Rochester elementary schools who are asking for our help.

It is a place where we can **share hope** with the IN HIS NAME Food Bank which needs a large place to assemble the food boxes that are distributed twice a month.

It is a place where we can **share hope** with our own church family because there is no point in trying to reach out to our community if we are not looking after the people that God brings us right now.

It is a place where we can hold ministry and mission fairs.

It is a place where the Women's Bible Study can meet when they have outgrown the Common Grounds area which they have almost done on Wednesday mornings. It is a place where children can let off steam and then hear the gospel of Jesus.

For our goal in **sharing hope** is to connect our community with Christ.

Now the cost of the surgical wing and The Center is **4.7 million dollars**. The good news is that the leadership of our church has already pledged \$650,000 towards **Sharing Hope**. That leaves about four million dollars to go.

Some of you have said that you would like us to try and reduce the debt we are carrying on this building and we heard you and thought that was a great idea.

So you will see on page 2 of RidgeLines there is a stretch milestone of **\$5.7 million dollars** which will allow us to pay off a million dollars in debt and release those monthly mortgage payments for ministry.

God has wired us all differently and certain things energize us. For some it is missions in Africa. For others it is ministry right here in Rochester and for others it is to be debt free.

Next month we will all have the opportunity to make a three year pledge. Depending on the outcome of our capital campaign we will then decide on the extent of the building we can do. We will have another church meeting to talk about that and to discern the will of God.

Now some of us are in no position to give right now.

Times are tight. We may be out of work.

God understands that. He knows our needs.

There are other ways that we can participate and there are some suggestions of how we can do this in RidgeLines.

But others of us have been blessed. God has given us more than we need in order that we can meet the needs of others.

You may be new to the church and you are certainly not ready to make this sort of commitment. That's fine.

We are just glad that you are here. But it is good for you to know that we are a church that loves to **share God's hope**.

We enjoy giving ourselves and our resources away for we have discovered that we cannot out give God.

This is our third capital campaign in ten years and our experience has been that God wonderfully provides for his people when they trust him and **share his hope**.

But before we can share hope we must possess hope.

So we are going to look at this grand subject of hope today.

There is an outline in your RidgeLines if you would like to follow along with me.

It is not an exaggeration to say that hope is the theme of the Bible which tells us how to avoid a hopeless end and instead embrace an endless hope. Scripture repeatedly tells us to turn to God as the source of our hope. Listen to these great truths.

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God." (Psalm 42:5)

"I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope." (Psalm 52:9)

"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him." (Psalm 62:5)

Here is David giving his testimony at the end of his life,

"You have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth." (Psalm 71:5)

"O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption." (Psalm 130:7)

The theme of hope continues in the New Testament where we come across statements like these from the chapter we have just read. **"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)**

Paul is coming to the end of his magisterial letter to the Romans. Times are tough in Rome. There are problems and persecution and Paul tells his friends "I want for you to know the God of hope."

But we ask how is God the God of hope?
The answer is rooted in God's character and conduct.

First, he is God of hope because **he is the God of purpose.**
He pursues his purposes to their final end in the face of all that will stop them. He is the God of new beginnings, restoring the lost and rebuilding the ruined.

Let this thought lift you up.
If you have come to church today discouraged and beaten down, remember that you have come to the God of hope.
The prescription of scripture is that when we can't cope we turn to the God of hope.
Here is comfort for the sons and daughters of despair.

You see God's hope is different from human hope.
With us hope is a possibility or it is wishful thinking but with God hope is a certainty.
The purpose of God flows through the Bible like a river.
Paul refers to it in Ephesians as **"God's eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Ephesians 3:11)**

Now what is the purpose of God?
Ephesians tells us it is, **"The summing up of all things in Christ." (Ephesians 1:10)**
Christian hope points us to the end of history when the victory and triumph of Christ will be seen.

Imagine an office where vandals have scattered everything in confusion. Slowly and patiently you start to gather the various documents, reports, letters and articles in different piles.
Finally you put them all into one orderly pile.

That is what God is doing in this chaotic world.
Jesus Christ is picking up the pieces and organizing everything so that it will come under his lordship.

Each period of history prepares the way for the next in God's eternal purpose.
The whole Bible is alive with the thrust of God's plan.
This is what made Israel unique.
They were a people of destiny because they were integral to God's purpose.
So is the Christian church.

We stand at the heart of God's purpose for the world.

However, our hope as Christians is not just about the future. It is also about the here and now. For hope speaks to our trials and failure, our pain and disappointment, our illness and death. Hope is specifically about these realities as well.

Hope is for the next year, the next week, and the next hour. Hope is the fuel that gets us up tomorrow. Hope has its greatest power in a context in which things are not good and where there is much that might otherwise recommend despair, fear and hopelessness.

Hope can take any circumstance, no matter how discouraging and transform it into growth, wisdom, witness, perseverance and courage.

Second Yahweh is the God of hope because **he is the God who is positive**. Many people have the idea that God is negative. They point out that the Ten Commandments are all about what we must not do. But that is to keep us safe from danger. Paul tells us that all God's promises are **"Yes, in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20)**

God's purpose for his people is gloriously positive. Jesus came to save and give fullness of life. There is nothing negative about that. God's purposes are always yes even when it seems the opposite.

Think of the story of Job. Life began well for him but then everything went wrong. The way became dark, but the end was bright. Indeed better than the beginning because God has a positive purpose for Job all the way through.

So it was with Jesus. God's negatives are all wrapped up in his great positive. So even in difficult situations we can still have hope because we have a God who is working all things together for good. His positive purposes will prevail at the end for **he is the God of hope**.

And people who know the God of hope can be positive in the face of tremendous odds. At our Pastors Conference in Ooty one of the men told how God had wonderfully saved him. He came from a Hindu family in a village that was entirely Hindu. He announced his new faith to the community. The elders said, "Now you have become a Christian, you must leave the village. You must never visit your family again. If you do we will fine them a \$1,000."

That dear pastor has been cut off from his family for years but he is not discouraged. He prays every day for them and believes that God will bring that whole village to himself.

In the two weeks that I was away I thought of you often.

I kept my watch on Rochester time so that I could remember what was taking place here. I found myself regularly breaking into a Doxology of thanksgiving to God for you.

On my return my colleagues told me how 140 of you have signed up for the Adopt a School Program which consists of tutoring and mentoring needy children in our school system. You volunteered to provide for the basic needs of these kids through clothing drives. In the past two weeks over a dozen of you have helped meet the need of children by purchasing clothes.

I heard how God has provided with a \$5,000 gift from the Rochester School Foundation and a \$10,000 gift from the Think Bank Foundation. We praise God for this and I thank God for you.

Some would think it is crazy to embark on a capital campaign like this in a time of economic recession but not Autumn Ridgers.

You have the positive hope that comes from knowing the God of all hope. You can say with Paul, **"I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)**

Third he is the God of hope because **he is the God who is persistent.**

The great emphasis of scripture is in the persistence of God with his people even when they have done everything possible to provoke him. In Romans he is called, **"The God of all patience." (Romans 15:5)**

Shining through the Bible is the glowing truth of a God who will not give up on his purpose or his people.

He is a God who goes on and on until he achieves his goal.

Nowhere is this more clearly shown than Jeremiah's parable of the potter. The prophet watched the potter form a vase out of soft clay rotating it on a wheel. He saw the half made vessel break apart in the potter's hand.

He saw him begin again patiently to make another vase. This was a picture of God's persistence with Israel.



In spite of failure and sin there is always hope as long as there is repentance. It is when people say there is no hope that they act in destructive ways. They don't bother to repent because they don't believe forgiveness is possible.

Theologian Jurgen Moltmann observed, "When hope dies the killing begins. Hopelessness and brutality are just two sides of the same coin." Our world is filled with violence caused by hopelessness. The task of God's people is to fill those places with hope so that kindness replaces killing.



Our God is the God of the **"again"**.
He made the clay vessel **again**.

He strengthened Samson **again**.
 He told Hosea to love his fallen wife **again**.
 He built the walls of Jerusalem **again**.
 He sent Peter **again**.
 He is coming **again**.

Perhaps you feel hopeless because of the failure in your life.
 But when there is repentance there is always hope.
 Let repentance reach out even a little way to grace and grace will come running to meet you.
 God can create an even better situation than before.

God brings palaces out of ruins, clear days out of cloudy mornings, beautiful vessels out of lumps of crumpled clay.
 He can remake marriage relationships.
 He can use at 80 the man who was ruined at 40.
 That is what he did with Moses because he is the God of hope.

Fourth he is the God of hope because **he is the God who is powerful**.
 He can take a little thing and make much of it as he did with the loaves and fishes.
 He can take our life and do something great with it.

Throughout history we find God beginning again and again with a small group of people like Noah, Elijah and Nehemiah.
 A little group of faithful people left amid the decay and destruction of their situation.

Even in Laodicea with all its hopelessness there was hope for all who would open the door to let Christ in.
 He is a God who is powerful. He is a God of renewal.

Then he is the God of hope because **he is the God of performance**.
 The God of hope is the God who does what he says.
 His word assures his action. "He spoke and it was done."

What he speaks is already performed in his mind, for God is the timeless one coming forth to meet us from the future where things that are not now, already are in him.

One of the great examples of this is Jesus' statement, **"I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18)**
 We have seen evidence of that in our own church.
 God has been building his people.
 That is why we moved to this site four years ago.
 And that is why we are building The Center.

We don't need all the classroom space right now but we anticipate we will in a few years as Jesus builds his church.
 We need to be ready for what God is going to do for he is the God of performance.

So what happens when we know the God of hope?

Paul tells us that, **"The God of hope fill you will all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of Holy Spirit."** (Romans 15:13)

When we overflow with hope we have more hope than we need and therefore we can share it with others.

Paul reveals to us an amazing truth when he says, **"God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you the hope of glory."** (Colossians 1:27)

You and I are the hope of glory for the world.

Every individual yearns for glory.

But they will never find glory until they find Christ and they cannot find Christ until we share the hope we have with them.

So let us go forward together in the power of God's Spirit of hope.