

New hope sermon Fervent Community Intercession

"Oh, no-o-o-o. We will pray her over." This was Marti's text message to me when we heard from Jingjing in China that complications had arisen to keep her from coming to the States in early October. That text captures the essence of the sermon topic today. We live in a world of many reverses, set-backs and overt opposition from Satan, but our corporate response as believers is to stand against those oppositions and reverse them in prayer by the power and intervention of God. "We will pray her over!" The power of prayer is a vast topic, so I want to concentrate on just two main ideas about community prayer. The first is our need to step up as powerful intercessors to counter the evil in our fallen world. And the second is the role of the Spirit in community prayer.

The model of Epaphras

Paul makes a telling statement about Epaphras – he “*was always wrestling in prayer for the believers in Colossae (Col.4:12) – that they stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*” What’s involved in wrestling? A desire to immobilize your opponent. People wrestle in prayer against the systemic evil and particular specific opposition of Satan in every work of the kingdom. His purposes are to steal, kill, dismantle or destroy individual believers and churches across the world. Like in wrestling, Satan wants to put believers in a head lock and immobilize them for kingdom work. And, of course, that includes us at New Hope. Epaphras wrestled against the opposition forces which would distract or discourage believers from “*standing firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*”



NEW HOPE BIBLE FELLOWSHIP
Finding Our life Focus in God's heart for the World

Most of our New Hope members are in transition and need to know with certainty the will of God in their future choices of vocation and relationships etc. It's part of their growth in maturity and discipleship. Our goal as staff is to help each one become “mature and fully assured as God's dear children” – but here's the qualifications for that maturity – people who line up their life focus with God's heart for the world. In fact, have you ever taken a closer look at our logo graphic? Jingjing helped design this when she was visiting from China . Do you see the image of an eye at the center? That represents our focus and how we see. And inside, in the iris of the eye, is the world itself. But...for most people the center focus of their iris is their big I – their ego – their self-sufficiency or struggles to deal with life's sufferings on their own. We have purposed that our life focus is “aligning with God's heart for the world.” So we wrestle in prayer together for others to find that life focus.

Now Epaphras is mentioned as an individual pray-er, but he was part of Paul's team of ministers who came from various house churches and went to various house churches to get them established as believers in Christ. When Paul talks about his prayers for the Christians in each of the house churches, he always speaks in the plural: “We always thank God...when we pray for you...” (Col.1:3). Beloved, wherever you go after Wheaton, make sure you find a community of believers in your new place and are supported by them, coupled with fervent intercessors from your old place – a team of Epaphrases you can count on.

That's the challenge I gave our staff team for this year. The model I chose was from Exodus 17. It's the story of Moses, and Aaron and Hur who were the prayer warriors for Joshua who was fighting the enemies of Israel. Remember from our Bible reading that the enemy came against Israel and Joshua was sent out to fight with his army against them. But he was outnumbered and overpowered. So Moses went up to the mountain of God with Aaron and Hur and pledged to pray for Joshua's victory. Moses had the rod of God's authority in his hand and when he raised that, Israel won; but when his hands got weary and they lowered, the Amalakites won. So Aaron and Hur got a rock for Moses to sit on and “*held up his hands till the going down of the sun. [And that's why] Israel mowed down the enemy.*”

Who are your Aarons and Hurs? Are you the Joshua, needing that support in a kingdom endeavor God has put before you? Or are you to be a team player for another who has the calling to take back a stronghold of Satan – whether in your family or your nation or the world? We call this type of prayer Prayer Warfare.” It is the form of intercession that deliberately engages with the enemy to free God’s people and prays believing the enemy will fall and the victory will be won in Jesus’s name. Fervent intercessory prayer that engages the enemy is not just an individual effort. It is a team effort. When we pray together in Jesus’ name, (Mt. 18), holding up Christ’s authority won on the cross, we can defeat the enemy. (Rev. 12:12). But like wrestling, it takes energy, drive, focus and willingness to stay engaged until the enemy falls. It is costly.

The Power of a Predator

We must not minimize the significance of this, beloved. Satan and his forces are stronger, much stronger, than any of us individually. BUT Jesus has defeated him and Satan must flee when together we resist him in Jesus’ name, with the word of scripture as our sword and the blood of the Lamb as our covering Rev. 12:11.

The Apostle Peter says “*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*” That’s a mandate from personal experience. I think Peter might not have fallen in denial, if he had not been proud of his standing among the apostles and had had another with him at that fireside – another disciple who could have bolstered him and acknowledged that yes, they were both disciples of that Galilean and He had changed their lives. We can fall under pressure if we are facing that pressure alone because then we are vulnerable to the lies and assaults of the enemy.

This is a life principle seen in the wild. Animal predators always try to separate an animal they want to kill from the herd. They look for the weak or the young or those who have wandered away from the herd and then separate them further and begin to run that one down until it is exhausted and the predators can pounce and easily kill it. If we become isolated from the church community, we will be equally vulnerable to the deceptions, the assaults and the distortions of the enemy. We NEED the protection of other believers, beloved, make no mistake about it. That’s principle one on community prayer.

Stories of God’s answers in our community

To encourage us, I wanted us to go back and think of what has God done in the last month or year or more in answer to prayer. Starting in the present and moving backward: Bing’s father was granted a visa in China and just arrived here to support the family on Friday. Here he is right before our worship service with Nathaniel. Emmie’s Singapore courses were accepted for credit (although it took 2 years!). Evan’s R1 religious visa granted – likely one of the first examples of a small house church like ours that qualified for such salary and support; we received a gift of \$10,000 from a foundation last year because they believed in our global vision and purposeful international staff; both Sam and Bing joined our staff this fall so now our house church has 4 pastoral staff members for a congregation of about 25 members!; Guillermo’s story – last summer – asking God for wisdom – cost to stay in Wheaton apartments = \$6,000 for the summer. A family, instead, offered their home for Guillermo and Sandy to house sit for June and July at NO COST. Then they moved in here in August. God’s provision!



And finally the Jingjing story. She became a Christian here 3 years ago and was planning to visit in October but there were complications at her work site. As Marti said, when she heard the news, "Oh nooooo. We will pray her here." Jingjing herself said, "God has the power. We will trust Him to do it." And here is the answer: As of Wed. this week her boss has just cleared her to come. He was the obstacle – with the requirement that she finish all her work for the next 2 1/2 weeks this coming week!! She will do that as we will pray God's stamina, wisdom and health so she arrives with peace and joy on Sat. Oct. 5. We are her only church and her deepest link with the Lord. As it says in James 5:16 "*the effective fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much.*" Effective, fervent community prayer where every answer to prayer become God's story and he gets the glory.

Here are two more people we pray for in this community. Carmen and David Gunderson are in Niger West Africa,



teaching at a Christian school. Carmen was concerned for the girls' understanding of their bodies and feminine hygiene. Finally after months about praying about a way to bring this information to the girls, she was allowed by the headmaster to present her material at the retreat the school had organized for the girls before school starts Monday. She is also teaching this material in a 6 week class at the Hosanna church in Niamey where she and David attend. Pray that this material will help the girls become better stewards of their bodies and help prevent the rape and sexual abuse they receive in their villages. We also want to be praying for Dennis Kilama and the new church his church in town is starting in one of the large refugee camps close-by. He has asked us to pray for the pastor they are equipping for that ministry, for the core team that is developing for the ministry, for a structure they can build in which to shelter the church and for many to come to faith in Christ. He will write me as these prayers are answered one by one.

The second principle of community prayer is **Effective Prayer Comes from the Promptings of the Spirit.** See if you can recognize the role of the Spirit in the following story.

"It was a phone call one never wants to get. A friend called from Ohio to say that our mutual friend, Debbie, was dying of leukemia and was at a cancer center in Seattle. Later, Debbie's husband called, telling me that Debbie had slipped into a coma. The doctors had given her two to three days to live. Debbie's two adult children had flown in to say their good-byes. He invited me to come and pray.

I admit that this was a huge stretch for my faith. But I asked a friend to go with me, and we set out for Seattle. As we drove, John 14:12–14 ran through my mind: "*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*" Now was my chance to prove that I really believed those verses. Could we really do the things Jesus did? Would he really do the things we asked in his name?

At the hospital, we introduced ourselves to Debbie's family and then approached her bed. I silently asked the Lord what to pray. Luke's account of Jesus rebuking a fever came to mind (4:38–39). Debbie, however, was a sad sight. By all outward appearances, what I was about to pray seemed impossible. Nevertheless, I prayed, "Lord, I come to you based on the authority and power you have given me because of Jesus. Jesus, you said we would do even greater things because of your power in us. You told me in John 15 that *if I abide in you and your words abide in me, I can ask anything and it will be granted.* So, right now, in the name and authority of Jesus in me, I rebuke the cancer and death. In Jesus' name, I pronounce healing and abundant life."

My prayer was simple, based on Scripture, and spoken in faith and in the authority of Jesus' name. Nothing happened at the moment, though, so my friend and I said good-bye. Debbie continued to

be on my mind, but I also knew the Lord had heard my prayer. It was all in his hands. A week later, my phone rang. It was Debbie. She had awoken from her coma and asked the medical team to unhook her life support! She had heard that I had visited her several days before and had prayed for her. "Would you please come back?" she asked. So the next day, I drove back to Seattle to see with my own eyes what the Lord had done. What an amazing time that was. Debbie—alert and smiling—told me the story. For three days after we prayed for her, while still in a coma, she sensed that an angel was standing by her bed. On the third day she woke up and knew in her heart that the Lord had completely healed her. The doctors' tests showed no sign of any cancer whatsoever. We rejoiced!

We were then able to share the gospel with her family. As a result of Debbie's healing, her son and his wife received Christ and are now joyfully serving him. And, to this day four years later, no cancer has returned. (*This account is confirmed by Mike Ricles, senior pastor of Clover Creek Bible Fellowship, Tacoma, Washington. Cindy Ricles, reprinted with permission from Pray! magazine (January/February 2006), pg. 24*)

I see several principles in this story that relate to powerful intercession. First, the urgent request to pray for Debbie that required the sacrifice of Cindy's trip to Seattle with another friend. She combined prayer with action. Second, the Spirit brought a scripture story to mind – which became the basis for their prayers of faith. Third, Cindy and her friend persevered even though Debby was apparently on the verge of death. It seemed like an impossible situation. But, fourth, they combined scripture (the word of their testimony) with the authority in Jesus' name granted to believers who abide in Christ. Fifth, though no visible results seemed evident, Cindy and her friend rested in the confidence that God had heard and returned home. And sixth, Debbie's total healing was corroborated by both the doctors and subsequent medical tests. All cancer had disappeared and has remained gone 4 year later.

This is principle two. There is power in our prayer when we are praying as the Spirit leads us. The Spirit is the One who brought the scripture verse that Cindy's authority rested on. So they obeyed, used that verse as their authority and go-ahead, and prayed in faith. *We overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.*"Rev. 12:11.

Matthew 18:19-20 is a key to **this second aspect of community prayer – the role of the Spirit in directing us in how to pray together.** When we meet together to pray, according to Mt. 18, Jesus is in the midst and He will teach us HOW to pray. Then when we agree together on what the Spirit leads, and we pray accordingly, the answer from God's heart will be there. This is the role of being warrior intercessors for God. Rees Howells, a famous intercessor from 200 years ago, says "Intercessory prayer means becoming responsible for a particular situation, individual or group, as the Holy Spirit gives a burden, and continuing to carry that burden until it is lifted (Rom.8:26-27), A Life of Intercession.

Think of this in the story of the church in Acts 12 when Peter was in prison, awaiting certain execution. Acts 12:5 "While Peter was in prison "constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." As a result: His chains fell off, the guards were put to sleep, an angel appeared and guided Peter step by step, the iron gates of the prison doors opened and Peter walked through those open gates and was free. "God wants to do miracles among us but too often we either don't pray for them or don't believe they can happen, or when they do happen we have trouble believing it. " (Stormie Omartian, Prayer Warrior, p.166)

So to encourage us, I want to share how the Spirit directed our prayer focus in this church. Sandy and I are working on organizing my office, and as I was sorting my papers, I found this story of the origin of our

prayer emphasis at New Hope. It starts with an explanation of how the Spirit works in conversational prayer:

“One of the most joyful aspects of “keeping in step with the Spirit” together (Gal.5:25) is in Spirit-led conversational prayer. Time and again when I am praying out-loud with other believers who are also listening to the Spirit, and we ask the Spirit to lead us on God’s agenda for prayer that day, the Lord will do just that. Sometimes the Spirit brings a point of view on a topic we hadn’t discussed before and yet we discover we are in total agreement with each other and the Spirit. Sometimes God gives a new direction which is validated by the others’ prayers. Sometimes, God gives a confirming sense of direction for a ministry. When Saul and Barnabas and Simeon and Lucius and Manaen, prophets and teachers in the young Antioch church, were praying “the Holy Spirit said, Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them: (Acts 13:2). The church confirmed that call and sent them out on His Kingdom agenda. This is the story behind two of the ministries at New Hope.

During one conversational prayer time in which I was involved, one gal began to pray a scripture verse for our New Hope house church. It was “*Jesus said, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations?’ ”* Mk.11:17 We had not yet articulated that central focus here at the church but this word from the Spirit was confirmed in all our hearts, and so in 2010 we began prayer groups, starting incorporating community prayer into the worship service and 2 years ago wrote prayers’ central focus into our mission statement: .”Our core values are prayer and community committed whole-heartedly to Jesus Christ, as a multicultural family, where the whole Body ministers to the whole Body, within a global context.” 3/28/17

Similarly, about two years ago in another conversational corporate prayer time the Spirit spoke again – this time as we prayed for the many women I know around the world. We were asking God to uphold them and bring them new joys in Him and in their work for Him and in their study of the Word. We were praying for their refreshment and the many issues we know they face. At the end of that prayer time one of the gals turned to me and said, “Mary Lou, I think God wants you to start a group of support and nurture for all these women.” Oh my. That was unexpected, and I didn’t see how I could fit it into my schedule. But as we prayed about it, God gave the confirmation and the scripture I needed to be sure of His words for this day by day and the Shepherds Daughters was born. Now this meditation, song and prayer go out to over 50 women around the world. Prayer is a key part of that meditation and the Spirit is the engine behind the inspiration every day.

Let’s be a community of faith, beloved. All kinds of amazing things can happen when we meet together to pray in Jesus’ name and listen to how the Spirit directs those prayers. It is a privilege for this to be one of our church’s distinctives, beloved, and thus for us to take our place among all the other prayer warriors around the world.

So three application questions: 1. Are you part of a Moses, Aaron, Hur, Joshua team warrior intercession prayer group? Or a Matthew 18:19-20 conversational prayer group? If not, why not? Only when Moses’s hand was raised holding God’s rod of authority did Joshua defeat the enemy. But Moses was not able to make that happen on his own.

2. What does God need to do in your life for you to join others as a prayer warrior?

3. What can we agree with God to do through faith-filled, fervent community intercession this week?

Community shalom and victory come through fervent community intercession. PTL!

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