

All right, hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. Let's take a moment and welcome in all of our campuses from wherever you're joining us, whether that is Gainesville, Denton, Lewisville, Flower Mound, Venue, Online, wherever you are in the world, let's welcome each other together today. Man, we hope you and your family had an amazing break, a time of rest, and sometimes -- I know how it goes. Sometimes, it is exactly like you hoped it would be, sometimes not so much, but in either case, we are here together today and God is good and we are the people of God. Can we go ahead and just say, it's just good to be here, and it's good to be the church, and it's good to be a part of what God has been doing in this season of time. We've been in an amazing series called the Hope Carrier Initiative. The Hope Carrier Initiative has really been less of a series; it's more of a season of time. It's this profound move of God in this season and we're experiencing so much of His goodness in this time.

Let me just remind you of, kind of, what it is to be a hope carrier, what that is, and what it means. You see, a hope carrier is just simply this -- it's a disciple of Jesus living on mission to change their world. A disciple of Jesus living on mission to change their world. To be a hope carrier means I'm a disciple of Jesus; a disciple, a student, a learner, someone who becomes like the one they follow. We're just following Jesus in doing a new thing in a new way in this season. Living on mission. When Jesus was on earth, He had a really clear mission to seek and save that which was lost. That's part of what we're invited to do as hope carriers -- to help seek and save that which is lost, to take back what was lost, and bring it into the fullness of the kingdom. Jesus was always doing what he heard the Father telling Him to do, and He would act out in ways that the Father spoke to Him to act out in. That's what we're doing. We're living on mission as hope carriers.

That living on mission piece is part of this activation of our faith, that's really growing in our faith together. Then, truly, we're transforming our world, not the world. The world is way too big. The world is way too much. But it's just like it's our world, it's our people, it's our families, it's our job, it's the areas we have influence, changing our world. That's a whole different ballgame. That's a completely different reality. We're really learning to change our world where we've been placed. Can I just tell you, isn't it amazing to think that God chose the times and places where each of us should live? Like, he knew you were going to be here in this time, in this place with the access to the people you have access to; that's changing your world. That's bringing what you've learned as a disciple into every area He's called you to be. A hope carrier, truly a disciple of Jesus, living on mission to change the world. Here's what happens when that happens. When our world starts to be transformed, when things start changing, stories start to abound.

The stories of transformation, the stories of life change start to take over and we start to hear these stories. Stories begin to bubble up, and we're having a lot of that happen right now. We're hearing so many stories of the goodness of God and the transformation that He's bringing into these changed worlds, these atmospheres that hope carriers are walking into. That's really special. It's really important because a question that each of us have to ask

ourselves is, how do we experience life glory to glory, victory to victory? Like, how do we live a life where we just keep winning in Jesus' name, where things just keep moving forward, and we find ourselves becoming more like Jesus and seeing more of His kingdom come, and experiencing more of an open heaven and pulling it down into earthly realities. How do we do that? Well, there's a great verse that tells us how. It comes out of Revelation 12.

It says this, "They," the people of God, "overcame him," Satan, the evil one, "by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." "By the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony." Here's what that's saying. The blood of the Lamb, the full forgiveness of Jesus, it transforms us, it cleanses us, it changes us. The word of our testimony, our story of how God has moved in our life and what He's doing, that helps us overcome. It helps us go from glory to glory, victory to victory. Part of why that's so important is that stories build our faith. A lot of times during this series, we've been practicing our faith. Today, in Jesus' name, may we find our faith being built because here's what we're going to do. We're going to tell some of the stories. God has been moving in such a profound way across our church family, it's time to hear some of those stories. It's time for our faith to be built.

Last week, we took communion, the blood of the Lamb. This week, the word of our testimony, the stories of what God is doing. Here's how we're going to do it. We have some of our leaders, and these are just -- these are regular, ordinary leaders that have been with Jesus. Because they've been with Jesus, they have a story to share. Because they walk with Jesus as disciples, they have a power and authority they walk in. They're collecting and they're going to tell us some of these amazing stories that are happening across our church family. I just want to invite you, lean into it. Enjoy each one of them. This is what God is doing among us. We are overcoming in Jesus' name by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. These stories, they are. Here we go. Listen to each one of them, enjoy each one of them, lean into each one of them. These are stories of hope.

All right, as we started the Hope Carrier Initiative earlier this year, Steve also started a brand new job.

As we started to learn that we don't have a job, we have kingdom work, Steve was so excited about all the opportunities he was going to have to carry hope, the breakthrough he was going to experience, and the kingdom momentum that he was going to be able to bring to his new workplace. After a few weeks, Steve was experiencing none of that. He wasn't experiencing any of that. Instead of breakthrough, he was hitting brick walls. Instead of moving forward, he was moving backward. Any momentum he was experiencing was going in the wrong direction. Frustrated, he started crying out to God, like, "God, help me break through, make a way, help me move forward." As he kept crying out to God, God spoke to Steve and he said this, "If you want to move forward, you've got to go back. If you want to see me move, you've got to apologize."

Now, frustrated and a little perturbed at God, I know we've all been there, Steve wasn't understanding what was happening, but as he leaned into what God said, he realized that what he needed to go back to, what he needed to do was go back and apologize to his old boss for how he transitioned out of his old job. Out of obedience to the Lord, and not really knowing what the outcome was going to be, Steve calls up his old boss and he owns up for how prideful he was. He owns up for how dishonoring he was during his transition. He apologizes and he asks for forgiveness. Now, astonished, his old boss didn't really know what else to say, but "Thank you. Like nobody has ever done this before, and I wish you well in your new job." You see, sometimes carrying hope looks like going back, apologizing and asking for forgiveness. That's what being a hope carrier looks like.

Let me tell you a story about a high school student who felt God invited her to be a hope carrier in her family; specifically, in the area of prayer for her older brother. See, she knew God wasn't just inviting her to share hope with him through her words, but also through her prayers. She prayed. Every day she prayed this prayer, "God, open his eyes to see your kingdom like never before. Help him keep his eyes focused on you and not the world." Every day, every single day, she prayed that prayer, sharing she never missed a day from the moment God first put that on her heart. God has been moving in incredible ways. See, her brother had a radical encounter with God. One that he will truly never forget. He's hearing God's voice at new measures and just thriving with his relationship with Jesus in every way. Now, instead of praying and asking for God to open her brother's eyes, she said she gets to thank Him for how He moved in her brother's heart.

She said, "You know, sometimes it can be frustrating when our prayers aren't answered right away. But when we trust in God and in His faithfulness, it always turns out better than you could have ever hoped." She said, "God answered my ways in bigger ways than I could have ever even imagined." See, this amazing high school girl has learned the power of persistent prayer. That prayer is one of the best and most powerful ways that we can share hope.

Okay, let me tell you guys about some young adults over at UNT. It all started with a girl who was asking God for a next step. She really felt like she was supposed to stay on campus a little longer and have lunch with someone new. She introduced herself to a girl named Christina, asked if she could join her table, sat down, and the two got to talking. Christina was super honest and open. She shared her faith, and said, "You know what, my parents actually have some conflicting beliefs and I have a lot of questions. But I can't shake this feeling that God is real."

The girls kept talking and discussing at the table. Before long, they made plans for a weekly Bible study. You see, they were going to let God's Word define who He is, who they are, and what they were made to do. The story is just getting started. You see, every week as the girls continued to meet, Christina's taking what she's learning back home to her family. She's taking what she's learning back to class with her friends, many of whom are actually from other

countries across the world, here, to get their degree and plan to move back after they graduate. You see, God is stirring up hope in Christina that she can't help but share. It is causing a movement of hope for UNT, the city, and beyond.

Hey, so let me tell you a story about one of our young adults at our Denton campus. He's been attending Valley Creek for about eight months now, and he's felt like God's been inviting him to jump in with everything we're doing here as a Valley Creek family. When it was announced that we're going to be doing the New Testament Reading Plan, he was excited to jump in. As he dove into Matthew, God started to show him some awesome things, like how Matthew wrote the book from the perspective of an outcast as a tax collector, and highlights how Jesus brought love, hope, and redemption to the outcasts of His day. More recently, he was just promoted to lieutenant with the Dallas Fire Department. That's an awesome job. Now, he's going to lead a crew and shifts with about ten guys in it that he's never worked with before. But he's realized that seven of these guys have been outcasts their entire careers. You see, seven of these guys, man, they deal with a lot of shame. Shame is a common tool used at fire stations to teach and motivate.

A lot of these guys experience and live with a lot of shame. Not only have they struggled professionally, but relationally as well, never feeling like they actually belong. But because he is a hope carrier, he's getting to love them exactly how Jesus loves Matthew. You see, when they mess up, there's no shame, but there's correction and encouragement. When they speak poorly of themselves, he speaks life over them. Instead of these seven guys just being a part of the fire station, he has placed them onto his team, just like how Jesus placed Matthew on His team. You see, he's changing his world by carrying hope to the fire station.

Let me tell you a story about one of my friends at the Gainesville campus. Taylor has been on an amazing journey to discover the leader that God has created her to be. When we started the Hope Carrier Initiative, she already knew she was a hope carrier in the areas of church and family. She's a Kids Leadership Coach to fourth and fifth graders, and she's a mom to a toddler at home.

But God revealed to her that she has influence and she's a hope carrier in other families in the community too, as she delivers meals to the elderly through Meals on Wheels every week. She had always tried to be intentional with the people she was delivering meals to, but the Hope Carrier Initiative ignited in her this new responsibility to bring hope into those homes and to those people in a way like no one else could. She began to just seek God, to ask Him how she could do that. She decided that she would ask how she could pray for every person on her route, and then just follow up every week whenever she dropped off their meals. Starting off was a little rocky. The first person that she asked to pray for actually laughed at her, and said, "You're praying?" But that same day, a woman told Taylor that she hadn't heard from her son in months, and she just wanted Taylor to pray that she could somehow get in contact with him.

Over the next few weeks, Taylor was able to pray for and follow-up with every person on her route.

Let me just tell you, God has been moving. The first woman who originally laughed at Taylor, well, she has seen God answer her prayers and has even said the words, "Prayer works." The woman that hadn't heard from her son, not only was she able to get in contact with him, but he came to visit her in-person. That woman later asked Taylor for healing prayers for her son, which God also miraculously answered. So cool. I tell you this story, guys, because this is what it can look like when we just slow down and ask God how He wants us to be a hope carrier in our unique areas of influence.

Tom has been on a Valley Creek serve team for years, and he has been serving faithfully for years. He recently shared how this Hope Care Initiative has really been impacting him, that he's starting to see the difference between his job and his work. His job, the place he goes to and gets paid.

His work, that's where he goes and he has his kingdom work, that thing's God has for him everywhere he is – whether that is at home, with family and friends, at work, wherever he is, his kingdom work, and his eyes are being opened to that. Recently, Tom was on a business trip to Austin, Texas, and he was going out to dinner with his team one night. Now, normally Tom is more of an introverted guy, kind of keeps to himself, a little quieter. But he's going out to dinner with his team, and they ended up being in an area of Austin that had a larger homeless population. They're going up to the restaurant, and Tom sees a homeless man sitting outside of it. He just decides to go over and talk to him. He goes over there, has a conversation with him, and then goes into the restaurant. He has dinner with his team, and then on their way out, that homeless man gets his attention and stops him. He goes over there, and the man looks up at him, and he says, "Thanks for seeing me." That's it. Thanks for seeing me. Tom is realizing he has a 9-5 job, but his kingdom work is everywhere he is.

He carried hope to that man, not by buying him a meal or by buying him clothes, but by slowing down, valuing him, and seeing him. Even that is what carrying hope looks like.

I get to tell you a story about a really involved dad who is excited about signing his daughter up for basketball. Because he had played in college, he was equally excited to help her practice and be an unofficial coach. He shows up to practice, and he's talking with the coach about, helping with the team, and the coach says, "No." The dad, he's offended. He responds with pride and defensiveness. He says things like, "What do you mean no? Don't you realize how much of my help you need?" He walks away angry. But then he does something wise, and he takes the situation to his Circle. What happens next is the value of being engaged in a Circle. You see, the men in his life, they pointed him back to Jesus and then encouraged him to reconcile with the coach.

They asked some questions like, "What would a hope carrier do?" You know, WWHCD. How would a hope carrier respond? A week goes by and what does the dad do? Nothing. See, pride was still keeping him in bondage. His Circle again reminded him that he wants to build God's kingdom and not his own. That he wants to go God's way, and not his own way. The dad leaves the Circle filled with hope. He calls the coach, he apologizes, he asks for forgiveness, and the coach couldn't believe it. She said, "I cannot believe that you're calling to apologize. No one's ever done something like this before." In that moment, both hope and freedom were released, and that is what a hope carrier looks like.

Isaiah is a fifth grader who's continuing to grow in believing that his prayers are powerful and effective. He's a part of his leadership experience and he's expressed a desire to grow in the area of prayer. As he's taken next step after next step following Jesus; he's gone from being one of the quietest kids on his team to being one of the first kids to express the need for prayer or pray for other kids out loud. God put it on his heart to continue to stretch his prayer muscles and to grow in praying out loud over others with boldness and confidence. As he's done this, God has told him that He's proud of him and that He loves him. It's clear that Isaiah believes this based on the next steps he keeps taking. Just a couple weeks ago, his teacher at school shared that she was having a hard day. In front of the entire class at school, Isaiah asked if he could pray for her. She said, "Yes," and he did! He prayed with boldness, and confidence, and authority. Afterwards, he said, "I didn't know what to do, so I just went with the flow. I just followed Jesus." Isaiah is a hope carrier.

In Lewisville, there's a young couple who, for the past two years, have really been walking through a really, really hard season. As you can imagine, over the two years, they have done all the things. They have prayed. They have pulled their godly relationships in with them, and said, "Will you pray for us?" They've fasted. They have tried to find their own breakthrough. At the beginning of this year, as we launched the Hope Carrier Initiative, they found that God was saying something new to them. He was telling them, "Hey, you know several people right here in our own church that need the exact same breakthrough that you do. Would you, with the same desperation that you have been seeking your own breakthrough, would you start to intercede on behalf of every single one of these families?"

In Lewisville, can I tell you guys, we've been watching as every single couple that they're praying for have started to receive their miracle. That already is amazing because that's what it looked like to be a hope carrier. But, then, in God's ridiculous goodness, we have watched this couple finally, after two years, get their breakthrough. Man, this is an example of what being a hope carrier looks like because when you give hope away to others, you find hope for yourself.

All right, well, let me tell you another story about a coach in our church who for ten years now has been leading a successful and a respected program in one of our local high schools. See, what I love about this coach is that when he looks at his work, he sees it as more than just wins and losses and sending players on to the next level.

See, really, for him it's about building up individuals. He likes to use the platform of sports to instill values in his players that he knows is going to carry them beyond just the field of the play. In fact, if you ever got around this coach, it's impossible not to catch his heart for Jesus and the desire that he has to make Jesus known. Last month, when the opportunity came up to be part of Serve the City -- and if you remember, Serve the City, last month, it was all about praying over our areas of life. He didn't just participate, he actually worked behind the scenes to open up access to the high school and to the different sports facilities at the school so that teams of people could come in and pray over the spaces that literally hundreds of student athletes and coaches frequent every single week. It's even more than that. When we were there that day, he saw a unique opportunity and he took it upon himself to gather together the coaches that just happened to be there that day, so that we could pray directly over them. I'm talking like we prayed the kingdom into their life, right. We prayed for God's favor, for God's protection. We prayed that their programs that they lead would be set apart, that they would lead with heavenly wisdom and authority.

See, for this coach, he would tell you that learning to live as a hope carrier, it is a day-by-day, moment-by-moment invitation to surrender to the will of God, right. It's allowing your eyes to be open to the unique opportunities in front of you and then just using whatever's been entrusted to you for the advancement of God's kingdom. I just want to say, I am so grateful and I'm so inspired that we have people like this leading in our schools and shaping the lives of our students.

There is a businessman in our church, and he just wanted to take hope to his office. He realized that the weekend messages are so full of hope that they could be a great resource for him. We went online to ValleyCreek+ and he downloaded the weekend message in transcript form. Yeah. Every single weekend there is a transcript available.

It's valleycreek.plus. He took that transcript and what he did was he pulled out, he extracted all of the kingdom principles, he then surrounded it with industry vocabulary so his team would be able to relate to it, and he took this talk and he gave it at his office. It was so impactful that word began to travel. Word traveled up to his supervisor who said, "Um, I'd like to hear this talk." He shared it with his supervisor who shared it with his supervisor who shared it with his supervisor until it traveled all the way to the top to the CEO of the company who heard this talk, and said, "That is so impactful. I would like to invite you to record it and I want every single employee to hear this talk." That's a big deal because he works for a big company. It is a fortune 500 company with over 15,000 employees globally.

See, what one man did out of obedience to carry one story of hope to one office, God breathed on it and it is now influencing tens of thousands of people all across the world.

There's young adults at our Venue campus who jumped into a Circle just as we were launching our Hope Carrier Initiative. One of the nights at Circle, the question was asked, "How do you carry hope into the workplace?" This young adult began to share that she works in healthcare in a high risk, high intensive unit where every day she's wearing a hazmat suit because their patients are so high risk. But instead of seeing the hardship, instead of seeing the sickness and the suffering, this young adult saw it as an opportunity to dream with God. One day she went into work and she just drew an encouraging picture on the back of her scrubs, really the only place that's visible for her patients.

She didn't think much of it, but she knew it's what God was inviting her to do. She wasn't going to let a hazmat suit stop her from connecting with others. She started to walk around doing her check-ins and her patients began to notice, and y'all, they loved it. It brought life and color and hope into a place that for so many, felt hopeless. I mean, she was drawing smiley faces and rainbows and Kermit the Frog. Come on. Who's not encouraged by Kermit the Frog? But not only that, it started to open doors, doors to have conversations about why she was doing these drawings and all that Jesus was showing her in her life. You see, this young adult refused to allow anything to stop her from carrying hope. Now, she's learning the lesson that the more you give hope away, the more you experience it yourself, because that's what it means to be a hope carrier.

Well, there's a principal in our area who takes the teachings and the values that we have at Valley Creek and he uses them to teach his entire staff, to lead his entire staff. I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but our messages and the leadership development we have here at the church is not just for the church. It's a model for every area of life. This principal, he wanted to bring hope to his school. He wanted to bring hope to his area of life, but all he needed were some handles. He took all of these values and brought them to his team, and he said, "Let's make our own values." They started to work on making their own values, making it in a relevant way so it can be relevant for the public school system. He's taken these and now he's teaching them to his entire administration, his entire staff, and he's bringing hope where he's at. He's even using The Three Circles as a diagram of how to teach his values, these new values to his team.

Our principal, this principal, wanted to bring hope to his staff. He's now bringing hope to his administration and we are seeing the move of God in his school. I am so thankful that we have leaders in our schools that say, "You know what, I'm going to take the authority that God has given me. We're going to push back the darkness, and we're going to say, 'God, let Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth in our schools as it is in heaven.'"

Come on, stories of hope. That's what it looks like when you are the people of the kingdom, carrying the kingdom into every area of life. There's a verse towards the end of the book of John, that says, "Jesus did so many other things that I don't think that all the books in all the world would be able to carry them -- would be able to hold them."



I feel like the amount of stories that are bubbling up inside of our church right now, it's kind of like that. Like hope is on the move and stories are happening and life change is occurring. What I want you to catch is, whether or not that story seems big or small, all of them represent a move of God, where God is actually working through the lives of us as a people, reminding us that the church doesn't have a mission, the mission has a church. That God's kingdom has a people, that He's sending out those disciples, living on mission, to change their world and the stories are just coming at us at rapid speed. Here's, maybe, a question for you. What about you? What stories are bubbling up in your life? What's God speaking? If you had to come to one of those mics – no, we are not going to make you do it – but if you had to come to one of those mics and you had to tell a story that you've either seen firsthand or that you've been a part of and had experience, what would that story be?

What would it sound like? What would the characters be like? Because whether or not it's a teacher or a businessman or a student or somebody in the workplace, you know what all the stories are? The stories of Jesus and they're stories of how Jesus is moving and how God is good and how life change is still happening. One of the things I felt really strongly about actually to say when I was listening to those, there's a few of you that are listening to this right now. You've been waiting on a specific breakthrough for someone you love. Let me just speak it out into the atmosphere. Stories beget more stories. Hope begets more hope. There will be a breakthrough. You are going to experience it. Continue to pray with a boldness and a desire to see His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

What would your story sound like? What would it be like if you had to speak it out? What would it feel like as you were talking about the way that God has worked in your life and in the lives of those around you? See, there's a beautiful story that comes out of our reading plan. It's actually out of Mark 5 and a little bit of Mark 6, but ironically the same story is told in Luke chapter 8, which just happens to be the chapter of today's reading plan that we're reading. I really want to encourage you, keep leaning into that. Keep digging for gold in the reading plan. There's amazing stuff that God's showing us. But in this story, a man that's just been healed by Jesus is told by Jesus to go home to his own people and tell them what God has done for him and how He's had mercy on him. Go home to your own people. Go home to your family. Go to your workplace.

Go to your friends and just tell your story of how good God has been to you and how He has broken through in your life and has transformed you and He's moved in you. Tell your story, how He's had mercy on you and His grace and forgiveness is poured all over your life; of how He's changing you and showing you and revealing Himself to you. Tell your story to your own people and your story will have power. Your story will have impact because you are overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony. Your testimony is powerful and your testimony is profound. That man listened to Jesus. He went and he went to his own people. He told them how much the Lord had done for him, how the Lord had mercy

on him, and something amazing happens. The next chapter later, when Jesus and the disciples go back across to the same place, a place that they'd only spent literally one afternoon in before, it says that people recognized Jesus from all the surrounding towns and they brought all the sick people on mats and they came running to Him to have an experience with Him.

Why? They recognized Him because they recognized who Jesus was through that man's story and that man's story had a profound impact. It was powerful and there was a ripple effect to it. It kept on moving throughout the countryside. That's true for your story also. That's true for these stories. That's true for your story. It's true for what God is doing in and among us here at Valley Creek. Valley Creek, can I just encourage you, don't stop telling your story. You have a story of how Jesus is moving in your life and that story has a profound impact when we start to tell it. The blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, we are overcoming in Jesus' name. I hope that your faith has been built today as you've heard those stories. Come on, maybe even just close your eyes with me. Let's just thank the Lord for the stories He's writing in our church right now, what He's doing.

Thank You, Jesus that You are truly moving among us, that we get to be part of this thing called the Hope Carrier Initiative. But even more than that, we get to be part of Your kingdom. A kingdom that never ends. A kingdom that is forcibly advancing, one person and one story at a time. Right now, I pray for anybody who feels like they don't have a story. They haven't seen a story. They haven't had that breakthrough, that miracle, that thing. Lord, will You build our faith? Will You build our faith, even right now, that You're on the move? Because You're on the move, we're on the move. We get to be a part of that because our church is experiencing breakthrough and stories and miracles and life changes. We get to be a part of that. We are a part of that. Build our faith to know that even when we can't see it coming, when we don't know what it's going to look like, You are working behind the scenes on our behalf, in conversations, in little steps of obedience, through Your scripture, through Your word, through Your Holy Spirit, as He does what only He can do and He moves in our lives.

You are working, God. Thank You that we get to see You working. Thank You that we have a story to tell. Thank You that we are overcoming by Your blood, Your finished work, and our testimony, the work of God in our life. Your Gospel is powerful. Your Word is powerful. It is good news for us and for this time and this place. Thank You, Jesus, that we get to be a part of it. In Jesus' name, amen.