

All right. Well, hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you're with us. Hey, before we jump in, can we just welcome all of our campuses, whether you're joining us in Gainesville, Denton, Lewisville, Flower Mound, or online? We are so excited that you're here with us, and we hope that you and your family had a great Fourth of July. My name is Justin. I get to serve as the director of Valley Creek College, also known as VC College, also known as the greatest college of all time, because not only do I get to watch students earn degrees, I get to watch them become world changers, disciples of Jesus. See, VC College cares about what career path you're taking, but more than that, we care about who you're becoming, because Jesus says, "What good is it to gain the world and yet forfeit your soul in the process. So, VC College is dedicated to helping students become leaders that know who they are, who God is, and what they were created to do – and act as if it were so. So, there's my shameless plug. If you want to learn more about VC College, talk to me or talk to our team.

We'd love to have that conversation with you, but I'm not here today to talk to you about VC College. I'm here today to continue in this series we've been in all summer long, 60 Days of Overcoming, and man, it has been such a good series. We're just talking about real people from the Bible, real stories, real challenges they faced, challenges that you and I face every single day, challenges like selfishness, challenges like insecurity, challenges like feeling insignificant, and the reason we're talking about these people is because not only did they face these challenges, but in Jesus' name, they learned how to overcome. They learned how to overcome them, and I don't know about you, but when I hear the names of the people we're talking about, Ruth, Moses, and King David, I instantly separate myself from them because I see them as like heroes of the faith, and I'm not a hero of the faith. Remember, I'm like the VC College guy. I didn't part the Red Sea. I didn't kill a lion with my bare hands, but what we're discovering is that the people in these stories didn't start there either.

In fact, our theme verse throughout this series has been this. "Elijah was a person just like us." Elijah, a person, a human being, just like you and just like me. Okay. Heroes of the faith, this is Elijah, prophet to the nations, who called fire from heaven and raised people from the dead, and yet here we read that he was a person just like you and just like me. And so, we've just been saying that the same is true for everyone in this series, whether it's Ruth, whether it's Moses, whether it's King David. All humans and all who face their own set of challenges, but in the name of Jesus, learn how to overcome, and you know how they learn to overcome? Because they were made in the greatest image of the greatest overcomer of all time, and so were you. You were made in the image and likeness of Jesus, which means you were created to overcome.

In all these things, you were created to live a life of overcoming, and so we said that we were just going to set out this summer and memorize the passage of scripture that reminds ourselves of that. So, you guys remember this one? Romans 8:37 through 39. It's a great passage reminding us of our identity. And so, how I thought we'd start our time together is I just want to invite us across all of our campuses. Let's just read this out loud together, and let's

read it like we're overcomers. Let's read it like we're more than conquerors. And so, across all of our campuses, here we go on the count of three. One, two, three. "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Let's go.

Yes. In all these things, you're more than a conqueror. In every challenge, every battle, every struggle, you are more than an overcomer. And so, I'm excited because today I get to introduce a new character to us, and today's a little bit of a bonus because it's not just one. It's actually one and some of his buddies. Today, we're talking about Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But since they're buds, I like to think Daniel called them Shaddy, Mesh, and Bendy, but the reason we're talking about these four guys is because all of them fell into the book of Daniel, and these aren't just four random dudes. These are homies. Like, these are guys doing life together. Godly relationships, following Jesus with everything that they've got, and I don't know about you, but when I think about the book of Daniel, my mind goes to the highlights. Daniel getting thrown into the lion's den. His three buddies getting thrown into a blazing furnace. For whatever reason, the highlights in the book of Daniel are someone getting thrown into something. But do you remember the backstory?

Like, do you remember how Daniel ended up in that lion's den? Do you remember how those three buddies ended up in the blazing furnace? Because it wasn't by choice. Not like they raised a hand and said, "Hey, that looks hot. Toss me in." It was because all four of these guys, in their own individual and unique ways, were overcomers. See, before getting thrown into anything, these were typical Israelites, doing typical Israelite things, minding their own business. But one day, King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, comes and conquers their land. Then he takes back them all to be prisoners in Babylon. However, for a very select few, like the most capable, the most bright, the most willing and able, they were actually chosen to serve King Nebuchadnezzar himself in the king's court. And so, this is where Daniel and his three boys have now found themselves, serving King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. And what you have to understand is that these guys have never seen anything like Babylon before in their entire lives, because the world had never seen anything like Babylon before.

Babylon was the epicenter, you all. It was like Tokyo, Paris, and New York City all wrapped into one. It had resources, it had riches, it had power. I'm just saying, if you wanted to indulge, Babylon was the place to go. In fact, the word Babylon literally means a city devoted to materialism and pleasure. Does that sound familiar? A city devoted to materialism and pleasure. And so, here are these four guys surrounded by a people whose number one priority was themselves, and the worst of them all, King Nebuchadnezzar, the very king they've now been placed under to serve. And so, one day, King Nebi decides, you know what would be awesome? A 90-foot gold statue of me. Because that's what any secure leader does, right?

They make a 90-foot gold statue of themselves, and not only that, I'd say his security was so strong, he now requires that the entire city of Babylon worship said statue.

And so, here are Daniel's friends, faced with the decision, faced with the dilemma. Are we going to worship this idol? Or are we going to worship the God of Israel, the God of Jacob, the God who created us, the God whose goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life? And what you have to remember about Daniel and his friends is they're overcomers. And so, since his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, refused to worship this idol, this is how they're thrown into a blazing furnace. Because what's a normal response to someone not bowing down to a 90-foot gold statue of yourself? Not raising their taxes, not sending them into their room or time-out. How about throwing them into a fire? And if you remember the story, King Nebuchadnezzar looks in and sees that there's another in the fire with him. The angel of the Lord appears so that not one single hair on their body is harmed.

And in this moment, we see Daniel and his friends as overcomers. And not overcomers of a blazing furnace, not even overcomers of death. Dare I say, overcomers of something much bigger than that. In this moment, we see Daniel's friends as overcomers of idolatry. And so, happy Fourth of July, everyone. Because if you haven't guessed it, we're talking about overcoming idolatry today. And idolatry is a big word. I fully acknowledge that. It feels a little ancient, a little outdated, maybe a little Old Testament. But all idolatry is anything that you and I give equal or higher value to other than God. That's what idolatry is. It's anything that we give equal or higher value to other than God. Another way to say it is it's anything that you serve other than God. And so, in this moment, Daniel's friends are being asked to serve an idol instead of serving God. But instead of being overcome by fear, instead of being overcome by threats, instead of being overcome by the worry and anxiety, they choose to overcome idolatry.

Because what you have to understand for Daniel and his friends is that they chose to serve God long before Babylon. It's not like they got to this crossroads at the furnace or the lion's den and they were like, "Uh, idol or furnace." No, they had chosen long before Babylon. One God, one king, one Lord, one worthy of my life, my devotion, my worship, and my affection. And so, it didn't matter if they were in Babylon, Gainesville, Denton, Louisville, Flower Mound, or out engaging online somewhere. They were going to worship one God, one king. And so, can I just ask you, have you chosen to do that? Like, today, as you think about the Babylon that you and I live in, have you chosen to serve the one true God? Because this is who Daniel and his friends served, but what about you?

Like, if someone were to look at your life, if someone were to read the story of you, would they see that you serve God and God alone? Or if we're honest, would they maybe see that there are some idols in our lives that we're serving as well? Because I think the problem for a lot of us, and I'm going to include myself in this, is we love the Jesus and lifestyle. The Jesus in that thing, the Jesus in that opinion, the Jesus in that feeling, the Jesus in that emotion, the Jesus in

that dream or that thought, the only problem with that is anything that has equal or higher value to other than God is idolatry. That's what has our affection. That's what has our devotion. That's what has our attention. That's what's in competition with Jesus, and that's the thing that we're serving. And Jesus knew that the only way for us to overcome a life of idolatry was to have all of us, but more importantly, for us to have all of him. This is why Jesus tells us the greatest commandment. "Love the Lord your God with, say it with me, all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind."

Guys, Jesus could have just said, "Love the Lord your God with your heart. Love the Lord your God with your soul. Love the Lord your God with your strength and your mind," but he doesn't. He says all. Not some, but all. Because Jesus knows that when he has our all, and most importantly, when we have all of him, we can overcome a life of idolatry. And listen, I don't think anybody here has a 90-foot gold statue of themselves in their living room, but that's because today I don't think our idols are statues anymore. I think they're way more subtle than that. In fact, it'd be nice if they were statues. At least it wouldn't be blind to us and to others. It'd be like, "Hey, meet my idol. He's 90 feet tall. His name is Frank." But today, I think our idols are a little more sneaky than that. I think they're things like time and how we protect it. Maybe a pride in our life that comes from a deep-seated insecurity.

Maybe a work ethic we excuse is really just overworking, or maybe it's the relationships we try to maintain and uphold, or a beauty that's physical or internal, or maybe it's like a mindset we have about future dreams and visions that have yet to come to pass today. I think our idols are way more sneaky than a 90-foot gold statue. And I think we've gotten really, really good at justifying these things. Like, no one wants to admit they have an idol in their life, yes. There's no way King Nebuchadnezzar is calling that statue an idol. What is he doing? He's justifying it. He's saying, "This is good leadership. This is strategy. This is me exercising my right as king." And don't we do the same? We'll say things like, "But yes, like this really matters, though." This is super important. Listen, if I don't make this money for these kids, who's going to do it? If I don't make this happen, if I don't get this done, who will? And maybe there's some truth to those things, or maybe, if we're honest, it's actually become a little bit of an idol in our life.

Which is why, again, I think so many of us are convinced that we don't have idols. And so, how do you know if something is an idol in your life? Well, just look at how you respond whenever that thing is challenged. Look at how King Nebuchadnezzar responds when his idol's challenged. He throws someone into a furnace, and not just someone, his best, into a furnace. And so, how do we know if we have idols in our life? Well, what in your life, whenever it's challenged, makes you throw someone into a fire? And not a literal fire, people, but a fire of judgment, a fire of anger, a fire of resentment and bitterness, a fire of shame and scorn. Like, what in your life, when it feels out of your control or it doesn't go your way, just causes you to lose it? Because you know something is an idol in your life based on how you respond whenever it's challenged.

And so, when that kiddo accidentally bounces that basketball into your car, when that supervisor gives you feedback on that project you worked really, really hard on, when that thing is trying to interfere with that time off or that vacation, do you brush it off as no big deal, or, if you're honest, do you throw them into the fire? And if you're still not convinced that you don't have idols, can I just invite you to something this morning? What would it look like to just ask the people who love you most in your life, what makes you throw them into a fire? And again, not a literal fire, people, I hope you hear me saying this, but maybe a fire of passive aggressiveness, a fire of rage, or a fire of silence and distance, because make no mistake, we all have a fire. They all just look different. And so, what in your life causes you to throw them into a fire and then just have the humility to hear them out?

And if you start to find yourself getting defensive as they're beginning to share what that thing is, I'm just saying, you may be proving their point. Because if we're going to overcome idolatry, the first thing that we have to do is just admit we have idols. Like, I admit that I have idols, and you don't have to admit for me, but I'm admitting that I've got idols in my life. Because if we want to overcome idolatry, we've got to admit that we've got idols so that we can be taught by the ones who've gone before us. The ones like Daniel, because, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the scripture and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." The reason we're talking about stories like Daniel's, like Ruth, like Moses, like King David, isn't because they're just epic stories. They are, but so that they can teach us. Teach us and encourage us. You know what encouragement means? It means to put courage into you. Why?

So that you can have hope. So that you can overcome in your own life, and so that you can live a life free of idolatry. And there are so many ways that Daniel teaches us how to live free of idolatry, but one of the ways we see Daniel do this is practice obedience in small things. If we want to overcome idolatry in our lives, we've got to practice obedience in small things, and I am convinced this is one of our biggest challenges. Because we all want to practice obedience in the big things. Give me the furnace. Give me the lion's den. That next step is right in front of me. The only problem with that is how you do one thing is how you do everything. And Jesus tells us that if you want to be entrusted with much, you've got to be entrusted with the small that's right in front of you. And Daniel practiced obedience in small things. One of the best examples of this that we see is when he first gets to Babylon. Since Daniel's chosen for the king's court, this means he now has access to the king's cafeteria, and this isn't Luby's, people. This is Texas Day, Brazil. Or Tejas, if you're cultured.

All you can eat. The finest food and drink you could ever imagine. And so, you would think that after being taken from his homeland, placed under an evil dictator, he would allow himself the luxury of a ribeye here and there. But he doesn't. He doesn't because for Daniel, he knows something as small as what he's eating could still defy God's will for his life. And for Daniel, how he did one thing was how he did everything. And so, what does Daniel do? Instead of royalty in this king's court, he asks for vegetables and water. Anyone here want to give up

all-you-can-eat royalty for a dry head of broccoli and some water from a well? Yes. Yes, me neither. But for Daniel, this was a no-brainer. Because the same water and vegetables every single day with God were better than all-you-can-eat royalty every single day without God.

Because how you do one thing is how you do everything. And food wasn't where Daniel found comfort. God was where Daniel found comfort. And so, as you think about your life in this season, where are you looking for comfort? Where are you looking for comfort? Is it in that bank account? Is it in the safety of your family or your children and their future? Is it in, maybe, your physical fitness, your mental, your thought life, or your well-being? Because any place we're looking for comfort outside of God has the potential to become an idol in our life. And so, Daniel choosing broccoli over a filet wasn't a small decision. It was a major decision. Because it played into a much greater narrative that how you do one thing is how you do everything. And I don't know about you, but when I look at the life of Daniel, I get super inspired. I'm like, "Lord, give me the test. I want the lion's den. I want the furnace. Let's go."

But what God is teaching me in this season is that if I want to say yes in those major moments, I've got to say yes to the small ones that are right in front of me. Like, the movies and the series that I choose to start. The music, the podcasts, and the audiobooks that I choose to listen to. The things and the places I choose to spend money or time on, the people I surround myself with, and hang out with. Why? Because the life of overcoming idolatry comes from a life of practicing obedience in small things. Because how you do one thing is how you do everything. And this part of Daniel's story in particular, it actually really hits home for me. See, for years of my life, if you know me well, I idolized food. I idolized eating it. I idolized how it made me feel. I idolized my next meal. I would be the dude at lunch that's thinking about what's for dinner. And the thing about idols is they don't want you to think it's a big deal.

They want you to learn how to justify. They want to keep it between just you and that idol. And so, whenever I try to confess it, I get the same response. "Oh, but you're so skinny. You're metabolism, you're young. Just enjoy it, live life." But inside, my soul was dying. I felt like I was in the furnace. I felt like I was in the lion's den, and I didn't have any glimmer of hope because I was letting food become my comfort. I was letting food become my escape, an escape from what you ask, an escape from my thoughts, an escape from being present with myself or the people that I love most, an escape from me. And I would just eat. I would indulge. I would eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, and I didn't care about the consequences. And little by little, food became an idol in my life.

But because of stories like Daniel's, I learned that when I practice obedience in small things like what I eat, I can actually experience significant breakthroughs in so many other ways in my life. And so, as soon as I started to practice obedience in where I went for lunch and how much of that lunch I chose to eat, you would not believe the miraculous, the supernatural, the miracles and the breakthroughs, and the bondage of generations that fell out of my life. Why? Because how you do one thing is how you do everything. And small obedience can lead to significant

breakthroughs. And so, what does a broccoli head have to do with the lion's den? Everything. Everything. Because how you do one thing is how you do everything. Another way that we see Daniel and his life help us overcome idolatry, live a lifestyle of prayer. You all, read the book of Daniel. The dude loved to pray. In fact, Daniel prayed so much that the next king after King Nebuchadnezzar, and his council said, "Daniel, if you keep up this prayer, you're going in the lion's den."

But check this out. "Three times a day Daniel got down on his knees," and say it with me, "prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." What this passage is saying is that it doesn't matter that Daniel's life was being threatened because for Daniel, prayer was life. Prayer was life. And a life without prayer wasn't a life worth living. And so, how does Daniel never make something bigger than God? Idolatry? He's always talking to a God that's bigger than everything. But if I'm someone where everything feels bigger than God, my anxiety, my worry, the pressures, the asks, life, it's probably because I'm not living a lifestyle of prayer. It's probably because I'm not talking to the one who's bigger than life.

But we see from Daniel that when we practice a lifestyle of prayer, we don't have room for idols in our life, you all. Why? Because we're filled to the measure of the fullness of God. Prayer helps you taste and see that God is good. And once you've tasted the goodness of God, you've tasted a life to the full. So, you don't have to go out into Babylon tasting what the world has to offer. You've tasted the presence of God, and nothing else will ever satisfy, because nothing else was ever supposed to satisfy. It's the presence of God that satisfies us. And when I think back to my own story and that journey with food that I was on, when I started to practice a lifestyle of prayer, food tasted better than ever before. Because you know what tastes better than food? The fruit of the Spirit. Self-control. Communion with the living God who created me. And so, we've got to practice a lifestyle of prayer if we want to overcome a life of idolatry.

And finally, from Daniel's life, what do we see that would help us overcome a life of idolatry? Trust in the goodness of God. Trust in the goodness of God. Think about it. Why do we have idols? Because we start to question the goodness of God. We start to ask questions like, yes, but like, "Is God really enough? Is he really going to satisfy everything that I want and need? Do I really not need to buy this? Do I really need to trust in the goodness of God in this moment?" And listen, the second we start to have those questions, the second we start to allow idols into our life. And God knew. He's pretty good at knowing things. He knew that this would be a challenge for us, which is why he starts the 10 Commandments with this one. "You shall have no other gods before me." You shall have no other idols before me. Because God knew that having faith would require faith. He knew that trust would require just that. Trust.

And so, just like Daniel, we can be surrounded by a Babylon and trust in the goodness of God. In spite of our circumstances, in spite of what's going on around us, even if trusting in the goodness of God looks like asking for a dry head of broccoli after you've been offered the king's court, because that's the thing about the goodness of God. Oftentimes, it makes zero

sense on paper. It looks like getting the opposite of what you wanted so that you can actually get the thing that you needed. But do you know what happens to Daniel after he faithfully eats that water and those vegetables for weeks on end? He is noticeably in better shape, better health, and better physical well-being than all the other servants who ate from the king's court. Why? Because it wasn't about the food Daniel was eating. It was about the God that Daniel was serving. And so, when we choose to trust in the goodness of God, we can overcome a life of idolatry.

We can give God the worship, the glory, and the honor that he deserves because Jesus isn't worthy of some. He's worthy of all. And when we experience all of him, we too can overcome a life of idolatry. And let me just acknowledge that I'm sensing that there's some of you here today that are maybe thinking, "Crud, you know what? I think I've got some idols in my life." Like, if I'm honest, and really, it's just like me and the Lord, like I know there are some things that have a stronghold on me. And maybe I've gotten really good at justifying it, or maybe people in my life don't really know how big of an idol it is, but I feel like the Holy Spirit is saying, "Today, that is an idol. Today, that is something I want you to live free from." And so, if that's you and you're like, "Hey, like I don't know what to do. I feel in too deep. I don't know where to go. I don't know how to deal with this. Can I just show you how God taught us how to deal with idols thousands of years ago?" Because I don't think the wisdom has changed. And so, if you have an idol in your life and you're wondering, "What do I do with it? How do I overcome?" This is how you overcome.

You break down their altars. You smash their pillars. You cut down their sacred poles, and you burn their idols with fire. If you have an idol in your life, this is how you deal with it. You don't treat it like a pet. You don't water it like a plant. You break it down. You smash, you cut, you burn. And I know it sounds extreme, but extreme situations require extreme responses. There's a battle for your soul. And God wants all of it, but so does the world. And so, in Jesus' name, we have to deal with the idols in our life. And so, this may look like, instead of pausing whatever that subscription is, cancel it. Instead of racking up more debt, let someone else do your budget. Instead of deleting the apps from the phone, buy a flip phone. Instead of taking a break from the relationship, end the relationship. Because it's time for you to get out of the fire, and it's time to throw that idol in the fire in Jesus' name.

Come on, you were made to overcome. You were made to live a life free from idolatry. And you were made in the image and likeness of the greatest overcomer of all time. And you weren't made to overcome alone. So, find your Shadrach, find your Meshach, find your Abednego, and surround yourself with overcomers. Because you were made to be a slave to nothing other than the righteousness that is in Christ Jesus. You weren't made to live a life of bondage. You were made to live fully free, fully loved, fully known, so that you can dance, you can laugh, you can play, you can live life to the full. And in all these things, you are more than a conqueror. In all these things, you are more than an overcomer. And so, when God tells you who you are, don't tell him who you're not. Come on, in Jesus' name, you are an overcomer.



And when we believe that, when we believe we are who he says we are, true identity is what helps us overcome false idolatry.

And so, today, would you believe that you are more than a conqueror, that you are an overcomer? Why don't you close your eyes with me? So, come on, what's the Holy Spirit saying to you? I know this topic isn't always the lightest topic, but the yoke of Jesus is easy and light. And so, we weren't made for a life of heaviness. We weren't made for a life of bondage. We weren't made for anything to hold us down or hold us back. We were made to live a life of freedom because it's for freedom that Christ set us free. And so, today, in the name of Jesus, if there is an idol in your life, would you deal with it? Would you break it down? Would you smash it? Would you cut it? Would you burn it?

Would you do whatever it takes to rid that idol out of your life so that you can experience the fullness of God? So that whatever that thing is can take its rightful place. So that it can be the thing serving you instead of you serving it. And so, Jesus, I just want to say thank you for the blessings you've given us. Thank you for the breath in our lungs. Thank you for our jobs. Thank you for our schools. Thank you for our friends. Thank you for our families. Thank you for our possessions. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. And so, the problem isn't having the stuff. The problem is when the stuff has us. And so, today, in the name of Jesus, we just speak freedom. We speak healing. We speak breakthrough. We declare that chains will fall because in all these things, we are more than conquerors. In all these things, we are overcomers because we were made in the image and likeness of the greatest overcomer that we have ever seen. So, Jesus, thank you for overcoming death so that we can experience life. In Jesus' name, amen.