



UNIT 5 | SESSION 3

THE PEOPLE WORSHIPED A GOLDEN CALF

EXODUS 32-34

KEY PASSAGE:

Psalm 95:6-7

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.

CHRIST CONNECTION:

Moses acted as the people's mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands for us before God. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION



LEADER Bible Study

After all God had done for the Israelites, the story of the Israelites’ worshipping a golden calf may seem surprising. How could God’s people turn so quickly from God, who delivered them from slavery and provided for them, even after they explicitly agreed to do everything He had commanded? (See Ex. 24:3.) When we think about the reasons why Israel fell into idolatry, we recognize that we are vulnerable to the same follies.

First, we fail to obey God’s Word. The Israelites disobeyed the second of the Ten Commandments: “Do not make an idol for yourself.” This might sound like an easy commandment to keep; you aren’t crafting little statues to worship, right? Idolatry is dangerous because it’s rooted in the heart. Our idols don’t always look like golden calves. Idols are anything or anyone our sinful hearts look to, seeking what only God provides—such as true joy, meaning, or hope.

Second, we distrust God’s purposes. The Israelites stopped trusting in God, who showed Himself to be powerful and good. They wanted their false god to save them. They thought God’s plan wasn’t working, so they made a plan of their own. Are you ever tempted to do the same? When we forget who God is and think too highly of ourselves or others, we put a person in the place of God.

Third, we forget God’s grace. Aaron gave credit to the man-made idol for bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. We might convince ourselves that our success comes from the work of our own hands or the favor of other people. When we forget that every good gift comes from God, we fall into idolatry.

Finally, we fail to use our gifts to the glory of God. Don’t miss that the Israelites used the plunder from Egypt—God’s provision to them—to make the calf. We too can often use the gifts God has given us for our own satisfaction and to draw attention to ourselves, rather than to the One who gave them to us.

God was angry with the Israelites. He is a jealous God who will not give His glory to another. (See Isa. 42:8.) Yet we see how Moses stepped in between God and the people to intercede on their behalf. As those who have Jesus Christ as our Mediator, we trust in His power to overcome our idolatries and empower us for His mission.

TERMS TO KNOW

Idolatry: the worship of idols or excessive devotion to, or reverence for, some person or thing. An idol is anything a person puts in the place of God. Idolatry is a sin.

WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “ Think of a time you did something you knew was wrong. How did you feel? Did you try to make it right? Why or why not? ”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: THE GO-BETWEEN

Form two teams of kids. Instruct teams to sit together at one end of the room. Give each team a piece of paper. Appoint one kid on each team to be the Mediator. Explain that when you say go, the Mediator should come to you for an instruction, relay the instructions to his team, and then come back for another instruction. The first team to correctly follow all instructions wins:

1. Two kids should draw a star.
2. All kids must list their names.
3. Rewrite the names in alphabetical order.
4. Circle any names that begin with a vowel.

SAY “ Without the Mediator, you wouldn’t have known what instructions to follow. In the Bible story we will hear today, Moses acted as a mediator between God and the Israelites. A mediator is someone who works between two people or groups to settle an argument or dispute. ”

OPTION 2: CLAY COWS



Give each kid a fist-sized lump of yellow clay or play dough. Encourage them to knead the clay and form a golden calf.

Applaud kids for their efforts. Then instruct kids to smash their clay cows.

SAY “ An idol is anything we love more than God—ourselves, other people, or created things. In today’s Bible story, we will hear about a time the Israelites worshiped a golden calf. Why would they do that? Why would they turn away from the one true God to worship an idol? Let’s find out what happened. ”

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “ Hey, everyone! I am so glad you are here. I’m [your name]. If you brought your Bible today, hold it up. [Provide Bibles for kids who need one.] Can anyone tell me what the Bible is about? [Allow kids to respond.] The Bible is God’s Word. It tells us the wonderful story of God’s plan to rescue sinners.

The Bible tells us what is true. The stories in the Bible really happened, and the people we hear about really lived. When we read about people in the Bible, we sometimes discover that what was true about them can be true about us too. ”



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Exodus 32–34. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The People Worshiped a Golden Calf.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

THE PEOPLE WORSHIPED A GOLDEN CALF

“**Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights.** While God met with Moses, **the Israelites at the bottom of the mountain were getting impatient.** They began to wonder, Where is Moses? What is taking him so long? Is he still alive?”

The Israelites went to Moses’ brother, Aaron. “Make us a god to lead us,” they said. “We don’t know what happened to Moses.” So Aaron collected gold from the people and made a statue of a calf that they could worship.

God saw what the people were doing, and He was angry. “I will destroy these people,” God said.

Moses said, “Remember the great promise You made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You promised to give them as many offspring as there are stars in the sky. You promised to bless them and give them land.” **So God did not destroy them.**

Moses went down the mountain carrying two stone tablets on which God had written the laws. Moses got closer to the camp **and saw that the people were dancing before the golden calf! He threw down the stone tablets,** smashing them at the bottom of the mountain. **Then he destroyed the golden calf.**

The next day, Moses went back up the mountain to talk to God. “These people sinned against You,” he said. **“Please forgive their sin.”**

God told Moses to return to the people and lead them. “When the time comes, I will punish them for their sin,” God said. God sent a terrible sickness to the people because they worshiped the golden calf.

God continued to meet with Moses and give him laws and instructions. One morning, Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. **God came down in a cloud. He said, “The LORD is a compassionate and gracious God ... but He will not leave the guilty unpunished.”**

Moses bowed down and worshiped God. “Lord, please go with us,” he said. “Forgive our sin, and accept us as Your people.”

Christ Connection: Moses acted as the people’s mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands for us before God. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Use visuals: Draw or print pictures of the Bible story people to hang on the wall. You may use a flannelgraph or felt board if you have one available. Include scenery or relevant objects. Move the pieces around as you tell the story.

Vary your voice: Vary your voice to distinguish between narration, the Israelites’ words, Moses’ words, and God’s words.

Small Group Discussion/Questions

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ Open your Bible to Exodus 32. When Moses was on Mount Sinai meeting with God, what did the people decide to do? [Allow kids to respond.] They grew impatient and asked Moses’ brother, Aaron, to make them an idol to worship. Without their leader Moses, the Israelites were looking for someone to follow. God’s people were out of control. They danced and worshiped the golden calf. God saw their sin, and He was angry.

Do you remember our big picture question? **What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.** Worship is meant to be reserved only for God. No one and nothing else deserves to be worshiped.

[Choose a volunteer to read Ex. 32:7-8 aloud.] God told Moses to return to the people because they had already turned away from what God had commanded of them. What did Moses tell the people when he saw what they had done? [Select a volunteer to read Ex. 32:30.]

Moses told the people that they had sinned against the Lord and that he would ask God for forgiveness on their behalf. Moses knew that the people had disobeyed God and what He commanded of them. He knew that they did not deserve forgiveness. Moses acted as their mediator, standing for them before God. God punished His people for their sin by sending sickness, but God showed mercy to them by continuing to meet with Moses and care for them as His chosen people. ”

3 CHRIST CONNECTION

SAY “ Moses acted as the people’s mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. God’s plan is to rescue His people from captivity, not only physical captivity like He rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but spiritual captivity—slavery to sin. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands before God for us. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. What good news! ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.)

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

| **SAY** “ Does God always punish sin? Why? ”

Help kids understand that God is just. That means He will always do what is right. Sin must be punished and the Bible says that the punishment for sin is death. All people have sinned, so all people deserve death. But God, in His mercy and grace, provided a way to be saved from the punishment of sin.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Rom. 6:23.)

| **SAY** “ How is Jesus our Mediator? ”

Allow kids to share their understanding of a mediator based on today’s story. Help them recognize that Jesus took the punishment for our sin on the cross and gives His righteousness to all who trust in Him. Jesus stands before God on behalf of anyone who trusts Him as Savior. He has paid for our sin, so when God sees us, He no longer sees our sin, but Jesus’ righteousness.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read 2 Cor. 5:21.)

| **SAY** “ What should we do when we sin? ”

Point out that the Bible says that if we confess our sins to Him, He will forgive us. Encourage kids that God wants us to confess that we were wrong and ask Him to forgive us. Once God saves us, nothing can separate us from God, but confessing our sins to God is an important part of developing a close relationship with Him.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read 1 John 1:9.)