



Use Week of:

Unit 6 • Session 1

The Golden Calf

BIBLE PASSAGE:

Exodus 32; 34

STORY POINT:

God disciplined His people for worshipping a golden calf.

KEY PASSAGE:

Exodus 15:2

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

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

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Additional resources are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

LEADER Bible Study

God led His people into the wilderness, but He did not leave them there alone. The Lord was with His people. He provided meat, bread, and water. He guided them to Mount Sinai, where He met with their leader, Moses. The Lord came down on the mountain in fire, and He spoke through thunder. The Israelites could not have ignored His presence.

But when Moses went up on the mountain and did not return for several weeks, the Israelites felt abandoned. They appealed to Moses' brother, Aaron: "Come, make gods for us who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!" (Ex. 32:1)

Aaron's response led the people to commit a terrible sin. He gathered gold from the people and made an image of a calf, and the people worshiped the golden calf. God saw what the people were doing, and He told Moses to go down the mountain at once. Moses confronted his brother. Aaron claimed that when the people gave him the gold, he threw it into the fire, and "out came this calf!" (Ex. 32:24)

God punished His people for worshiping a golden calf, and Moses returned to the mountain to ask the Lord to forgive the Israelites' sin. Moses could not atone for the people's sin; God said He would hold the people accountable for their sins, but the Lord did not abandon the Israelites.

Introduce the kids you teach to the concept of idolatry. An *idol* is anything a person puts in the place of God. Explain that idolatry is a sin. The Israelites deserved to be punished for their sin. In the same way, we deserve to be punished for our sin. Point out that Jesus never sinned. He is greater than Moses, and when we sin, Jesus not only talks to the Father for us, He atones for our sin. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.

The BIBLE Story

The Golden Calf

Exodus 32; 34

God had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and from Pharaoh and his pursuing army. The Israelites came to Mount Sinai (SIGH nigh), and they camped there in front of the mountain. Moses went up the mountain, and God spoke to him.

God had a lot to tell Moses, and **Moses was up on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. Meanwhile, 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 has happened to Moses." So Aaron made a golden calf that they could worship.

God saw what the people were doing, and He was angry because of their sin. God told Moses to go down the mountain. "I will destroy these people," God said.

"Please forgive them," 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 decided not



to destroy the people.

Moses went down the mountain. He carried 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 calf they made.

“What were you thinking?” Moses asked Aaron. The people were out of control.

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

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

God continued to meet with Moses and give him laws and instructions. He made two more stone tablets to replace the ones Moses broke. One morning, Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. **The Lord** 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.”**

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Role play:** Create name tags and assign roles to the kids to act out the story as you narrate. Roles would include Moses, Aaron, the Israelites.
- **Display a model:** Paint or cover a toy cow with gold wrapping paper. Show the golden calf model as you tell the story.

Christ Connection: God's people sinned against God, and Moses asked God to forgive them. Moses acted as their 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.

INTRODUCE the Story



SESSION TITLE: The Golden Calf

BIBLE PASSAGE: Exodus 32; 34

STORY POINT: God disciplined His people for worshiping a golden calf.

KEY PASSAGE: Exodus 15:2

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to think of a time it was really hard to wait for something special. What were they waiting for, and why was it hard to wait?

SAY • What kinds of things do you do while you wait? In today's story, what the Israelites did while they waited on Moses got them in a lot of trouble!

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Stained Glass Secret" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete "Stained Glass Secret" on the activity page. Guide kids to fill in the spaces using the color key to reveal a secret word.

SAY • You've probably heard the word *worship* many times before. Have you ever thought about what it means? We're going to explore that more today when we hear our Bible story.

LOW PREP

- various craft supplies (paper, craft sticks, markers, ribbons, scissors, tape)

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Beautiful creations

Spread out the craft supplies for the kids to see. Challenge

them to create something beautiful in less than five minutes. Kids may work as one group, form teams, or create individual designs. After five minutes, guide kids to present their creations.

SAY • You are all so creative! While these creations are each unique and beautiful, they are not alive, and they can't do anything for us. It would be foolish to worship them. God is the only One who deserves our worship. Sadly, the Israelites didn't seem to understand this. We will learn today about a terrible decision they made.

OPTION 2: Who will help me?

Before the session, write simple scenario statements on separate index cards that indicate a need that can be met by the helping items. Example: *I fell down and my knee is bleeding* requires a bandage.

Select a volunteer to be the helper. Distribute the cards to the rest of the kids. Position the helping items next to you for the helper to see. Invite kids to read their cards one at a time. The helper must come to you and ask for the most appropriate item for each need. When kids finish, thank the helper for getting each person what he or she needed.

SAY • Our helper listened to your problem and came to me to find a solution. Our helper was like a mediator between you and me. In today's story, we will learn how Moses was a mediator, standing before God on behalf of the Israelites.

- index cards
- marker

Helping items:

- bandage
- pencil
- water bottle
- coat
- snack
- umbrella
- ice pack

Transition to teach the story

TEACH the Story



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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.

- room decorations
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Create the front office area of a police station by setting up a table to look like a desk, hanging a map of the city on the wall, and stacking several books and notebooks.

Countdown

- countdown video

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

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire

[Leader enters wearing dark pants, a dark shirt, a police hat, and a badge.]

Tip: If you prefer not to use themed content or characters, adapt or omit this introduction.

LEADER • Hello, boys and girls! Thank you so much for coming down to the station. We love getting to know the kids in our community. Police officers work to serve and protect the community. One way they do that is by enforcing the law. People aren't usually happy when we catch them breaking the law. Nobody thanks us for handing out a speeding ticket or gives us a hug when we arrest him for a crime. But laws exist for the good of the community. Without laws, this city would get out of control.

Did you know laws have been around for

thousands of years? Don't just take my word for it. I'd love to share a Bible story with you. This story is about a time God's people foolishly broke God's law.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • When you hear the Bible story, think about this big picture question. This question helps us see the bigger picture of what God is up to. Here is the question: ***What is worship?*** A very good question! I'll tell you the answer, and then we'll look at the question and answer again after we hear the Bible story. ***What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.***

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review. · Giant Timeline

LEADER • Our story today begins in Exodus 32. Let's review the events up to this point: God had created everything and then people chose to sin. God promised to send a Rescuer to save people from sin and death, and He formed a nation through the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This family grew into the nation of Israel, and it was through Israel that God would send Jesus into the world.

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, but **God called Moses to deliver His people from captivity.** God miraculously brought the Israelites out of Egypt, and Moses led them toward the promised land.

For our story today, God's people were in the wilderness. Moses had gone up on Mount Sinai to

Speak with God. While Moses was on the mountain, **God gave rules to show how to love Him and others.** The Israelites camped at the base of the mountain. Even though Moses' brother Aaron was with the people, they were tired of waiting around for Moses. We'll hear what the Israelites did while Moses was away.

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Exodus 32; 34. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "The Golden Calf."

LEADER • Sadly, we see this kind of thing too often. People stop focusing on the right things and start focusing on the wrong things. That *always* leads to wrong choices. See, the Israelites grew impatient. They forgot our big picture question. Do you remember what it is? [*Allow kids to respond.*]

That's right! ***What is worship?*** Well, here's the answer: ***Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.*** The Israelites forgot that important truth. They took their eyes off the greatness of God and made a golden idol instead. They somehow thought that hunk of gold could do something for them. Boy, were they wrong! God is the One who loved them, rescued them, and had a plan for them. He needed to get their attention fast so they would put their focus—their worship—back where it belongs: on Him. That meant a time of discipline for the people. **God disciplined His people for worshiping a golden calf.** The Israelites seemed to have learned their lesson for a while.

- Bibles
- "The Golden Calf" video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Story Point Poster

Christ connection

LEADER • God used Moses to lead the people. Moses brought God's message to the Israelites and prayed to God for the people. He acted as a 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.

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided on page 181 to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Questions from kids video (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 6, Session 1” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to think about how they can know if something or someone is an idol. Guide them to discuss what types of things or people they might be tempted to worship today.

• “Unit 6, Session 1” questions from kids video



Missions moment (3 minutes)

Display the “Buddhist Temple Worship” printable. Point to the image and explain that the woman in the picture is worshipping in a temple that was not built to honor the one true God. She is like many others around the world who don't know that God sent Jesus to save people from sin. Japan is a country filled with temples like this. In the coming weeks, we will hear about a missionary family that is telling the people of Japan about Jesus.

• “Buddhist Temple Worship” printable

Type the following phrase into an online translator: *There is only one God, and He loves you.* Allow kids to listen to the translation in another language.

Pray, asking that many people in Japan will hear and believe the good news about Jesus! Pray specifically for the woman in the photo.

• Key Passage Poster

• “The Lord Is My
Strength and My
Song” song

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Exodus 15:2. Invite the girls read it as a group. Then invite the boys read it as a group.

LEADER • When God rescued the Israelites from Egypt, He wanted them to be His own special people. They were going to be a new nation, holy and separate from other nations, to bring glory to God.

The same thing is true today for everyone who trusts in Jesus. Through Jesus, we are chosen to become part of God’s family, holy and set apart to point people to Jesus. Let’s sing.

Lead boys and girls in singing “The Lord Is My Strength and My Song.”

Sing (4 minutes)

• “This Is My God” song

Open your Bible and read aloud Isaiah 12:5.

LEADER • I love thinking about worship. We worship God by celebrating the greatness of God. We can do that with our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We can also worship God with our voices as we sing. So let’s stand and worship Him now.

Sing together “This Is My God.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Lord God, You love us and care for us! Help us remember the truth so we will not turn away from You. Only You deserve our worship. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

APPLY the Story



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KEY PASSAGE: Exodus 15:2

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- chalkboard or dry erase board
- chalk or marker
- eraser

Before the session, write the key passage on a chalkboard or dry erase board. Form two teams. Invite kids to read Exodus 15:2 aloud. Choose a volunteer from team 1 to erase one word of the key passage. Challenge team 2 to read the key passage, providing the missing word.

Then allow a volunteer from team 2 to erase a word. Team 1 will read the key passage and supply the missing words. Continue back and forth, erasing one word at a time until both teams can say the key passage from memory.

SAY • These are the words the Israelites sang after God parted the Red Sea and they escaped from the Egyptians. They praised God and worshiped Him for saving them.

Practice the key passage this week and see if you can memorize it. We can remember these words as a way to worship God today. ***What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.***

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Story Point Poster
- Small Group Timeline and Map Set (005802790)

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

Distribute Bibles. Guide boys and girls to open their Bibles to Exodus 32. Remind kids that the Book of Exodus is

the second book of the Bible. The word *exodus* means “departure.” Explain that the Book of Exodus is about the departure of God’s people from Egypt and their travels afterward. The Israelites camped at Mount Sinai where Moses received God’s law. Point to Mount Sinai (I9) on the Old Testament Mediterranean Map.

SAY • God loved the Israelites. The laws were for their good. So when they turned away from Him and created an idol, **God disciplined His people for worshipping a golden calf.**

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. Being disciplined is never fun. But why is it necessary and even helpful? *Help kids recognize that discipline often helps us learn from our mistakes. It also helps us see the severity of our wrongdoing—the greater the offense, the greater the discipline.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Heb. 12:11.)
2. How does God’s discipline show that He loves us? *Help kids recognize that God disciplines us because He loves us. If He didn’t love us, He wouldn’t care what we did. He wants us to follow His rules because He knows what’s best for us.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Prov. 3:11-12.)
3. What would happen if we were never disciplined? *Help kids recognize that without discipline, everyone would do their own thing. There would be no order and no way to hold people accountable for their actions.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Prov. 12:15.)

SAY • No one likes to be disciplined, but when we view discipline as an act of love, we’re better able to learn from our mistakes and help others avoid the same mistakes.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

- Allergy Alert download
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 10½ ounces mini marshmallows
- 6 cups puffed cereal
- gummy candy fish, 1 per kid
- fruit leather strips, 1 per kid



OPTION 1: Candy sushi

In advance, prepare puffed cereal treats:

1. Melt 3 tablespoons butter in a large saucepan over low heat.
2. Add 10½ ounces of mini marshmallows. Cook until marshmallows are completely melted and mixture is well blended, stirring constantly. Remove from heat.
3. Add 6 cups of cereal and mix well.
4. Press into the bottom of 13-by-9-inch pan sprayed with cooking spray. Cool completely.
5. Once cereal treats are firm, lift wax paper and transfer the treats to a cutting board. Cut treats into small rectangles, about 3 inches in length.

Recipe yields about 30 crispy treats. Kids will finish preparing the candy sushi during class.

SAY • Sushi is a common dish in Japan. It is often made with rice, fish or vegetables, and seaweed.

Invite kids to make a slightly different version: candy sushi! Give each kid a puffed cereal treat, one gummy candy fish, and a strip of fruit leather long enough to wrap around each piece of candy sushi. Instruct kids to top their cereal treat with the fish and to wrap the fruit strip around their treat and fish candy. Before letting kids enjoy their treats, pray for missionaries in Japan to lead people to turn from idols and to worship the one true God.



Tip: Use this activity option to reinforce the missions moment from Teach the Story.

LOW PREP

- play dough or modeling clay
- random objects

OPTION 2: Today's idols

Arrange several objects on a table. Give each kid a lump of clay. Challenge kids to choose an item and make a clay model of it. After a few minutes, invite kids to display their model. Prompt kids to point out which version is better, the

actual item or the model. (*the actual item*)

SAY • Not many people today set up a golden calf in their home as an idol to worship, but people still worship idols. Remember, an *idol* is anything that we worship in the place of God. People might worship other people, possessions, or even themselves. Nothing can rightfully take the place of God in our lives. He is better than anything and anyone else.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

• pencils
• Journal Page
• "You Said It!" activity page, 1 per kid

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, thanking God for being compassionate and gracious to us by sending Jesus as our Mediator and Savior.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "You Said It!" on the activity page. Kids should match each statement with the name of who said it. Encourage them to use the Bible to check their answers.

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.