Unit 6 • Session 1
The Golden Calf

BIBLE PASSAGE:
Exodus 32; 34

STORY POINT: God’s people worshiped a golden calf.

KEY PASSAGE:
Exodus 15:2a

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

TEACH THE STORY
(15–20 MINUTES)
PAGE 114

EXPERIENCE THE STORY
(25–30 MINUTES)
PAGE 116

REVIEW THE STORY
(10+ MINUTES)
PAGE 118

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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 preschoolers 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.
Moses and the Israelites were in the wilderness. God had freed them from slavery in Egypt, and He helped them escape the angry pharaoh and his army. The Israelites set up camp in front of a mountain called Mount Sinai (SIGH nigh). Moses went up the mountain, and God talked to him.

God had a lot to tell Moses, and Moses was up on the mountain for a long time. The Israelites at the bottom of the mountain were tired of waiting.

Where is Moses? What is taking him so long? they wondered.

The people went to talk to Aaron, Moses’ brother. “We need a god to lead us because we do not know what happened to Moses,” they said. So Aaron used gold to make a statue of a calf for them to worship.

God saw what the people were doing, and He was angry because of their sin. God told Moses to go down the mountain.

Moses rushed down the mountain, carrying two stone tablets that God had written on. He got closer to the camp and saw the people dancing in front of the gold calf. Moses threw down the stone tablets, smashing them at the bottom of the mountain.
Then he destroyed the gold calf.

“What were you thinking?” Moses asked his brother.

The next day, Moses said, “I will go up to the Lord. Maybe I can do something so God will forgive you.” Then Moses went back up the mountain to talk to God.

“Please forgive these people,” Moses said to God. God said, “When it is time to punish them, I will punish them for their sin.”

God gave Moses more laws and instructions. God made two more stone tablets because Moses broke the first two. God said to Moses, “The Lord cares about His people. He is good to them. But He will punish the guilty.”

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

Christ Connection: God’s people disobeyed God, and Moses asked God to forgive them. Moses talked to God for the people. When we sin, Jesus talks to God for us. Jesus never sinned. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.
Welcome and worship with song
Greet preschoolers with a smile. As preschoolers arrive, sing an action song such as “Only One True God” to engage and welcome them. Begin worship by leading preschoolers in “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

Watch or tell the Bible story
Before the session, spray paint a calf figure with gold paint. Hold up the calf for preschoolers to see. If a calf figure is unavailable, simply point to the Bible story picture.

SAY • What color is this cow? [Allow for responses.] In today’s Bible story, Aaron made a gold statue of a calf for them to worship instead of God. Anything that we worship instead of God is called an idol. Do you think God was happy with the people’s choice to worship an idol? Listen to our Bible story to see what happened.

Open your Bible to Exodus 32. Show the video or tell the Bible story using the provided storytelling tips. Use the bolded version of the Bible story for young preschoolers.

Practice the key passage and a Bible skill
Place a gold ribbon at Exodus 15:2. Invite a volunteer to open your Bible to the key passage. Read the key passage
aloud. Create motions for preschoolers to use as they say the key passage. Use the key passage song video for inspiration.

**SAY •** A golden calf cannot save people. A golden calf did not rescue God’s people from the Egyptians. Only God can save people. He is our salvation. God forgives our sin when we put our trust in Jesus.

Sing the key passage song “He Has Become My Salvation” together.

**Learn the big picture question and answer**

**SAY •** Our big picture question is, **What is worship?** What do you think worship is? **Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.** God forgives all who trust in Jesus. When we sin, Jesus talks to God for us. We worship God because He is worthy. He alone can save us.

**Respond through song and prayer**

**SAY •** God’s people worshiped a golden calf. God’s people disobeyed God, and Moses asked God to forgive them. Moses talked to God for the people. When we sin, Jesus talks to God for us. Jesus never sinned. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.

Sing “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” and “You Must Be Holy” as preschoolers move with the music. Prepare for prayer by singing “I Will Stand.” Collect an offering.

**SAY •** God, thank You for loving us. Thank You for sending Jesus to talk to You for us. Thank You that when we trust in Him, You forgive when we disobey. Help us to trust You and worship only You. Help us show how important You are. Amen.

**Transition to experience the story**

Worship in the Wilderness
EXPERIENCE the Story

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

Decide who’s missing

Instruct preschoolers to close their eyes. Choose a child to “go up the mountain” by stepping out of sight. Invite preschoolers to open their eyes and guess who is missing. Give each child an opportunity to “go up the mountain.”

SAY • Moses went up the mountain to hear from God. God’s people were tired of waiting and told Aaron to build an idol. _God’s people worshiped a golden calf._ Moses talked to God for the people. When we sin, Jesus talks to God for us. Jesus never sinned. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.

Play out being cows

Invite preschoolers to crawl on all fours and pretend to be cows, mooing and pretending to chew cud like cows do.


Discuss forgiveness

Cut hearts from construction paper and give one to each preschooler with several dark colored pom-poms. Discuss
sin and ask preschoolers to think of examples of sin. For each example, lead a preschooler to place a pom-pom on his heart. Say the Christ Connection on page 113 and guide preschoolers to push the pom-poms off their hearts.

**SAY • God’s people worshiped a golden calf.** That was sin. When we sin, Jesus talks to God for us. Jesus never sinned. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.

**Work a movement puzzle**
Draw a simple cow image on poster board with a gold marker or crayon. Cut the poster into pieces. Tape the pieces on the wall, reassembling the picture. Instruct one preschooler at a time to move across the room to the cow puzzle and remove a piece. Explain that they must move to the puzzle in the way you instruct. Suggested movements include giant steps, hop, bear crawl, crab walk.

**SAY • God’s people worshiped a golden calf.** We tore down the calf like Moses destroyed the golden calf idol. God wants us to worship Him and no one else. I gave you instructions of how to move. God gave Moses instructions on how the people should live.

**Sort golden objects**
Place an assortment of colored objects in a container, being sure to include gold objects as well. Invite preschoolers to sort the objects, separating the gold objects from the others.

**SAY • Aaron used gold to make a calf statue for the people to worship. God was angry at their sin. God wants us to worship Him and nothing else. What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.**

**Transition to review the story**

*poster board*
*markers*
*scissors (adult use)*
tape

*assorted colored objects, including gold (bead necklaces, ribbon, beads, fabric, costume jewelry)*
*bins or baskets*

*countdown video*
(optional)
REVIEW the Story

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Review

Point to the timeline as you review today’s Bible story. Ask the following review questions:

1. Where did Moses go? (up the mountain)
2. Who talked to Moses on the mountain? (God)
3. Why was God angry? (God’s people worshiped a golden calf.)
4. What did Moses throw down and break? (the two stone tablets that God had written on)
5. What did Moses ask God to do? (forgive the people)
6. What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.

SAY • God’s people disobeyed God, and Moses asked God to forgive them. Moses talked to God for the people. When we sin, Jesus talks to God for us. Jesus never sinned. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.

Sing the theme song, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” or the key passage song, “He Has Become My Salvation.”

Pray

Invite preschoolers to tell you any prayer requests they have.

SAY • God, thank You that when we trust in Jesus, You forgive our sin. Thank You that even when we don’t put You first, You forgive us. Thank you for Jesus.
Help us to worship You only. Amen.

**Missions moment**
Display the “Buddhist Temple Worship” printable.

**SAY**
- This woman is worshiping in a temple, but she is not worshiping the one true God of the Bible. Japan is a country filled with temples like this. We will hear about a missionary family that is telling the people of Japan about Jesus. Let’s pray for the people in Japan and the woman in this picture.

**Review with pictures**
Print the “Picture Review” images and arrange them in a line on the floor. Take turns asking preschoolers questions about the Bible story. Use the questions below or form your own. Guide preschoolers to answer a question by standing on the appropriate picture.

- Who talked to God for the people? Who did God give instructions to? (*Moses*)
- What idol did the people worship? What did Moses destroy? (*golden calf*)
- Who is Moses’ brother? Who used gold to make a statue of a calf? (*Aaron*)
- Where did Moses go? Where did the Israelites set up camp? (*mountain*)
- What did God give Moses? What did Moses break? (*stone tablets*)
- Who talks to God for us? Who never sinned? (*Jesus*)

**SAY**
- God’s people worshiped a golden calf, and Moses asked God to forgive them. When we sin, Jesus talks to God for us. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.