

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 6, Session 1

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An Image of Idolatry

Session in a Sentence: Any worship of something or someone else besides God is idolatry and is condemned by Him, but God is merciful to provide forgiveness.

Main Passage: Exodus 32:1-14

What are some “I want” moments in your favorite stories? How do these wants compare to the wants we have in our own lives?

Whether we realize it or not, we are driven by our desires. We reveal what we want through our words and deeds. It is evident in what we talk about, how we spend our time, how we use our resources, and what we post on social media. Usually the things we want are good, but sometimes, instead of allowing our desires to drive us to God, the One who provides all we need, we worship those desires instead. And often we don’t let go of those desires, even when we come to see they are not for our good, for the good of others around us, or for God’s glory. And in these times we see how idolatry did not merely exist in the days of the Old Testament; it exists today within our own hearts.

Group Time

Point 1: Idol-worshippers distort true worship (Ex. 32:1-6).

1 When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, “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!”

2 Aaron replied to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me.” **3** So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron.

4 He took the gold from them, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf. Then they said, “Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!”

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of it and made an announcement: “There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow.” **6** Early the next morning they arose, offered burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.

The golden calf was not an outright rejection of God. The Israelites mixed a sincere desire to worship the Lord with elements they had carried over from their pagan worship in Egypt, where the cow was a symbol of strength and fertility. ¹ But the people lapsed into idolatry because they focused on what they wanted—a god they could have on their own terms—rather than the Lord Himself. In this we see that the *means* of worship matters as much as the *object* of worship.

What do you picture when you hear the word *idol*?

Three Characteristics of Idols

1. Idols are things that _____ our hearts or imaginations.
2. Idols are things we trust for what only God can _____.

3. Idols aren't _____.

Point 2: Idol-worshippers deserve condemnation (Ex. 32:7-10).

7 The LORD spoke to Moses: “Go down at once! For your people you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly. **8** They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them; they have made for themselves an image of a calf. They have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, ‘Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.’” **9** The LORD also said to Moses: “I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people. **10** Now leave me alone, so that my anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

Perhaps the people thought they were worshiping the one true God, but they broke His commandments. Our idols always reveal rebellion against God. In our foolishness, we turn our backs to God for a created thing that will never satisfy our desires.

What are some people or things we expect to satisfy us? How do we respond when they fail to truly satisfy?

The golden calf robbed God of the glory due Him. The idols of our hearts likewise seek to steal God's glory. They make our desires, and more precisely *us*, the most important part of our story, but God made us for His glory (Isa. 43:7). Our idols will always fall short of what we expect them to do because they are created things meant for our enjoyment, not our fulfillment. Idolatry severs our relationship with God and renders us guilty and ashamed before Him.

Guilt and Shame: Guilt refers to the _____ of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it. Shame is the _____ that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.

Voices from Church History

“For whatever resemblance created nature may have to its Creator ... we cannot legitimately bear to them sovereign respect, since there is nothing so abominable in the eyes of God and man as idolatry, because it renders to the creature the honor that is due to none but the Creator.” 2

—Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Point 3: Idol-worshippers require a mediator (Ex. 32:11-14).

11 But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God: “LORD, why does your anger burn against your people you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand? **12** Why should the Egyptians say, ‘He brought them out with an evil intent to kill them in the mountains and eliminate them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger and relent concerning this disaster planned for your people. **13** Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—you swore to them by yourself and declared, ‘I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and will give your offspring all this land that I have promised, and they will inherit it forever.’” **14** So the LORD relented concerning the disaster he had said he would bring on his people.

God had told Moses to step aside, to stay out of the way, so He could destroy the Israelites (v. 10). But Moses came to the people's defense—just what God wanted him to do. After all, why would God need Moses out of the way to judge His people?

Moses did not try to dismiss the seriousness of the people's sin; in fact, he would be enraged by it too (see vv. 19,22,31). Rather, he pleaded for God to cover their sin with His grace on account of *His glory* and *faithfulness*. And Moses' mediation proved effective as God relented from His just condemnation.

Moses, a Mediator	Jesus, the Mediator
_____ God before the people and the people before God (Ex. 18:19; 20:19)	The one Mediator between _____ and _____ (1 Tim. 2:5-6)

_____ for the Israelites (Ex. 32; Num. 12; 14; 16; 21)	_____ lives to intercede for His people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)
Mediator of the _____ (Ex. 24:8)	Mediator of the _____ (Heb. 9:15)

Christ as Priest: As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of _____ us to God. He is the One who _____ for us before the Father and _____ for us to remain faithful.

What do you know about the character of God in Christ that should inform the way you pray for yourself and others?

My Mission

Because Jesus is our perfect mediator who has brought us to God, we intercede for others who need salvation, appealing to God's character and His will as we pray for their redemption and point them to Jesus.

- **Ask the Lord to help you identify idolatry in your heart; then repent and find forgiveness in Christ and pray for help to worship God alone.**
- **What are some ways your group can help support and intercede for you as you strive for purity in your life and worship?**
- **How will you pray this week for an unbeliever in light of God's character in Christ? What steps will you take to share the gospel with this person?**

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Exodus 32:1-6

Time is quite subjective, or so it seems. While every second, every minute, and every hour is the same for each of us, they can certainly feel quite different. Five minutes waiting in line sure feels much longer than five minutes talking with a friend you have not seen in years. This is what we see at play as Exodus 32 opens.

Moses has gone up the mountain to meet with God. We aren't told how long it has been, but notice how the people felt about how long he had been gone: to them Moses "delayed" in coming down. This is what drove them to feel abandoned by Moses, and more importantly God, and to ask Aaron to make an idol.

But notice God's perspective on how long it had been. Later in verse 8, God tells Moses that the people had "quickly" turned away from Him. Apparently it did not take the Israelites long to violate the commands they swore to uphold, and they acted hastily in calling for Aaron to fashion an idol for them to worship.

Like the Israelites, our perception of time can mislead us as well, especially when it feels as if God is not paying attention or has abandoned us. And like the Israelites, we can act hastily and turn from God. But it is in these times when we need to remember that God is never far off and He always works in His perfect timing, even if it does not feel that way.

How have you seen the perfection of God's timing?

Voices from the Church

"Sometimes we sense God more palpably in our lives than at other times. When His presence feels more distant, if not completely gone, we must resist the temptation to substitute the tangible things that we can touch and feel for the God we temporarily can't sense." 3

—Kelly Minter

Day 2: Read Exodus 32:7-10

The children of Israel not only saw time differently than God did, they saw His presence differently as well. While Moses was up on the mountain meeting with God, the Israelites concluded that God was absent. They failed to understand that God is omnipresent—He is not contained in one place—and that He is omniscient—that He knows all and is fully aware of all. And so, they pleaded with Aaron to make a god they could see and touch. God was distant from them, or so they thought, so they wanted to make a god that would always be present. God, however, told Moses exactly what the people did, even what they had said. God was not absent. He was not distracted.

The same God who was ever-present with Israel in the wilderness, the same God who knew everything Israel did, He is with us as well, and He is just as aware of our lives too. This is a great comfort for us; it reminds us that we are never alone and that nothing happens to us apart from God's full knowledge and His sovereign hand.

Does God's presence in and awareness of your life encourage you or concern you? Why?

Day 3: Read Exodus 32:11-14

Although the people of Israel had grumbled against Moses, although they had been difficult to lead, Moses stepped forward as the mediator they needed. But don't just marvel in what Moses did but how he did it as well.

Notice that as Moses pleaded for the people, his argument for sparing the people was comprised of three main points: (1) they were God's people, (2) God would not be glorified if He were to wipe them out, and (3) God had made promises to this people. Not a single argument was made on behalf of the people. Not a single promise that they would do better. Not a single excuse for their lapse of obedience. The reason was because none were warranted. Moses could offer no reason why the people did not deserve judgment; plus, grace does not work that way.

And so it is with the gospel. Christ is our mediator, and He makes constant appeals to the Father on our behalf, not based on what we have done or might do but on what He has done and the righteousness He has given us.

How might you be prone to try to rest in your work instead of in Christ's work on your behalf? Why?

Day 4: Read Exodus 32:15-20

Moses had pleaded for the people, and God had relented in bringing disaster upon the people. But notice what happened when Moses arrived at the camp. Hearing God explain what the Israelites had done was one thing, but hearing it and seeing it was another. And so, seeing and hearing how the Israelites had rebelled against God and how they had scorned Him was too much for Moses. He was filled with a righteous indignation that prompted him to act. He burned the golden calf, ground it into a powder, spread it over the water, and made the people drink it.

How we view Moses' actions here tells us quite a bit about our view of God. If we see Moses as over-reacting, we might want to pause and consider if we appreciate the gravity of this sin and the holiness of the One it was against. Sin is never to be taken lightly, even by those of us who are in Christ. Yes, all our sin is forgiven, but even the "smallest" sin is still an act of open rebellion against God and dishonors Him.

How do you tend to view sin? How does the gospel address that perspective?

Day 5: Read Exodus 32:21-35

We have to appreciate Aaron's response to Moses' question of what happened: "It was the people. They made me do it. And when I threw the gold into the fire, this calf just happened to pop out!" Yes, we have to appreciate Aaron's response, not because it is admirable in any way but because we tend to respond in the same way to sin.

We deflect. We minimize. We rationalize. We are just like Aaron and just like our ancient ancestors Adam and Eve in Eden. Our sin keeps us from even owning up to our sin. That is the downward cycle of our hearts and minds. But thankfully, God has not left us in our depravity.

As Christians, we can make the mistake of languishing in our sin and failing to grasp grace. We can forget that all of our sin has

been paid for by Christ. But at the same time, we are just as prone, perhaps more so, to view our sin lightly and abuse God's grace. We want to avoid both extremes and instead see our sin as forgiven, yes, but still with consequences for both us and others.

What is your perspective of your sin: Do you tend to minimize it or languish in it? Why?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Idol-worshippers distort true worship (Ex. 32:1-6).
- Idol-worshippers deserve condemnation (Ex. 32:7-10).
- Idol-worshippers require a mediator (Ex. 32:11-14).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

How does your group need to point one another to Jesus' role as priest to help them rightly address their guilt and shame?

What are some compelling ways to discourage others from trusting in idols rather than in the true and living God? Why is the triune God more beautiful than any other person or created thing we could worship?

References

1. Dorian G. Coover-Cox, "Exodus," in *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 142, n. 32:2-6.
2. Blaise Pascal, in *Blaise Pascal: Thoughts, Letters, and Minor Works*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, trans. W. F. Trotter, M. L. Booth, and O. W. Wight (New York: Cosimo, 1910), 330.
3. Kelly Minter, *No Other Gods* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2017), 53.