Preschool–Grade 6

The Golden Calf

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: Worship God only. Nothing and no one may take God's place, and when we sin, God is merciful to those who turn back to Him.
Bible passage: Exodus 32. Read it before class.
Memory verse: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." *Exodus 20:3 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), paper and a pencil for each child, a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board.

1. Opening game: First Place (5–10 minutes)

Give each child paper and a pencil. Say: "Write down five things you love most. Then number them 1 to 5, with your favorite as number 1." Give them two minutes. Ask a few volunteers to share their number 1. Then ask: *Where did God go on your list? Did anyone forget to put Him on it at all?* No one is in trouble. Say: "God said, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Today we'll see what happened when God's people put something else in His place."

2. Bible story: Only God Is God (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Exodus 32. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

The people stop waiting. God had brought Israel out of Egypt and given them His commandments at mount Sinai, beginning with "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2–3). Then Moses went up into the mount, and he was there forty days and forty nights (24:18). God gave him two tables of stone, written with the finger of God (31:18). **Look up Exodus 32:1.** When the people saw that Moses **delayed** (was taking a long time), they told Aaron, "Up, make us gods." **We wot not** means "we don't know."

The golden calf. Aaron told them to break off their golden earrings and bring them to him, and they did (32:2–3). **Look up Exodus 32:4.** He shaped the gold with a **graving tool** (a tool for carving) and made a **molten calf** (made of melted gold poured into shape). The people said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." But the LORD had brought them out (20:2)! Aaron built an altar before the calf and said, "To morrow is a feast to the LORD" (32:5). The next day they gave offerings, and sat down to eat and to drink (32:6).

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Moses prays. God said to Moses, "Go, get thee down," because the people had **corrupted themselves** (ruined themselves with sin) and turned aside quickly from His way (32:7–8). God called them **stiffnecked** (stubborn) and said He would consume them (32:9–10). But Moses **besought** the LORD (begged Him). He asked God to turn from His fierce anger and to remember His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel (32:11–13). **Look up Exodus 32:14.** "The LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do" means God listened to Moses and did not bring the punishment He had spoken of.

The broken tables. Look up Exodus 32:15–16. Moses went down with the two tables of the testimony in his hand. They were written on both sides, and the writing was the writing of God. Joshua heard noise in the camp and thought it sounded like war, but Moses said it was the noise of singing (32:17–18). When Moses came near and saw the calf, his anger **waxed hot** (grew strong). He cast the tables out of his hands and broke them beneath the mount (32:19). He burned the calf in the fire, ground it to powder, **strawed** it (scattered it) on the water, and made the people drink of it (32:20).

Excuses and mercy. Moses asked Aaron what the people had done to him to make him bring such a great sin on them (32:21). **Look up Exodus 32:24.** Aaron said, "I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf," as if the calf made itself! The next day Moses told the people, "Ye have sinned a great sin," and went up to pray again (32:30). He asked God to forgive them, and even said, "If not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book" (32:31–32). God told Moses to lead the people on to the place He had promised (32:34).

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. The people made the calf because Moses "delayed" (32:1). Why does waiting make it hard to trust God? What helps you wait?
2. The people gave the calf thanks for something God had done (32:4; 20:2). Why is that foolish?
3. Aaron said the calf just "came out" of the fire (32:24). What was wrong with his answer? Why do we make excuses?
4. Moses kept praying for people who had done wrong (32:11–13, 32:31–32). Who can you pray for this week?
5. Kids today don't usually make gold statues. What things can still try to take God's place in our hearts?

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Recall questions

1. How long was Moses on the mount? *(Forty days and forty nights, Exodus 24:18)*
2. What was written on both sides of the tables? *(The writing of God, 32:15–16)*
3. What did the LORD do after Moses prayed? *(He did not bring the evil He had spoken of, 32:14)*

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain the old words: **thou shalt** means "you must," and **before me** means in front of God, in His place. Read the verse on the board together. Erase one word and read it again. Keep erasing one word at a time until the board is empty and the class can say it alone. Then kids say it to a partner.

5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "The people put a gold calf in God's place, and that was a great sin. But Moses prayed, and God showed mercy. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."
Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.
This week: look at your First Place list. Give God the first part of every day: pray and read your Bible before anything else.

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6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Exodus 32:1: What did the people ask Aaron to make? *(Gods, which shall go before us)*
2. Exodus 32:2: What did Aaron tell them to break off? *(The golden earrings)*
3. Exodus 32:5: What did Aaron build before the calf? *(An altar)*
4. Exodus 32:9: What did God call the people? *(A stiffnecked people, which means stubborn)*
5. Exodus 32:13: Which three men did Moses ask God to remember? *(Abraham, Isaac and Israel)*
6. Exodus 32:16: Whose writing was on the tables? *(The writing of God)*
7. Exodus 32:17: Who heard the noise of the people in the camp? *(Joshua)*
8. Exodus 32:20: What did Moses do to the calf? *(Burnt it in the fire, ground it to powder and strawed it on the water)*

7. Prayer

"Dear God, You are the only God, and You brought us out of sin like You brought Israel out of Egypt. Help us keep You in first place, wait on You when it's hard, and pray for others like Moses did. Thank You for Your mercy, and for loving us and coming to save us in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a child asks why Moses made the people drink the powder (32:20): the Bible tells it without explaining. Say: "Moses destroyed the calf completely, so everyone could see it was nothing at all, not a god."
Left out on purpose: Exodus 32:25–29 and 32:35. Moses stood in the gate of the camp and asked, "Who is on the LORD'S side?" (32:26). The sons of Levi came to him, and that day about three thousand men of the people died (32:27–28). Later the LORD plagued the people because of the calf (32:35). These verses are not in the lesson. Read them yourself before class. If a child asks, answer simply and gently: worshipping the calf was a great sin, and God judged it. God is holy, and He is also merciful: He heard Moses' prayer and still led His people on (32:14, 32:34).

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