Preschool–Grade 6

The Golden Calf

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Give God first place, even while you wait on Him. Nothing may take His place, and He is merciful to those who turn back to Him.
Bible passage: Exodus 32. Students read Exodus 32:1–5, 32:7–14 and 32:30–34 out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." *Exodus 20:3 (KJV)* and "Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." *Matthew 4:10 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Exodus 32, Exodus 24:18 and Psalm 106:19–23. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses.

1. Opening game: My Week (5–10 minutes)

Each student draws a big circle and splits it like a pie into how they spend a normal week: school, sleep, family, friends, sports or hobbies, screens, church, prayer and Bible. No one has to show theirs. Ask: *Which slice is biggest? Which slice gets your first thoughts in the morning? Does what gets our time show what comes first?* Say: "God said, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Today we'll see how fast God's people put something in His place."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Tell the beginning: God brought Israel out of Egypt and gave the commandments at Sinai, beginning with Exodus 20:2–3. Moses went up into the mount and was there forty days and forty nights (24:18). God gave him two tables of stone, written with the finger of God (31:18).
Read out loud: Exodus 32:1–5. Old words in this passage:

- **delayed** (32:1): took a long time; **we wot not** (32:1): we don't know
- **graving tool** (32:4): a tool for carving; **molten calf** (32:4): a calf made from melted gold
- **proclamation** (32:5): a public announcement

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Tell in your own words: the next day they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings and sat down to eat and to drink (32:6).
Read out loud: Exodus 32:7–14. Old words in this passage:

- **corrupted themselves** (32:7): ruined themselves with sin; **stiffnecked** (32:9): stubborn, not willing to turn
- **wax hot** (32:10): grow strong; **consume** (32:10): destroy completely
- **besought** (32:11): begged; **mischief** (32:12): to do harm
- **repented of the evil** (32:14): God did not bring the punishment He had spoken of

Tell in your own words: Look up Exodus 32:15–16. Moses came down with the two tables of the testimony, written on both sides with the writing of God. Joshua heard a noise and thought it was war; Moses said it was the noise of singing (32:17–18). When Moses saw the calf, his anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands and broke them beneath the mount (32:19). He burned the calf, ground it to powder, strawed it on the water and made the people drink of it (32:20). Aaron blamed the people, then said, "I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (32:22–24).

Read out loud: Exodus 32:30–34. Old words: **peradventure** (32:30): perhaps; **atonement** (32:30): making peace between God and people by covering their sin; **blot me… out of thy book** (32:32): take my name out of Your book. Psalm 106:23 looks back on this day: "had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath." **The breach** is a broken gap in a wall, where one person stands to protect everyone behind him.

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. The people wanted a god they could see (32:1–4). Why is it tempting to trust something we can see and hold instead of the God we can't see?
2. Aaron called it "a feast to the LORD" with the calf standing there (32:5). Can someone say they worship God while something else is really in first place?
3. God said they "turned aside quickly" (32:8). Moses had been gone forty days. Does drifting from God usually start all at once, or a little at a time?
4. Aaron blamed the people and the fire (32:22–24). What does owning your wrong instead of making excuses look like?
5. Moses stood in the breach and offered his own name (32:32; Psalm 106:23). What does that teach about praying for others?
6. What "golden calves" can people your age be tempted to put ahead of God? What helps you keep God first?

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4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: in Exodus 20:3, **thou shalt** means "you must," and **before me** means in front of God, in His place. In Matthew 4:10, **get thee hence** means "go away"; Jesus answered the devil's temptation with "it is written" and the words of Scripture. **Him only shalt thou serve** means God alone gets our worship and our obedience.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Exodus 20:3 this week; keep working on Matthew 4:10 next week too.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Moses said, 'peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin' (Exodus 32:30, KJV). He could only pray and offer himself, and even he could not take their sin away. But God Himself made the way. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: '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) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-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 utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, 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.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Is there anything in my life that has started to take God's place? What would putting God first look like there this week?
2. Where am I waiting on God right now, and how can I keep trusting Him while I wait?
3. Write a short prayer for someone you know, the way Moses prayed for the people.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: give God the first part of each day, before your phone, games or anything else. Pray every day for the person you wrote about.

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7. Prayer

"Dear God, You alone are God, and You deserve first place. Forgive us for anything we have put ahead of You. Give us patience to wait on You and hearts that pray for others. Thank You for Your mercy, and for loving us and making a way to save us through Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

Reading out loud: the read-aloud parts skip Exodus 32:6 and 32:15–29 on purpose. Verse 6 and verses 15–24 are told in your own words above, so the class hears what happened in plain words.
Left out on purpose: Exodus 32:25–29 and 32:35. Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me," and the sons of Levi gathered to him (32:26). At Moses' word they went through the camp, and about three thousand men died that day (32:27–28). Later the LORD plagued the people because of the calf (32:35). If a student asks, answer honestly 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, did not consume the nation, and still led His people on (32:14, 32:34). Later He wrote His law on new tables of stone (Exodus 34:1).

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