The Golden Calf: Broken Promises and God's Mercy

Returning to God and beginning again

Ages about 7-11 | Video 6:02 | Group lesson about 25-35 minutes

Central truth Israel broke its covenant by worshiping the golden calf. Moses prayed for the people, and God renewed His covenant. Jesus invites us to turn away from sin, receive mercy, and begin again.

Learning goals Recall the broken covenant and Moses' prayer; explain repentance as turning back to God; identify a truthful, loving step toward making things right.

Gather Video access, one handout per child, pencils or crayons, and a Bible.

Watch online Open this video on Servus Dei

Before watching | 2 minutes

Recall the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Ask: What can help us remain faithful when waiting is hard?

Watch and notice

Notice the people's impatience, Moses praying for them, the broken tablets, and God giving His words again.

Talk together | 6-8 minutes

1. What did the people do while Moses was away?
They brought gold to Aaron and worshiped the calf he made, breaking their promise to worship God alone.

2. How did Moses show love for the people?
He prayed for them and asked God to forgive them and remain with them.

3. What gave the people hope to begin again?
God remained faithful, renewed His covenant, and gave the commandments again on new tablets.

4. How can we return to Jesus when we sin?
Tell the truth, be sorry, turn away from sin, ask for mercy, and try to make things right. In Confession, Jesus forgives us through the priest.

Then respond and pray Allow 6-8 minutes for a handout or the activity on page 2; finish with the closing prayer.

Lead the response

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Short family lesson Watch the video, choose one recall question and one application question, then pray. About 12-18 minutes; the handout is optional.

Choose a handout

Draw & Tell Read prompts aloud. Accept drawing, pointing, dictated words, or spoken responses.

Read & Write Use one story detail, one explanation, and one practical response. Short or dictated answers are welcome.

Adapt by readiness

Younger children: focus on Moses praying, God’s faithfulness, and telling the truth after a wrong choice.

Older children: read Exodus 32-34 with an adult and discuss how mercy calls us to repentance and responsibility.

A path back to love | Optional 4 minutes

Draw three stepping stones labeled Tell the truth, Ask for mercy, and Make things right. Discuss an invented example, such as taking a pencil without asking. Add one loving action to the path. Keep personal sins and Confession private.

Look for understanding The child recalls the calf, explains Moses’ prayer and God’s renewed covenant, and names a concrete step of repentance.

Closing prayer Merciful God, thank you for remaining faithful. Help us turn back to you, tell the truth, and make loving choices. Jesus, forgive us and help us begin again. Teach us to pray for one another. Amen.

At home Pray for someone with a trusted adult. Discuss an invented example of making a wrong choice right; keep private matters private.

Handout answer notes Remember: the calf was worshiped while Moses was away. Explain: Moses interceded and God renewed the covenant. Apply: truthfulness, sorrow for sin, asking for mercy, and making amends.

Teach with care

Have a Bible, paper, pencils, and crayons. Preview the entire film: it includes anger, broken tablets, narrated killings, and a plague. Adapt discussion to your group. The ancient account includes severe violence and consequences. Discuss suffering gently; this is not permission to harm anyone. Distinguish worshiping an idol from using holy images to remember God and the saints: worship belongs to God alone. Repentance includes responsibility and making amends; mercy does not make wrongdoing good. Do not ask children to disclose sins or simulate sacramental Confession.

Words to explain Idol: something worshiped in place of God. Intercede: pray for another person. Repentance: turn away from sin and return to God. Mercy: God’s compassionate love and forgiveness.

Sources for the leader

Scripture: The golden calf - Exodus 32
Scripture: Moses asks for God’s presence - Exodus 33
Scripture: The covenant renewed - Exodus 34
Catholic teaching: Catechism: worship and idolatry, 2112-2114
Catholic teaching: Catechism: interior repentance, 1430-1433