Background

The episode of the golden calf is remarkable in so many ways. It is amazing that any nation who had seen the miracles the people of Israel saw could so quickly and easily turn away from the true God. They knew idolatry was wrong, and they knew that the real God was nothing like the calf they created. Why, then, did they do this horrible thing? And why would Aaron, of all men, lead the way? He was Moses’ brother and God’s soon-to-be high priest!

We may shake our heads, but the same questions could be asked of us. With all our Bible knowledge and Christian training, with the very Son of God crucified and risen for us, why do we still fill in the blank? Or our children—most of us have memories of our parents confronting us after we disobeyed, demanding to know why. Why, why, why? But there is no acceptable answer. The best we can say is “I sinned. I sinned because I am a sinner. I have no excuse and no reason.”

Thanks be to God that even in the face of such wicked idolatry, He still calls us back, brings us to repentance, and forgives us through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is sheer undeserved grace. We may suffer the consequences, but we don’t get anything near what we actually deserve. Instead, we get gracious pardon, mercy, and reinstatement as God’s own dearly loved children. Thanks be to God! He is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6).

Central Truth

God shows His love for us even when we don’t put God above everything else in our lives. Although there are consequences for that sin, He still loves and forgives us.

Objectives

- Repent that we do not always make God the most important thing in our life.
- Rejoice that although we deserve punishment for our disloyalty, God forgives us through Christ and empowers us with the Holy Spirit to be obedient.
- Grow in our desire to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Materials

Day 1
- The Basics
- Coins and paper money
- Bookmark from Lesson 10
- Word Wall Word: calf
- Student Book 2

Day 2
- The Basics
- Word Wall Word: gold
- Reproducible 11
- Student Book 2
- Web Resource 11a

Day 1 Classroom Devotion

Zack wanted a soccer ball, a good one. His was scuffed up. First he asked his mom very nicely to buy him one. She said, “You’ll have to wait.” Then, when he was taking out the trash, he asked his dad. “Sure, but not yet,” said Dad.

Zack didn’t like waiting. He wondered if he had enough money to buy one, so he counted his spending money. He only had five dollars. He knew that wasn’t enough.

At the end of recess, he stood in line. “I wish my parents would buy me a new soccer ball like this one,” he said, twirling the ball the class used. To Zack, it didn’t seem fair that the school had good balls and he didn’t.

Zack tried praying for a new ball. He thought if he asked often enough and nicely, God would give him one. So that’s what he did. Each night for a week, he prayed, “Dear God, please give me a good soccer ball.” Zack thought for sure he would get the new ball. But nothing happened.

Finally, he got tired of waiting. He came up with his own plan. Tomorrow, at the end of the last recess, he would hide the school’s soccer ball in a bush. Then, on the way home from school, he would stuff it into his backpack. Finally, he would have a new soccer ball.

Have you ever been impatient like Zack? Have you done something wrong to get what you wanted? Zack made his way of doing things more important than God’s way. And doing that leads to trouble.

God doesn’t like sin, and He often lets us get caught. But He doesn’t punish us the way we deserve. Because Jesus died for our sins, God is merciful. When we sin, He is ready to hear us confess. He is ready to forgive.

As we journey through this life on our way to heaven—to our promised land—we can be thankful that God is merciful and gracious. He is full of love.

PRAY: Dear Father in heaven, I am sorry that I don’t always make You the most important thing in my life. Forgive me for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Sing: “God Has Given Us His Word” (SKLS2, p. 12) or “Thine Forever, God of Love” (LSB 687:1, 5).
Show the children coins and paper money. Jingle the coins in your hand and ask, *Do you think money is an idol? Would you bow down and worship money?* Accept various answers. *What is an idol?* (An idol is something worshiped as a god.) *You might think of an idol as a statue. But anything you love more than God is an idol.*

Take time to review the Ten Commandments by using the bookmark from Lesson 10.

Hold up the Word Wall Word calf. Say, *In today’s Bible story, a statue of a calf becomes an object to worship. That may seem very strange to you, but it wasn’t to these people who had lived in Egypt where they saw other people doing it.*

Listen to find out where this event happened, who made the calf, and what God thought about it.

To focus the listening, write the words *where*, *who*, and *what* on the board.

Ask the children to follow along on page 5 as you read the Bible story from the Student Book.

The children may wonder why the people would worship the statue of a calf. Explain that they were probably imitating the Egyptians, who worshiped many idol statues. They probably wanted to be powerful like the Egyptians. But they forgot that the idols of Egyptians were useless next to the power of God.

To review the story, point to the three words you wrote on the board.

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Ask, *Where were the people of Israel?* (At Mount Sinai)

*For whom were they waiting?* (Moses) *Whom did the people ask to make a god?* (Aaron)

*What did Aaron use?* (He used the gold jewelry that the people offered.)

*What happened when Moses came down the mountain?* (Moses was angry and threw down and broke the stones on which were written the Ten Commandments.) *What happened next?* (Moses burned the calf and punished the people.) *How did God show His patience and kindness to the people of Israel?* (He forgave their sin. He gave them the Ten Commandments again.)
Whom Do You Fear, Love, and Trust?

Directions: The people of Israel did not always fear, love, and trust in God. As you hear your teacher read about other people, decide whom they trust. Color in the part of the calf where you hear about people whose actions show that they do not fear, love, and trust God above all things.

Bible Words to Remember
[God is] merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Exodus 34:6

Read the following situations to the children. Ask them to color in a section on the calf if they think the person in the story is sinning and not putting God first.

1. My dad and I are making vegetable soup for our church supper.
2. I like to skip church and play soccer.
3. See my new soccer ball? Someone left it at the park, and I took it.
4. I’m going to skip my prayers tonight. I don’t think God can help me.
5. My parents and I invited our neighbor to church.
6. My friends use bad words, and they don’t get in trouble. I’m going to try it.

Ask, How did Moses deal with the people of Israel? (He punished them.) Who took the punishment we deserve for our sin? (Jesus)

In anger, Moses smashed the Ten Commandments, but in love, Jesus kept them all. What else did Jesus do for you? (He died on the cross for our sins.)

God told the people of Israel that He would be merciful and gracious to them, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Let’s look at His exact words as we read the Bible Words to Remember. Talk about the meaning of the words merciful, gracious, slow, abounding, and steadfast. When we sin, God is also merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, He is ready and willing to forgive our sins.

Say, In the church service, we pray the Kyrie. It is a cry for mercy that our Lord and King hear us and help us in our needs and troubles. The word kyrie is a shortened form of the Greek words kyrie eleison, which mean, “Lord, have mercy.” God was merciful to the people of Israel. God is merciful to us too.

Sing “Kyrie! God, Father” (LSB 942). Tell the children to write the word Kyrie at the base of the calf.

Tell the children to look at their Ten Commandments bookmark from Lesson 10.

Say, The first three commandments tell us how we are to act toward God—how we love and trust Him, how we use His name, and how we use His Word. Say the first three commandments.

Ask, Which commandments did the people of Israel break? (The First and Second Commandments)

We do this, too, when we sin and make something more important than God. Each day we make choices. Some of the things we do or say do not make God important. Let’s look at some examples. Turn to the activity for this lesson.
Day 2

Classroom Devotion

Zack walked home, proud of himself for getting the soccer ball in his bag. He could hardly wait to use it and use it soon. Each day after homework, his friends played soccer at the corner lot.

Zack did some fancy footwork up the driveway. Then he hid the ball behind the planter and went in.

“Hi, Zack,” called his mom. “How was school today?”

Zack didn’t want to face his mom. He said, “I’ll tell you later.” Then he hurried to finish his math and find his shin guards.

When his homework was done, he went out the door and picked up the ball. His mom followed him to the door to remind him when to come home for supper. That’s when she spotted her son pulling the ball out from behind the planter. “Where did you get that ball?” she asked. Zack jumped. His face grew hot. He was in big trouble. Should he lie, he wondered, or tell the truth?

Zack decided to tell his parents the truth. They said he had to take the ball back and write an “I’m sorry” note for the principal.

What Zack didn’t know until that day was that his parents had already bought him a soccer ball for his birthday in a few weeks.

That night, his dad talked to him about sin. Dad said Zack had sinned against God’s commands. And Zack’s dad said that he had done that, too, in other ways. Both of them confessed their sin and asked God to forgive them. After their prayer, Zack felt better, even if he couldn’t play outside for a week.

Dad gave him a hug and said, “Remember, God is merciful and loving, full of goodness. He only wants what is best for us.”

PRAY: Dear Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross to pay for my sins. I’m sorry when I disobey You and do things my own way. Help me each day to find joy in Your ways and peace in Your forgiveness. Amen.

Sing: “God Has Given Us His Word” (SKLS2, p. 12) or “Thine Forever, God of Love” (LSB 687:1, 5).

Day 2

Into the Lesson

Ask, What things are made out of gold? Accept answers. Where does gold come from? (Gold is a precious metal. It is found in stones.) If you find gold in a rock, it actually looks yellow. Gold has other interesting qualities. It can be hammered into sheets that are thin. The sheets look like aluminum foil. You can use thin gold to cover something. Our Word Wall Word for today is the word gold.

In today’s Bible story, Aaron used gold jewelry to make an idol. Review the meaning of the word idol.

Into the Word

Use Web Resource 11a with this section.

Read the Bible story again from the Student Book. Tell the children to listen for the words up, down, and around. They are to stand up when they hear the word up. They are to kneel down when they hear the word down, and they are to turn around when they hear the word around.

As you read, pause when you see a numeral, and share the following details to enhance the Student Book account.

1. In the Bible, God said that the children of Israel were stiff-necked. Like a farm animal that does not let anyone guide it, the people of Israel refused to follow God’s lead. It was His new direction for them.

2. God tells the people to take off their ornaments too. It would be a sign that they are sorry for their sins. They do what God asks because they are sorry for their sins. Each day, we can confess our sins to God too. He graciously forgives us.

3. The two tablets of the Ten Commandments were written on both sides—on the front and on the back. They were the work of God.

Distribute Reproducible 11 and use the map to review the journey of the people of Israel to the Promised Land. The seven stickers will be placed near the location of the events. The children can add the Egypt, Ten Commandments, Bitter Waters and Manna, and Golden Calf stickers. The stickers can be applied flat on the map or placed on mini-tents made of folded paper. Students will add the remaining stickers in Lessons 12, 13, and 14. Have students cut out their map and glue it to the inside back cover of their Student Book.
Say, The people of Israel disobeyed God. It is easy for us to see why God asked them to repent. We think to ourselves, “Those naughty people worshiped idols and not God.” But we are just as bad. The Catechism tells us that we should “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” When we say “fear” here, we mean “respect.” We often fear, or respect, other things or other people more than God. We often love and trust other things more than God too. Ask the children to identify things that they might fear (respect), love, or trust more than God.

God asks us to repent too. What do we do to repent? (We tell God and others that we are sorry for our sins and want to change.) When can we repent? Remind the children that as God’s dearly loved children, they can confess their sins daily and receive His forgiveness. Also talk about the time set aside in corporate worship for the public confession of sins and absolution. Who made it possible for God to forgive our sins? (Jesus did when He died on the cross for our sins. He paid for our sins.)

Practice the words one might say when confessing by reviewing situations that go along with the activity on page 6 of the Student Book. Read the following four sentences again, and ask the students to identify which commandment(s) the children are breaking. Then ask the students to model how to ask God for forgiveness.

1. I like to skip church and play soccer. (Third Commandment, First Commandment)
2. See my new soccer ball? Someone left it at the park, and I took it. (Seventh Commandment, First Commandment)
3. I’m going to skip my prayers tonight. I don’t think God can help me. (First Commandment)
4. My friends use bad words, and they don’t get in trouble. I’m going to try it. (First Commandment, Second Commandment)

To close, review the Bible Words to Remember and the words merciful (does not give us what we deserve), gracious (giving us gifts out of His kindness), abounding (plentiful, well supplied), and steadfast (unchanging). Sing the Bible Words to Remember to the tune “Are You Sleeping?”

God is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, slow to anger,
And abounding, And abounding,
In steadfast love, steadfast love.
Aaron’s excuse for making the golden calf was a masterpiece of absurdity. Take a look at how people misuse language in section 2.4.2.2, Evaluate Accuracy and Quality, in the Language Arts volume of the Concordia Curriculum Guide series. Help students understand that not everything they read or see on TV will be true. Even if it is true, it may be blown wildly out of proportion. You might ask students to bring in examples of advertising aimed at children that says or suggests much more than the truth. Does that snack food really taste as wonderful as they say? Is that new toy really going to make its owner popular with everybody? With so many TV commercials targeting young children, this kind of critical thinking is a skill students need to learn.

The people of Israel danced around the golden calf. We don’t dance in church, but we do other things. Discuss church postures. When do we stand, sit, or kneel in church? When do we fold our hands? When do we bow our heads? Use a camera to take pictures of the various postures. Use a hymnal to match the postures with the parts of the Divine Service. Use the CPH resource Worshipping with Angels and Archangels: An Introduction to the Divine Service (item #22-3094).

Especially when teaching English Language Learners (ELL), teachers can help students feel welcome by finding out more about them and their culture. Verbal and nonverbal customs and cues may mean different things in different cultures, so it is wise to find out as much about the child’s culture as possible.

To help ELL students to learn and grow in their faith, teachers can implement several general strategies.

- Pair students with a buddy or friend. Children learn well from each other.
- Use Bible pictures and visual aids frequently.
- Model spoken language without singling out the child.
- Provide adequate wait time so students can process the information before speaking.
- Include hands-on learning activities.
- Review vocabulary with picture cards.
- Teach a song to the rest of the class in the child’s native language so the child feels special and welcome.