

CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

FAITH FORMATION FOR CHILDREN | YOUTH | FAMILY | ADULT

God does what!?!...The Surprising Work of God in the Lives of People Week 2 - God Forgives

KEY POINT

God's people turn away from God and begin to worship other things. Moses asks God for forgiveness in the place of punishment. God hears and forgives. Forgiveness doesn't make sense, but it is what God does and what God asks us to do.

KEY VERSE

Exodus 32:13-14
Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'

Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

OPENING PRAYER

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of promise, just as your people turned to worship idols during the exodus, so we also put our trust in people and things instead of trusting in you. Turn our hearts to see you clearly, to resist temptation and to worship you alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

READ

Exodus 32:1-14

ABOUT THE STORY

In Exodus chapters 25 through 31, God gives detailed instructions to Moses about how to create an ark to hold the covenant (Ten Commandments), build the tabernacle (a special tent) where God can reside among the people, and ordain priests to perform acts of worship, acting as the intersection between God and the people.

In chapter 32 we find the Israelites waiting at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses speaks with God. The people grow impatient and ask Aaron to create a god for them to worship, so he takes their gold and molds it into the shape of a calf. The Israelites begin worshipping the golden calf, placing their trust in an inanimate object to bless their herds and lives. They offer sacrifices to the calf because they believe it is capable of giving them what they desire.

The phrase "rose up to rebel" (verse 6) insinuates the cultic practice of orgies. God becomes outraged the Israelites have turned away from God and embraced earthly ways and so threatens to consume them with wrath. Moses reminds God of God's promise to Abraham—the promise of innumerable descendants and a land for them to possess—so God spares the people.

Ultimately God is not revealed in golden (or any other material) statues, but through Scripture and God's interactions with people. Even when God's chosen people arrive at the Promised Land, they fail to remain faithful to God. Yet God continually forgives the people and keeps God's promises. This can be of great comfort to us who consistently fail to be faithful to God as well!

SHARE

- Do you ever become impatient with God and take matters into your own hands?
- The people worked together to create the calf, but how could their collective time and energy been better spent in honoring their true God?
- What do you think of the fact that God calls them “your people” to Moses instead of God’s people?
- What changes God’s mind from being angry with the people?
- The Israelites grew impatient with Moses and also with God. They also did not like that they could not worship a physical god, so they created their own idol. Take 60 seconds individually to write down ten “idols” you are tempted to worship—or ten things that distract you from following Jesus—in your life today. At the end of the 60 seconds compare your lists and see what top three to five temptations you have most in common. How can we support one another in turning from temptation and focus on worshiping and trusting our true God?

PRAY

For two minutes, turn off all distractions and lights. At the end of the two minutes, pray this prayer quietly: God, thank you for taking care of us. Use us to show your love and care to others. Amen.

BLESS

Share this verbal blessing with one another: “You are more precious to God than silver or gold. Amen.”

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Find a symbol of something that could be an idol for you and put it away for the week. This might be your credit card, social media, a picture of someone or something who is consuming your thoughts, etc. When you feel tempted to use or focus on it, say a prayer of gratitude and praise or sing a song of worship to God instead.
- One day this week, instead of focusing on your own need to see or hear God, take time to help someone else connect more deeply with God. That may mean praying with them or accompanying them to a worship service of their choice. Afterwards, reflect on whether or not it brought you closer to God, too.
- Pray each day that you might notice the needs and suffering of others and for ways you can help relieve them.