

## “Udderly Wrong: A Moo-ving Tale of Spiritual Rebellion” // Exodus 32 // *Rescue: The Book of Exodus* #12<sup>1</sup>

### Bumper/ Introduction

We had an incredible Easter weekend with over **26k in attendance in person** (that’s not including our Good Friday services or online, just our in-person Easter services), and most importantly, we saw hundreds of professions of faith.

- At our college services, we had over **1,500 students** (with 86 professions of faith).
- We had **300 inmates attend our prison** services (with 40 professions of faith there).
- We had more than **3k in Summit Kids** (which is birth through 4th grade) and **hundreds and hundreds of first time guests**.

And all of this is possible (by the way) because of the **3,351 Summit volunteers who served throughout the weekend**. In fact, if you volunteered or served in any capacity, would you stand? These numbers I shared and the joy they represent—those are yours!

**And as I often tell you, each number represents a story**, and we can’t share them all, but I can share one! One of our Summit member families opened up their home earlier this year to let a college girl live with them—mind you, these members already have three young kids of their own, but this girl needed a place, so they said, “Come live with us.”

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted: Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014); Joby Martin, “[Exodus - Week 12: Providence](#)”, March 22, 2015, The Church of Eleven22; Jen Wilkin, “Forgetfulness”, Session 9 of God of Freedom Bible Study, March 15, 2022; Andrew Wilson, talk on Exodus 32 at TGC Conference, 2023; David Platt, sermon on Exodus 32 (date unknown).

Well, that college girl—we’ll call her Ellie—has been building a relationship with her “One” for over a year now—we’ll call her One “Kayla.”

- Kayla had shown ZERO interest in coming to church and had not accepted a single one of her invites.
- But a couple weeks ago they were having coffee, and Ellie worked the story of the “woman at the well” into the convo. Kayla said, “Whoa. That’s an incredible story. Someone should write a book about that.” To which Ellie responded, “Interesting ideas. It’s already in a Book, and we study that Book every week at my church! Seriously, come to Easter services with me. Just once. Give it a try.”
- Not only did Kayla come to Easter last weekend, but she ended up giving her life to Christ! ... and it gets even better. She came to one of the Saturday services at Capital Hills, and after she got saved, she immediately called her mom and invited her to come back with her on Sunday, saying, “Mom, you’ve got to hear this.” This weekend, Kayla is getting baptized here.

Every baptism you’ll see this weekend has a story behind it. And, by the way, I’m going to end this message by giving you a chance to join this group being baptized if you never **have. You say, “But I don’t have a change of clothes!”** We’ve got all that. I’ll explain that more **at the end**.

**For now, if you have your Bibles, please open them to Exodus 32 ... I’m gonna tell you the story of Israel and the golden calf, which I’ve lovingly entitled, “Udderly Wrong: A Moo-ving Tale of Spiritual Rebellion.”** Write that down, that’s gold.

As you’re turning there ... for the first several years of our marriage, I drove a 2003 Honda Pilot. It was such a great car. Reliable. Comfortable. Sporty. I loved it. And I had bought it salvaged and rebuilt, so it was a great deal. Well, one afternoon just toward the

start of spring, I hopped into it and when the air conditioning kicked on, I heard this awful grinding sound, and the compressor seemed to almost tremble for a moment. But hey, like I told you, the car had been wrecked and rebuilt, so it was always making funny sounds, and usually, if I just ignored them, they went away. I'm not saying that's car-care best practice, but it worked on that Honda. Well, I was out of town for the next couple of days and so I didn't drive it, and when I got home and drove it again and the AC kicked on, the most foul smell flooded the car ... and when I say foul, I mean foul. And I had three young kids at home at the time, so I had a pretty high tolerance for foul. I sprayed air freshener in it and rolled the windows down, but nothing helped, so I took it to my favorite backyard mechanic, and after about 20 minutes he comes out and says, "Well, I figured out your problem, son; she's all fixed now," and he holds up this mangled rodent corpse that he'd pulled out of the fan of my AC compressor. That was the grinding sound ... poor little guy was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. So my mechanic said, "I cleaned her out for ya, I used 409 and everything (which apparently, I learned, 409 is like redneck miracle potion)..."

The problem was, every time I turned on the AC, it still smelled terrible. For weeks. I tried everything to get rid of the smell. I sprayed a whole can of Lysol into the air intake valve while it was running, to try and clean it out. Eventually, I called my mechanic and he said, "Yeah, J.D., I done all I can do. You just gonna have to let it work its way out." So I bought like four of those little vent air fresheners, and for the next couple of months, my car smelled like a mixture of cheap roses, Lysol, and rat carcass.

**Now, why do I share that heart-warming and edifying story?** Because in a way, it reminds me of what we're going to see happen with Israel here in Exodus 32. Even after I'd removed the dead rat from my car's central air system, the odors remained. Even after God has delivered Israel of Egypt, there are still odors of decay, and these odors come out whenever the heat kicks on ...

**As we've said:** *It's one thing to get Israel out of Egypt; it's quite another to get Egypt out of Israel.* And the same thing is true for us: It's one thing to save us from hell; it's another to get hell out of us.

**Chapter 32, vs. 1:** When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

<sup>2</sup> So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

<sup>3</sup> So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

<sup>4</sup> And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" <sup>5</sup> When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." <sup>6</sup> And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. (And you're like, "What's wrong with that? Who doesn't like a good meal and then a game of ultimate frisbee?" But that word "play" here has sexual overtones; they are engaging in the pagan sexual fertility rites they'd seen practiced in Egypt.)

Now, at first, this scene seems almost unbelievable, right? I mean, it's been, what, 90 WHOLE days since they left Egypt? And think about what they'd seen in those 90 days:

- **The plagues**, where God brought the most powerful empire in the world to its knees

- Then the **Red Sea**, where God split an ocean in two, brought them safely across and then buried the Egyptian army when they tried to follow
- They'd experienced God's presence in a **gigantic pillar of cloud and fire** about the size of the Empire State Building.
- Then they'd experienced **God's provision in the manna**, those magically delicious golden grahams that appeared mysteriously on the ground each morning, and then twice—not once, but twice—God provided water for them in a dry desert place.
- And many other things ...

### **You'd think, after all that, God deserved a little bit of trust, right?**

And yet, here in Exodus 32, Moses is a few days late, and the people are like, "Well, I guess that's it. God has forgotten us! We need a plan B."

Now, you might be tempted to think: "This borders on the ridiculous. How could anybody be so dull?" But before you condemn them, put yourself in their place for a moment and ask yourself what you would likely have done in that situation: Keep in mind, these people had no home and no readily accessible source of food and water. They are literally in a desert with enemies all around them, enemies who would love nothing more than to plunder and enslave them. They are people with families who worry about their kids just like you worry about yours. And now Moses, their only real connection to God, disappears up into a mountain of fire for 40 days, and you don't know when he's coming back, and you wonder if he's dead. How long of a leash would you have given Moses in that kind of situation before you start hedging your bets with plan B?

And ... it's **important to see that what they are doing is not an outright rejection** of God. Notice **vs. 5** says that in constructing this golden calf, they declared a "feast to the LORD." They did this in the context of a pseudo-church service! And **v. 4**, after Aaron had made the golden calf, he said to them, "These are your gods, O Israel, who

brought you up out of the land of Egypt." Notice the plural, "gods." (You've got Jehovah—that's one God—and this golden calf, the other).

**Write this down: The golden calf wasn't so much a replacement of God as it was a supplement to God.**

You say, "Why a calf?" Well, other nations at the time commonly worshiped the calf as a symbol of protection. In Egypt, for example, they worshiped **Apis**, the bull god, as one of their prime deities, and in Canaan, the region they're traveling through, one of the principal deities was El, also a **divine bovine**.

And so what you're seeing is that in a time of anxiety, Israel adopted the support structures of the culture around them and trusted in what the world around them trusted in.

***Let me ask:** How similar is your source of joy and your source of peace to that of the culture around you? Can you only feel happy and secure when you have all that the world around you tells you that you must have?*

**Listen, consider:** What if the Enemy's great temptation in your life was not to get you to outright reject God, but to supplement your trust with something else? When our Enemy comes at us to tempt us, it's not usually in the form of **God OR ...** (as in, you gotta choose this and reject him, but) **God AND ...**

**Isn't this exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden?** The serpent didn't slither up to Adam and Eve and say, "Hey, there is no God; you should be an atheist." He said, "**In addition to God, you need this tree of knowledge of good and evil to be complete ...**"

**What else do you require, in addition to God and his will, as a necessity for life?** Where do you say, "God, I want to belong to you,

but in order to feel like I have a full and complete and joy-filled life, I also need ...”

- To be married
- To have a marriage that looks like *this* ...
- To have kids that turn out well
- To be financially well-off
- To look a certain way or weigh a certain amount

An **idol is anything you require, in addition to God**, to feel secure and complete in life. This may not seem like any big thing to you, but God considers it an act of supreme betrayal. In **chapter 34**, he compares it to marital betrayal, like when an adulterating spouse says, in effect, to their marriage partner, “You’re not enough for me. I need the love of someone else in addition to you to satisfy this part of my heart.”

In fact, the materials they used to construct this golden calf were an insult to God. Remember what they made the calf from? **Verse 3** says they took off their gold jewelry and melted it down to make the calf. Well, do you remember where they had gotten all that gold jewelry?

**As they were leaving Egypt**, God had moved in the hearts of the Egyptians to give up their gold jewelry to them, which didn’t make any sense—the Egyptians hated the Israelites at this point, but now they’re like, “Hey, as you’re leaving ... here’s my best earrings and my favorite bracelet.” Jewelry for Jewry. These had been like God’s wedding presents to them, and *now they’re taking them off and melting them down to make another god*. It would be like a wife hocking her wedding ring to pay for a hotel room to have an affair with another man.

And so, vs. **7**: **And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt (You catch that? Whose people? God is like, “Your people, Moses, they ain’t mine.” God doesn’t even want to claim ‘em anymore. Your people ...), have corrupted themselves ...”**

**9** **And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.**

- This is a great, even if awkward image of disobedience ... **Everybody, real quick, stiffen your necks.** Feel that? That’s how these people are resisting God.
- **When I first started in ministry, I was at a smallish leadership conference with a really famous** charismatic church leader. You’d recognize his name, and I had a lot of respect for him. Well, at the end of one of the sessions, he called down any leaders who wanted more of the Spirit in their lives ... I was like, 23, and I was like, “Yes, Lord. Anything you have for me, I want it. I want it all.” So several of us came forward and we formed a little line, and he came along and prayed for each of us, and I was watching out of the corner of my eye, and I noticed that each of them was falling backwards after he prayed for them. But I couldn’t tell, since I didn’t want to stare, but it looked to me like at the end, he was pushing them down. So I said to the Lord—no joke—I said, “Lord, I want absolutely everything you have for me—if you want to knock me flat on my back and tattoo John 3:16 on my chest, I’m here for it ... but I am not going to let that man push me down.” So it finally came my turn and he started to pray, and as he prayed, he got louder, and I could feel him starting to push. And I was like, “Lord, I’m pretty sure that’s him, not you.” So I kind of pushed back. I stiffened my neck ... and this little mini-war went on for a few seconds, and then he moved on to pray for the next person. Now, I’m sure he thought, **“What a stiffnecked guy.”** And I guess I was toward him, but that’s what these people are doing with God. They’re resisting him. He’s pushing them toward something and they don’t want to go there, so they resist: *I’m not going to do it your way, God. I’m not content with just your promises. I ... need ... more!*

<sup>10</sup> Now therefore let me alone [God says], that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

God is ready just to wipe them out and start over. He’d already done that once with Noah, after all. He destroyed the whole human race with a flood and then started over with Noah’s family. Maybe he should just do that now, again, with Moses.

<sup>11</sup> But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom **you** have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”

Listen, if you wanna learn how to pray, there it is. Moses says: “God, you started this, and you’re the one who made all these promises to these people, and your reputation is at stake, so you better finish this. Do what you said you wanted to do.”

<sup>14</sup> And the LORD relented (some translations say “repented” or “changed his mind”) from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

- Now, did Moses really change God’s mind? Was God like, “You’re right, Moses; I’m wrong. I just let my emotions get the best of me for a minute and forgot what I promised. I should probably listen to my better angels and be compassionate, like you said.” Is that what happened?

- Of course not. As Moses himself said in **Numbers 23:19**: “God is not man ... that he should change his mind.”<sup>2</sup>

God didn’t change his mind in the sense that he learned new information or calmed down and acted more rationally. What you’re seeing here is an insight into the mystery of how prayer works.

- God **puts his people in places**, like he does Moses here in this chapter, where he wants them to pray his promises back to him.
- Did you notice in **vs. 7** that God was the one who directed Moses to go down and see this in the first place? (God said, “Moses, go down, and look ...”) Before God pointed it out, Moses didn’t even know it was happening! God put Moses into a place where he would see what was going on so he could pray God’s promises back to him.
- That’s what God wanted from Moses, and that’s what he does with you: He puts you in places to see need and brokenness—where on one side you’ve got some need, and on the other you have God’s character and his promises, and he puts you there to pray those promises back to him.
- What if you used that filter on your life now? Where has God directed your attention to a place of need? Maybe he’s put you there so you can pray his healing and his kindness and his promises over the situation!
- One of my favorite scenes in *Back to the Future* is where they’re trying to get power to the DeLorean when it’s going exactly 88 mph, and there is nothing in 1955 that can supply that kind of power except for lightning, and they happen to know exactly when lightning is going to strike, so they rig up a power cord to harness the power from the lightning strike, but at the last minute it comes unplugged, so Doc climbs up on the tower and connects the two wires by means of his body so that the power of the strike can flood into the flux capacitor and take Marty McFly BACK to the future. And I see that scene and I think, THAT’s prayer! We have

<sup>2</sup> See also 1 Samuel 15:11, 29, where it says that God “regretted” making Saul king, but then later says God is not a man who can have regrets.

the lightning strike of God's power, but our prayers are the bridge that connects that power to the place that needs it!

- That's a whole 'nother sermon for another day, but it's what's going on here.

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand ... <sup>19</sup> And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. <sup>20</sup> He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it. I can't imagine this was good for ye ol' digestive tract. I told you last week that some of the health gurus I follow recommend some weird supplements, like lion's mane mushrooms, ground-up tree bark, and even black ant extract (which I don't take), but I've never seen a dietician recommend liquified gold. Moses made them drink this, and many got sick and died.

*Which is going to be an important lesson about idolatry: Anything you trust in for safety or fulfillment instead of God ultimately becomes bitter in your mouth and kills you. We'll come back to that in a minute,*

**but vs. 21** may be the best part of this story, so we can't skip it: <sup>21</sup> Moses said to Aaron, **"What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?"** (Moses is not letting AARON off the hook, since he's the leader.) <sup>22</sup> And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. (So, first, he blames the people! "You know the people, Moses.") <sup>23</sup> For they said to me, 'Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' (NOW who is Aaron blaming? Aaron's blaming Moses. "You were gone SO long!" The only person he doesn't blame is himself.) **Look at vs. 24:** So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and ... out came this calf!" What ... is Aaron in middle school? "I

*seriously have no idea how it happened, Dad! I don't know how the phone got up here in my bedroom, in my bed. Maybe a demon carried it up and put it there to tempt me to text my friends and watch YouTube shorts at night. I mean, you know how sneaky demons can be, Dad!"*

**What we're seeing here is a recapitulation of the Garden of Eden.**

The original sin of the Garden of Eden went in three stages:

**abdication (of spiritual leadership), idolatry, and then blame shifting.**<sup>3</sup>

- Adam **abdicated** his role as spiritual leader. Adam should have led his wife to resist the temptation and trust God, but he stood there and let her lead.
- Then, **idolatry**—Adam and Eve attempted to supplement God's plan with something else. God and his will weren't enough; they needed this other thing—this forbidden fruit—to feel full and complete.
- And then, **blame shifting**. When God confronted Adam, Adam's response was, "The woman that you gave me, she made me do this," and so God turned to her and she was like, "The snake made me do it!" Everyone pointed at someone else.

**Same thing with Aaron:** Aaron **abdicates** his role as leader, creates an **idol** to supplement God: Then, when confronted, **blames** other people, the circumstances. It's the Garden of Eden all over again, because it's the recurring cycle of sin.

<sup>25</sup> And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose ...) (Again, blaming Aaron, and by the way, "broken loose" there is the root word for "naked"—remember how in the Garden of Eden they felt naked after they sinned? This whole account is written in parallel with the Garden of Eden story.) <sup>26</sup> then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. <sup>27</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Joe Rigney, *Leadership and Emotional Sabotage*

And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’”<sup>28</sup> And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell.

Imagine how awful this was for the priests. They had been appointed to serve and bless the people, and now they lead in this discipline. And I know some of you ask why a God of love would order something like this. Let me say, first, this 3,000 represents ½ of 1 percent of the total number of men in Israel, even though it was the entire nation who sinned, so we’re talking about a relatively small percentage, and some commentators suggest that these were people who refused to stop the sexual orgy stuff even after they’d been commanded. **But the biggest point here is idolatry is no joke. God considers it to be wickedness of the highest order.**

And so that’s what I want to focus on today: the danger of idolatry in your life! Let me make four points:

### 1. The sin behind all other sins (our root sin) is idolatry

And maybe that confuses you because you’re like, “J.D., I’ve got a lot of problems, but I don’t have a golden calf in my basement that I bow down to each night.” Sure, but gold statues are not the essence of idolatry.

An idol, Martin Luther said (“Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is your god”), an idol is whatever your heart clings to and confides in. Whatever you look to for happiness, or completeness, or security, or comfort.

Tim Keller says it this way: “What is an idol? An idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and

imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give you ... A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.”

Idols are not usually inherently bad things! They are usually a good thing you make into an ultimate thing, a God thing. I’ve told you that one of the Hebrew words for worship is “kabod,” and it means “weight.” An idol is whatever you give so much weight in your life that you couldn’t imagine being happy without it.

Over the years, I’ve given you a few diagnostic questions to help you figure out what your idols might be. Start with this one:

- **What can I not imagine life being complete without?** (Or, what is there that, if you didn’t have it, life would not hardly feel worth living?)
  - You say, “I can’t be happy until I’m financially well-off. Or at least until making \$10K more than I am right now.”
  - Or maybe you’re the kind of person who has to win all the time. You can’t be happy if you’re not first. Losing or being bested drives you crazy.
- Here’s another one: **What do I obsess about obtaining?**
  - Maybe it’s romantic love. Many of us think, “Well, this is the one thing I absolutely need if my life is going to be happy! It doesn’t matter if I’m rich or famous, as long as I find true love!”
  - This is like the theme of every Hallmark movie we’ve ever seen, right? “I was a highly paid corporate lawyer on Wall Street and realized on my trip back to my parents’ house that my life was empty without love, so I gave up my career to get married to my high school sweetheart, and now we run a cattle ranch together.” I saw a comedian who said (PIC), “Over

Christmas I watched a Hallmark movie backwards: A woman in an ugly Christmas sweater dumped her loser small-town boyfriend to pursue a law career in NYC, where she lived happily ever after in pencil skirts and amazing shoes."

Romance is an idol for many people.

- Here's another question: **What am I most terrified of losing?**

*(What's your greatest nightmare?)*

- Your family falling apart? Your kids turning out poorly?
- For me one of those things is failure. That one weekend I show up here to preach and the only people here are the ones I pay—and they're all listening to Joby Martin sermons on their headphones because they think he's a lot funnier than me. The reason I feel that way is that I've made an idol out of success and accomplishment.

- Or: **Where do I turn for comfort or assurance when things go wrong?**

- Meaning, when the chips are down, what do you retreat into to tell yourself, "I'm gonna be ok"? "I've still got my family! I've still got my savings! I'm still a good person. I've always got my brain and my ingenuity; I can make it work." Those likely are idols.

**The question is not if we worship, it's what we worship.** The human heart will always make something ultimate. As John Calvin said, "The human heart is an idol factory." The human heart will always find something to assign ultimate value to, and you will cling to it and confide in it and trust in it. Those are *our* golden calves.

Which leads me to #2 ...

## 2. Our idols corrupt us

- The words that Moses uses to describe Israel's behavior after they started worshiping the golden calf make them seem like dumb animals. They basically do nothing but eat and then get up and satisfy their urges. They become spiritually dull and "stiff-necked" like a stubborn mule. This is a theme that shows up over and over again throughout the Bible: **You become like what you worship.**<sup>4</sup> When Israel worshiped the cow, they became like the cow. The same thing is true with us. Which is bad news, right?
  - *When you worship money, you become greedy and anxious.*
  - *When you worship power you become controlling and manipulative.*
  - *When you worship pleasure, you become compulsive and develop addictive behaviors.*
  - *When you worship attention, you become boastful and jealous.*
  - *When you worship family, you become domineering and controlling.*
  - *When you worship romance, you become lustful and never quite satisfied.*
  - *When you worship winning, you become obnoxiously competitive and vengeful when you lose.*

**Worship of an idol always corrupts you. There's an old movie, a great movie, called *Cool Runnings*.** Seen it? It's the unlikely story of a Jamaican bobsled team that competes, for the first time ever, in the Winter Olympics. There's a scene in it where Derice, the captain, finds out that years ago, their coach got caught cheating. So Derice asks him about it: *Why'd you do it, Coach?*

The coach responds, "It's quite simple, really: I had to win. You see, Derice, I had made winning my whole life. And when you make winning your whole life, you have to keep on winning, no matter what. You understand that?"

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Isaiah 44:9–20; Jeremiah 51:17–18; Psalm 115:8, 135:18.



Derice is like, "No, I don't understand, Coach. You had two gold medals. You already had it all!"

And the coach says, "Derice, a gold medal is a wonderful thing. But if you're not enough without it, you'll never be enough with it."

That's good enough to put on the TV: **Whatever you're not enough without, you won't be enough with.** And that emptiness will drive you to manipulate and cheat and steal and become a different kind of person! **Jen Wilkin points out that** in this chapter, their idolatry led them to break just about all the other commandments! They made a graven image (C2); they dishonored their elders (C4); they committed adultery (7); they stole (8); they lied (9); they coveted (10).

All sins begin with idolatry, because you become like what you worship.

Now, there's actually some good news in that too. Because when you worship God, you become like him. While Israel was down in the valley worshipping the cow and having an orgy, Moses was up in the mountain spending time in God's presence—and at the end of the chapter, Moses starts acting like God! He pleads for mercy and faithfulness to the promises. In **vs. 32**, he'll even express a willingness to suffer in Israel's place!

**You become like what you worship.** If you worship money, success, or sex, you'll become like them, and if you worship God, you'll become like him.

### 3. Idolatry begins in fear

Their fear, their lack of trust, is what drove them to idolatry! Listen, that's always where it begins! *Hey, God, I've been praying about this for years and ... my kids aren't changing. I'm still single. The job's not*

*turning out! The marriage is not getting better. My body still hurts. The door's just not opening. The ministry's not growing."* And that's when you're like, "I need something else. I don't want to leave God; I just want to supplement him!"

Listen, if you don't learn to trust God in times of delay, you'll never make it! Without faith it is impossible to please God, and faith isn't required when you feel God's presence and see all the evidence of his work. Faith is what you show when you don't see those things.

**I've heard it said that the American Christian ideal is to be justified by faith but then never have to show it again.** But if you're going to make it in the Christian life, you have to learn to trust God when you can't see him or feel him. We walk by faith, not by sight or feeling or warm fuzzies. Your faith, Peter says, is the most valuable thing in your life—more precious than gold—and God has arranged everything in your life to produce it in you.

### 4. Jesus is our escape from idolatry

How can these people ever learn to trust God? I told you at the beginning they should have known better than to doubt God, after all they'd seen ... I mean, the exodus, the Red Sea, manna and water in the desert. But even that proves not to be convincing enough for them.

God's final argument to our doubt is what we celebrated last weekend: the crucifixion and resurrection of his Son. On Good Friday, we celebrated that God's own Son was crucified by wicked men, making it look like evil had won, but then on Sunday, he resurrected his Son, showing that he ultimately transforms all things, even the worst things, for his glory and our good.

Honestly, I think of all the days in the Easter holiday, the one most helpful for me is that Saturday between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, and I know that's odd because at first, it seems like a pointless day. Why did God wait an extra day to resurrect Jesus? I mean, I understand, if Jesus died on a Friday afternoon, waiting until at least the next morning to resurrect him—give it a night to prove that he's dead; plus, the imagery of Jesus rising at sunrise is pretty cool. But why add the full extra day in the middle—imagine how awful and sad and confusing that day must have been for the disciples. Why make them wait a full extra day for the resurrection?

Well, in part, it's because that **time gap is a METAPHOR** for what our lives feel like now. We have seasons where we ask: **Where is God? It seems like he's delayed. What's he doing? Has he forgotten us? Is he dead?** No, he hasn't; no, he's not. You're just in a Saturday of waiting, **but hang on, friend, Sunday always comes.**

The cross and resurrection is God's final argument for us to trust him. We criticize the children of Israel for not trusting God after all they've seen, but think about how much we've seen. And yet you still doubt God? If you won't trust God after the cross and resurrection, what else could he do? J.C. Ryle said that the ultimate insult you can give to God after the cross and resurrection is to doubt his love for you.

*My faith has found a resting place, not in device or creed. I trust the ever living one, his wounds for me shall plead.* The cross and resurrection are God's answer to your doubts. Your faith can rest there too.

This chapter shows us that what our faith most needs is an assurance that we have a mediator who will never leave us. So, fittingly, this

chapter ends by giving us a beautiful picture of that mediator. **Direct your attention**, if you will, to the final verses of chapter 32: **So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. <sup>32</sup> But now, if you will, please forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written."** Moses wants to be the mediator, which is a gracious offer. But God said, vv. 33–34, "No, Moses, you can't do that." You see, Moses is going to have sin of his own that will disqualify him from even going into the Promised Land. A person with his own sin can't be the mediator for other people with sin. **And so vs. [35] The LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf ...**

But see, this sets us up for another mediator, one who would be without sin. And see, one day, another lawgiver did indeed come. He taught the Law from a mountain just like Moses did. But unlike Moses, that Lawgiver would himself be sinless, and then he would be blotted out of God's book because of our sin, just like Moses had asked for. The plague of our sin went into him, and the sword of God's justice would drop on him. Jesus drank the melted-down, poisoned cup of our sin, and it killed him.

But see, that enabled him to turn to crowds of hungry, thirsty, fearful people and say, "The one who eats of me will never be hungry again and the one who drinks of me will never thirst!"

Feasting on him won't make us sick. It won't corrupt us. It makes us alive and heals us.

In fact, one other amazing thing I want to point out: In this chapter, as Moses is giving them the Law, they sinned and 3,000 died. Acts 2, at Pentecost. It's kind of a similar scene here to Exodus 32. In Exodus 32, it was a mountain of earthquake and thunder and fire; in Acts 2, it was a mighty tornado wind and tongues of fire. But this time, instead

of there being a barrier they were not allowed to pass, the wind and the fire came into them, and instead of killing them, it filled them with joy in God's presence. And then Peter stands up to preach, and do you remember how many people got saved at Pentecost in Acts 2? 3,000.

Do you think that number is just a coincidence? In Exodus 32, at the giving of the Law, 3,000 died. In Acts 2, at the giving of the Spirit, 3,000 live. We needed more than the law, friend. We needed a Mediator, and the Holy Spirit of God inside us, who enables us to obey that Law.

I told you that we become like what we worship. That's an important truth. But Christianity's most important truth is that the one we worship became like us, so that through his death, we could live.

So surely, you see, he should be your only God. He's the one you can trust with everything, fully and completely. You gotta stop blaming everyone and everything else for your unhappiness and your lack of peace. It's my circumstances. It's my husband. It's my parents. It's my job or my boss or my lack of success. Stop blame shifting and say, "God, you're what I need! I've got all kinds of problems I need your help with, God, but my primary problem is that I've failed to trust you."

**And that brings us to the invitation I wanted to give to you:** Baptism is the sign that you are going all-in with Jesus.

Baptism is actually an important part of the exodus journey. Paul says their going through the Red Sea was like our baptism, in that it was the water marker that symbolized they are passing from death to life.

Because it's the symbol that you've passed from death to life, it's supposed to be the first thing you do after you accept Christ.

**Some of you haven't done that yet since you became a Christian or since you've gotten serious about following Jesus, and we want to give you a chance to do that *TODAY*.**

**You say, "Well, I was baptized as a baby, does that count?"** Listen, I am super glad for how your parents, at your birth, expressed a desire for you to belong to Jesus. But that was more about their faith than yours, right? Why not make a decision to ratify their decision by being baptized on your own! You can call them later and say, "Mom and Dad, that hope you had for me all those years ago, today it became real. I ratified your baptism with one of my own!" You're not rejecting their baptism; if anything, you're fulfilling it. Baptism in the Bible is always a sign of someone's own individual faith. It's time to get baptized as a show of yours.

You say, "But, more practically, Pastor, all I have are the clothes I wore!" **Good news.** We have T-shirts from sizes **small** to **XXL**, shorts with drawstrings, and even swim caps **for your head**, in case you're really proud of your hair. We have **hair dryers**—we don't give you those until after you get out of the water, for liability reasons. We have hair **gel and hairspray** so you can redo your hair, so that it looks as fabulous as when you came. We have **combs and brushes and deodorant**. We have items back there I don't even know how to pronounce or how to use.

**You say, "But I rode with people."** They'll wait! I promise. Let me prove it: If you drove someone else to church today, and you're not willing to wait for them to get baptized, raise your hand! (See? I told you. Of course, if you did raise your hand, that's like telling everyone around you that you're the one who needs to be baptized, and they're all praying for you now.)

You say, "**Well, I'm not ready to switch denominations** ... I'm not sure what denomination this church is, but J.D., you make me nervous." Fair. Let me be clear: I'm not asking you to switch denominations. **When we baptize you, we don't say,** "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and *Southern Baptist Convention*." No, we are not going to baptize you as a Baptist, or a Presbyterian, or a Catholic, but as a follower of Jesus, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**OK? Everybody bow your heads.**

- **If you've never given yourself fully to Jesus** and received his offer of salvation, to be your Mediator, say to him, "Jesus, I right now receive your love and your offer of salvation. I believe in the resurrection. You're the Lord, and from now on, you call the shots."
- **Now, if you've never been baptized**, tell God that if he'll give you the courage, you're ready to take that step now. If you have been baptized, and you're with somebody who you think needs to, pray for them right now ...

Now, our worship teams and baptism counselors are getting in place. When I stand you, you will come. There will be people in the aisles to receive you and take you somewhere to answer any questions and get you ready. They're already in place. Now, warning, this is not a great time to slip out early. I know you're like, "But I really like to leave early every week." I'm just telling you, if you step out now, there might be a series of misunderstandings where you end up in a tank of water with people cheering for you. So, hold on until the end today, OK? OK, you ready? When I tell you, we're all going to stand, and if you need to come, you step out immediately, and Summit, we'll cheer in celebration of that. **OK? You ready?** Everybody stand, and you come! Let's celebrate!