

## Old Habits Are Hard To Break

How many of us have had the experience of trying to break a sinful habit only to find that old habits are hard to break? If you have, you've experienced that just having the desire to change a habit in and of itself is not enough. You've also experienced that just trying to develop new habit patterns alone are not enough. At the end of the day we have to have a complete **heart change**. Without a change of heart and mind all of our other attempts just become window dressing. **The only thing that can truly break the power of sinful habits and the influence of the world on our lives is FAITH demonstrated by CONFESSION and REPENTANCE.** Israel had a desire for the Promised Land and they wanted to leave Egypt. However, with every challenge that tested their resolve they ended up looking back towards Egypt. Even a new way of living was not enough! God gave them a new way to live (His commandments). But once again, with every challenge that brought fear and uncertainty to their lives they resorted back to the old way of dealing with things. We see this on a couple of occasions. The first one was at the Red Sea where Pharaoh had them trapped.

**Exodus 14:10-12 (NIV) 10** As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. **11** They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? **12** Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

We see this same kind of thinking just a few days later after God delivers them from Pharaoh's hand and they are complaining about what they are going to eat in the wilderness.

**Exodus 16:2-3 (NIV) 2** In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. **3** The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

In order to break the power of the old life we must put it to death with all of its desires and come alive in the new life God has for us! And the only way to do that is to by faith confess our sin as something that is contrary to God and then turn away from it completely by turning to God. In essence, **we must trade fear and self-reliance for faith and a complete reliance on God**

Today in **Week 4** of "**Promised Land**" we are going to take a look at the Golden Calf episode in Israel's journey to the Promised Land in **Exodus 32** and I want us to see that when it comes to following God by faith there are no shortcuts to trusting God. We need a complete heart shift so that our old way of thinking and living doesn't get in the way of the new relationship God desires for us to have with Him. So let's find **Exodus 32** as I **PRAY** for us.

Just to set the context for **Exodus 32**. After 3 meetings with God on Mt Sinai and after revealing to the people the 10 foundational commandments that are to govern them in the Promised Land. God calls Moses back up to the mountain to meet with Him for 40 days and 40 nights. It is during his 4th meeting with God that Moses is going to receive from Him a plan for the Tabernacle that will serve as a way for God to dwell physically with His people and that will provide a place and a method for God's people to engage in worship. It is also during this meeting that God is going to give Moses tablets of stone upon which he will record God's commandments for the children of Israel in order to teach to their children. These are the same commands we looked at last week in Exodus 20 and that the people had agreed to keep before God. But before Moses can return back down the mountain to reveal what God has given Him, the people have already gone astray. (It's important to note that as far as a timeline is concerned it has only been a few months since God delivered Israel from the Egyptian army. But this just goes to show us how entrenched old habits and old mindsets can be and how hard it is to break them even when we experience God's grace and mercy in real and tangible ways.)

As we read through **Exodus 32** I want us to learn **5 Valuable FAITH Lessons** from God's interaction with Moses and his people.

**Exodus 32:1 (NIV) 1** When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

First of all, if you have the power to make a god, then it's not much of a god to begin with! We cannot put God in a box and that is exactly what happens when we create idols that we look to for comfort in our time of need. While Egypt is a real nation, it is also a symbol of the ways of the broken world. Israel looking back to Egypt is equivalent to us looking to the things of the world that comfort us in our time of need Which brings us to **FAITH Lesson #1 - In times of distress we have a natural tendency to resort back to what is most familiar.** If you are familiar with the world's ways of dealing with difficult situations then that is what you will always seek to resort to in your life. Usually these are things that are not of God but of the world, things we see others enjoy and go to when they are stressed and we indulge in those things as well. These are in essence coping mechanisms for dealing with traumatic situations in our lives. In most cases we have developed what we have seen our parents use or if our parents were absent we develop our own as we seek to survive. For Israel, they grew up in Egypt where their mechanism was to look to false gods. And we do the same thing. **We look to the gods of money, drugs & alcohol, pleasure, human strength, or bad physical relationships which lead to fulfilling sexual desires. These are our gods and when in distress we have a tendency to quickly turn to them for help.** Israel was looking for gods to lead them through their current crises. In fact, it appears, based on their fleshly world view, that they had missed God altogether! They apparently didn't see God as the one who delivered them but instead attributed their deliverance to Moses and now that he seems to be gone they need something else to replace Him. Notice their focus is on the tangible. That which they can see and touch as opposed to God who is not limited by physical dimensions. In order to combat this tendency and walk in the new life Christ has for us **we need to be mindful of the things that trigger our**

**natural tendencies** and make sure that we turn to Jesus first instead of our natural security blankets. This requires a complete mindshift regarding the things that stress our lives as well as the fact that **we need to be more familiar with Jesus than we are with the ways of the world!** Remember, **we have a natural tendency to resort back to what is most familiar.** Therefore, let's make Jesus that which is most familiar. Cultivate that relationship with Him through His word and with the intimacy of prayer.

**Exodus 32:2-6 (NIV)** **2** Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." **3** So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. **4** He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." **5** When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." **6** So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Aaron was Moses' representative that was supposed to lead and guide the people while Moses was away. But unfortunately, because Aaron was more influenced by his way of life in Egypt more than he was his life in God, Aaron gave into his old ways as well. As followers of Jesus we must be careful that we too don't do the same. Which brings us to **FAITH Lesson #2 - We are to be light in the darkness encouraging people to trust God not giving in to self-reliance.** First of all, as Christians we are to be examples of faith to others not an example of one who is self-reliant. **It's much easier to seek after what you want on your own than it is to wait on God for what you need.** We must resist this temptation as a disciple of Jesus. Secondly, we need to place people around us who will challenge us and hold us accountable to trusting God by faith, not someone who will tell us what we want to hear. Israel needed accountability and a man of faith in this moment. They did not need someone who would fulfill the selfish sinful longings of their wicked hearts by giving them what they wanted. Aaron knew better but rather than be a disciple maker he tried to be popular. Rather than be more concerned with what God thought he was more worried about what the people thought. Rather than encourage the people to wait on God for what they needed. He gave them what they wanted.

**Exodus 32:7-10 (NIV)** **7** Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. **8** They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' **9** "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. **10** Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

Unfortunately, once again we see people trying to come to God on their terms. Most of us don't want God, we want a god we are more comfortable with. Notice that God calls them "your people". That's because they looked more like Moses than they did God. Once again we see the ugliness of SIN. (SIN being our inability to trust in God) God hates sin because sin destroys our lives. When we choose to live apart from God we only welcome heartache and difficulty into our

lives. God wants his people to experience the fullness of life. But as was the case with Adam & Eve sin only brought darkness and pain. The only way to purge sin is DEATH. And as we have said all along something must die! Either you and I must die, or something else must die. So watch what Moses does.

**Exodus 32:11-14 (NIV) 11** But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? **12** Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. **13** 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.'" **14** Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Moses does not leave God alone as God asked Him to in verse 10 but instead presses in even more. Here we see the power of intercession. Where Moses intercedes for the people by petitioning God on their behalf because he has compassion on them because they just do not understand what they are doing and they don't have the connection he has with God due to his FAITH! Obviously Moses has a deeper understanding of God than the people he is leading who are fresh out of Egypt and trying to overcome generations of spiritual bondage in Egypt. We must stand in the gap for those who don't know God. For those who have misguided views on Jesus. We stand in the gap for those who need His grace and mercy. This leads us to **FAITH Lesson #3 - As people of faith we have a responsibility to intercede on behalf of those who do not.** We should have a heart of compassion for people and plead for God's grace and mercy on their lives. People cannot act like Jesus until they know Him by faith. Church, we need to stop complaining about people who don't have faith and start crying out to God on their behalf! Let's not leave God alone but let's bombard His throne praying for salvation and for hearts to be softened to the message of His Gospel.

**FAITH Lesson #1 - In times of distress we have a natural tendency to resort back to what is most familiar.** So let's make Jesus more familiar than our idols.

**FAITH Lesson #2 - We are to be light in the darkness encouraging people to trust God not give in to self-reliance.** Let's wait on God by faith and place people around us who will help us to do so.

**FAITH Lesson #3 - As people of faith we have a responsibility to intercede on behalf of those who do not.** Let's seek the throne of God on behalf of those who do not know Him

And that brings us to **FAITH Lesson #4 - In order to be FREE from sin we must CONFRONT sin**

Sin cannot be allowed to run rampant and go unchecked in our lives. As the scripture says, "a little leaven will eventually leaven the whole lump of dough." Sin grows like yeast until it

completely consumes everything. This was the point Paul was making to the church at Corinth regarding sin in their church. Rather than address it by removing it and mourning because of it, they tolerated it. In fact, Paul says they act as if they were proud of it.

**1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (NIV)** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. **2** And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?

**1 Corinthians 5:6-7 (NIV)** Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? **7** Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

**Exodus 32:15-24 (NIV)** Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. **16** The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. **17** When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp." **18** Moses replied: "It is not the sound of victory, is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear." **19** When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

The breaking of the tablets was exactly the result of what the sin of the people had done. They had broken the commandments of which they had originally agreed to keep back in Exodus 19. In doing so they have failed to trust God and instead attempted to lean on their own understanding. This will not serve them well in the Promised Land. This mindset and heart attitude must be changed. **So how do you begin to change it? You have to confront IT!**

**20** And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. **21** He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"

**22** "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. **23** They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' **24** So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

Moses confronts Aaron but notice how he tries to blame shift. Rather than owning his sin by confessing and rather than leading the people by being an example, he flat out gives in to their wishes and takes the easy road. Rather than confront sin and correct it with truth, he yields to the culture of the camp. **As followers of Jesus we have a responsibility to confront the lies of our culture with the truth of God's word.** Rather than buckle or cave into the whims of the people we are to stand with God and be an example of one who is pursuing God. This is why reading through the Bible and knowing God's word is so important. We have to have an

OBJECTIVE truth that is outside of ourselves and that can illuminate the darkness that is in our own hearts.

**Romans 12:2 (NIV) 2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**25** Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. **26** So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. Moses calls the people to make a stand. You either want to continue in this sinful revelry or you want to follow God. Those who stand with Moses want to follow God. Then comes a portion of scripture that really makes us all uncomfortable and causes us to question why was God being so harsh? In fact, some of us want to skip this and pretend that it isn't even in God's word or that it is a mistake because it doesn't seem to fit our image of God. The reason we struggle with this is because we really do not have an appreciation for the magnitude of God's holiness and our sinfulness nor the sinfulness of Israel at this moment .

**27** Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" **28** The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. **29** Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

This is not an arbitrary act of God just being violent. In fact, here are 3 realities we need to be reminded of regarding God's harsh judgment of the 3000 who die as a result of this situation.

- 1) The people had made a commitment to God back in Exodus 19. God showed them what he required of them as His people. They were not to look to any other gods or make an image of anything to represent God. God is not punishing people for their ignorance. They knew better. And they acknowledged God's commands as something they would strive to honor with their lives
- 2) As God's people they are to represent Him in this world as distinct and different from all other gods and nations. By practicing Idolatry they were not being distinct and thus bringing shame to the holy name of God. What does it say about God if He does not hold them accountable for their actions?
- 3) The people were given an opportunity to repent and it is apparent that some of them were unwilling to do so. There was over 2 million people at this point but only 3000 died which means God obviously didn't kill everyone.

This judgment as is all of God's judgments was just and was carried out with grace and mercy. It was specific and obviously necessary in order to deal with the violation at hand. When it comes to sin in our lives we must not play around with it or entertain it. We must kill it. Remove it completely. Sin is deadly! It robs, steals, kills and destroys. It is a cancer that must be cut-out of our life altogether. We look at this and we say, WOW! And we should! But let's not be amazed

or be distracted by the harshness of God but instead let's have a greater respect for His holiness. God is trying to send a message to his people and that message is that SIN is serious! And the reality is for us, until we get serious about sin in our lives it will continue to plague our lives. So what does that look like for us? Because obviously we are not going to go around and kill people!

It looks like **CONFESSION!** (Acknowledging that what you are doing is sin against God. It is wrong and a violation of what God considers good and healthy for your life)

It includes a **CHANGE of DIRECTIONS!** (I am not only willing to confess it but I am willing to live differently and change from doing it my way and start living according to God's way)

**1 John 1:9 (ESV)** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)** if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

**30** The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." **31** So Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. **32** But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." **33** The Lord replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. In other words, they will still die (Which, btw is true of us all) And Moses you cannot atone for their sin! **34** Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." **35** And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made. Not only will the people eventually die, there will also be a consequence for their sin regarding this particular situation. We might receive forgiveness but that does not mean that we will not have to endure the consequences of our sin. But there is hope! Which leads us to **Faith Lesson #5 - What Moses did not accomplish for Israel, Jesus did!**

**1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

**Galatians 1:3-5 (ESV)** **3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, **4** who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, **5** to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen

**Worship Team Comes Back Up**

**Invitation:**

**In times of distress what is your Golden Calf?** Let's make Jesus more familiar than our idols. Don't let your blessings become your idols

**Are you allowing God to use you to be light in the darkness by learning to wait on God for what you need rather than taking matters into your own hands and seeking after what you want?** Let's wait on God by faith and place people around us who will help us to do so. Learn to worship while you wait.

**Are you interceding on behalf of those who do not know God by faith?** Let's seek the throne of God on behalf of those who do not know Him

**Are you FREE from your SIN?** The only way to put sin to death is confess and repent taking up our new life in Christ

**Have you placed your FAITH in Jesus?** Only Jesus can make full atonement for your sin. Have you trusted Him?