

Commandment 1: The Golden Calf

“You shall have no other gods before My face”

Exodus 20:1-6; Exodus 32:1-20 *portions*

Goal: This lesson teaches the first commandment through the story of the Golden Calf. The children of Israel disobeyed the Lord by making an idol shaped like a golden calf. They broke the commandment that we should worship the Lord alone.

Process: Choose activities for the 4 parts of the lesson from the chart below. For multi-aged groups, teach the lesson to the entire group and select activities that suit your students. Online Extras provide additional activity choices.

Lesson Overview

Lesson Parts	Activities	Materials Given	Supplies Needed
1. Introduction (2-3 minutes)	All Ages <i>The First Commandment</i>	introduction p. 2	
2. Readings & Questions (5-7 minutes)	All Ages select readings for your group	readings pp. 2-3 questions p. 4 talk-about picture p. 5	Bible for ages 11-14
3. Activities choose 1-2 activities (15-20 minutes) Note: Activity ages are approximate. Choose activities that will work for your group.	Ages 3-6 <i>The Golden Calf</i> modeling project	directions p. 6 <i>The Golden Calf</i> Template p. 7	scissors, tape, sturdy disposable plates, yellow modeling clay or playdough optional: elbow macaroni, gold paint
	Ages 7-10 <i>Model the Golden Calf</i> modeling project	directions pp. 8-9	five pieces of aluminum foil approx. 5x5" (13x13cm)
	Ages 11-14 <i>When the Lord Feels Absent</i> activity & discussion	directions p. 10 <i>Mount Sinai and Golden Calf</i> pp. 11-12 <i>When the Lord Feels Absent</i> p.13	sticky notes in three colors; pens or pencils; scissors; paper; wall, table or floor space to lay out a large chart
	Ages 3-10 picture to color	<i>Worshiping the Golden Calf</i> p. 14	crayons or markers
4. Closing & Recitation (2-3 minutes)	All Ages wrap-up	<i>Recitation Slips</i> p. 15	scissors or paper cutter
Online Extras	All Ages additional activities	online links p. 15	various

Introduction: The First Commandment

The first commandment is about worshipping only the Lord. The Lord tells us,

1. You shall have no other gods before My face. Exodus 20:3

The first commandment says we should only worship the Lord, the one true God of heaven and earth. The commandment means that we should not love any thing or any person more than we love the Lord. If we do this, it is like worshipping “false gods”.

- What things do you spend time thinking about?
- How can you tell if what you are thinking about is a “false god”? False gods are things we make the most important things in our lives, so that we spend most of the time thinking about them. These may be things like wanting to be right or best, to do things by ourselves, or to do something we really want to do—like watching a show or playing a game—when we should be doing something else.
- The first commandment says we should put the Lord first. How might you bring the Lord into the picture if you find yourself thinking about “false gods”?

When we do put the Lord first, He can lead us to heaven—just as He led the children of Israel to the Promised Land. Our story today describes what happened at the bottom of Mount Sinai while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. Listen to what the people did when they got tired of waiting for Moses.

Reading Ages 3-6: The Golden Calf

This is a short retelling of the story for young children. To tell the story in your own words using a picture, see the talk-about picture on p. 5.

The Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Moses went high up on the mountain where nobody could see him. It took a long time. The people got tired of waiting for Moses and disobeyed the Lord.

The people asked Aaron to make them an idol. They brought Aaron their earrings, and he made them into a golden calf. Aaron said they would have a big celebration, so the people made a feast.

During the feast the Lord told Moses that the people were disobeying Him down below. He said, “They have made a molded calf and worshiped it.”

So Moses went down the mountain with the Ten Commandments. When he saw the calf and the people celebrating, he was angry. He threw down the Ten Commandments and the tables of stone broke into pieces. Moses punished the people for disobeying the Lord. He burned the calf in a fire and ground it into powder. He sprinkled the powder on the water and made everyone drink it.

But the Lord loved the people and forgave them. He gave Moses two new tables of stone with the Ten Commandments written on them. The people took good care of them. Later, they made a special box called the Ark of the Covenant to keep them in.

Reading Ages 7-10: The Golden Calf

New Church Concept

Teacher Background

Breaking off the golden earrings that were in the ears of your women, of your sons, and of your daughters represents drawing out from the sense of the letter of the Word such things as favor external loves and principles. By the ears is signified obedience, by gold, the good of love, here the delight of external loves. See *Arcana Coelestia* 10402

"By 'a calf' is signified the good of the external or natural man." *Arcana Coelestia* 9391

"Those who teach the outward things of the Word without the aid of what lies within, thus without the aid of authentic teachings about what is good and true, do not see the difference between truth and falsity, nor between good and evil. Rather, whatever coincides with the illusions of the senses they call truth, and whatever coincides with selfish cravings they call good. So they call falsity truth, and evil they call good." *Arcana Coelestia* 9425

A retelling of the story for children.

Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. He was gone for forty days and forty nights. The Lord had many important things to tell him. While Moses was out of sight, the children of Israel forgot about the Lord and asked Aaron to make a god to lead them. They wanted a god like the statues they had seen in Egypt. A common god there was a bull.

Before they left Egypt, the Lord had told the children of Israel to take gold and silver from their Egyptian neighbors, so they had lots of gold and silver. So Aaron asked the people to bring him golden earrings from their wives, their sons, and their daughters. He shaped the gold with an engraving tool and made a molded calf.

The Israelites were pleased with the calf and said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" So Aaron built an altar and proclaimed that the next day would be a feast day. The people rose up early on the feast day. They forgot how the Lord led them out of Egypt and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to worship the calf. They ate and drank, and played.

But the Lord knows everything. He knew about the golden calf. He told Moses, "Go, get down! For your people have made a calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"

So Moses went down with the tables of stone in his hand. As he came near the camp, he saw the calf and people dancing. He threw down the Ten Commandments in anger, and they broke into pieces. The tables breaking was a sign that the people had broken their covenant with the Lord. They had disobeyed the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods."

The people had done evil, and so they were punished. Moses took the calf they had made. He burned it in a fire, ground it to powder, and scattered it on the water. He made the children of Israel drink this water. While on the mountain, Moses had asked the Lord to forgive the people, and He had forgiven them. But there were still consequences.

The Lord called the children of Israel "stiff-necked". They had promised to obey Him but stubbornly insisted on their own way. This is how evil enters the world.

Later on Moses cut two new tables of stone. He took them up Mount Sinai, and the Lord wrote the same words on the tablets again. This time the children of Israel carefully put them in the Ark of the Covenant.

Reading Ages 11-14: The Golden Calf

Read Exodus 32:1-9, 15-16, 19-20 or use the retelling above.

Questions Ages 3-6

1. The people had promised to obey the Lord. Did they keep their promise? (No, they broke the first commandment.)
2. What did they ask Aaron to do? (make them an idol—the golden calf)
3. What did Aaron use to make the golden calf? (golden earrings from Egypt)
4. What happened when Moses came down from the mountain? (He threw down the tables of the Ten Commandments, and they broke.)
5. How did the Lord punish the people? (Moses ground up the golden calf, put the powder in water and made the children of Israel drink it.)

Questions Ages 7-10

1. What was the Lord's covenant with the children of Israel? (To obey His words)
2. Why did the people ask Aaron to make them an idol? (They could not see Moses. They wanted a god they could see.) When we don't read the Lord's Word, we can lose sight of the Lord, too, like the children of Israel.
3. Why did Aaron make an idol that looked like a calf? (Calf idols were common in Egypt, where the children of Israel had lived.)
4. How did Moses find out what was happening while he was up on the mountain? (The Lord told him.) The part of us that knows and loves the Lord can see whether what we are doing is right or wrong.
5. Why were the people punished for making an idol? (Because what they did was wrong.) Evil brings its own punishment.

Questions Ages 11-14

1. Have you experienced a time when you felt the Lord was absent from you, or out of sight, as Moses was out of sight on Mount Sinai? (When we do not read the Word, the Lord can appear to be absent from us.)
2. How would you describe the way the children of Israel reacted to Moses' absence? Have you had similar feelings? The appearance that the Lord had abandoned the children of Israel was a "test" or "temptation". Moses was absent for 40 days and nights, and 40 corresponds to "temptation". How do temptations "test" us? Why are they important? (Temptations test whether we will do the things the Lord has told us and not do what He has forbidden. They are important because that is how we grow spiritually closer to the Lord and to heaven.)
3. The children of Israel brought Aaron earrings to make an idol. The sense of hearing corresponds to "obedience". What relationship might there be between the people's choice to make an idol and the earrings used to make it? (The children of Israel had stopped listening to the Lord and were disobeying Him.) While it may appear that the children of Israel did not have the commandments yet, the Word tells us that they already knew them. The Lord giving them to Moses showed that they were spiritual laws, as well as natural laws.
4. What detail in this story shows that evil brings its own punishment? (The punishment was that the children of Israel had to drink the ground up calf statue—the very thing that they had made to disobey the Lord.)



Ages 3-6: The Golden Calf

Materials Needed

The Golden Calf Template, sturdy disposable plates, scissors, glue, yellow play dough (see recipe below) or modeling clay
optional: elbow macaroni, gold paint

Prepare in Advance

Print *The Golden Calf Template* for each child. For very young children, cut out and glue the calf to the plates before class. Cut several at once by stacking several templates carefully, so the pictures line up, and cutting a circle around the calf. Gather other supplies. If wished, paint the macaroni gold.

Play Dough

Ingredients (US measures):

Mix in a saucepan:

- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup salt
- 1 tablespoon cream of tartar

Add:

- 1 cup water
- yellow food coloring

Stir until thoroughly mixed. Cook on medium heat until thickened and jelly-like, stirring constantly. Turn out on a table or wax paper to cool. Knead while warm.

For video directions, see www.newchurchvineyard.org/resource/video-play-dough/.

Moses spent many days on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. The children of Israel could not see him. They asked Aaron to make them a false god they could see that was like the false gods they remembered from Egypt. Aaron took their golden earrings, shaped them into a calf and set up an altar to worship the calf.

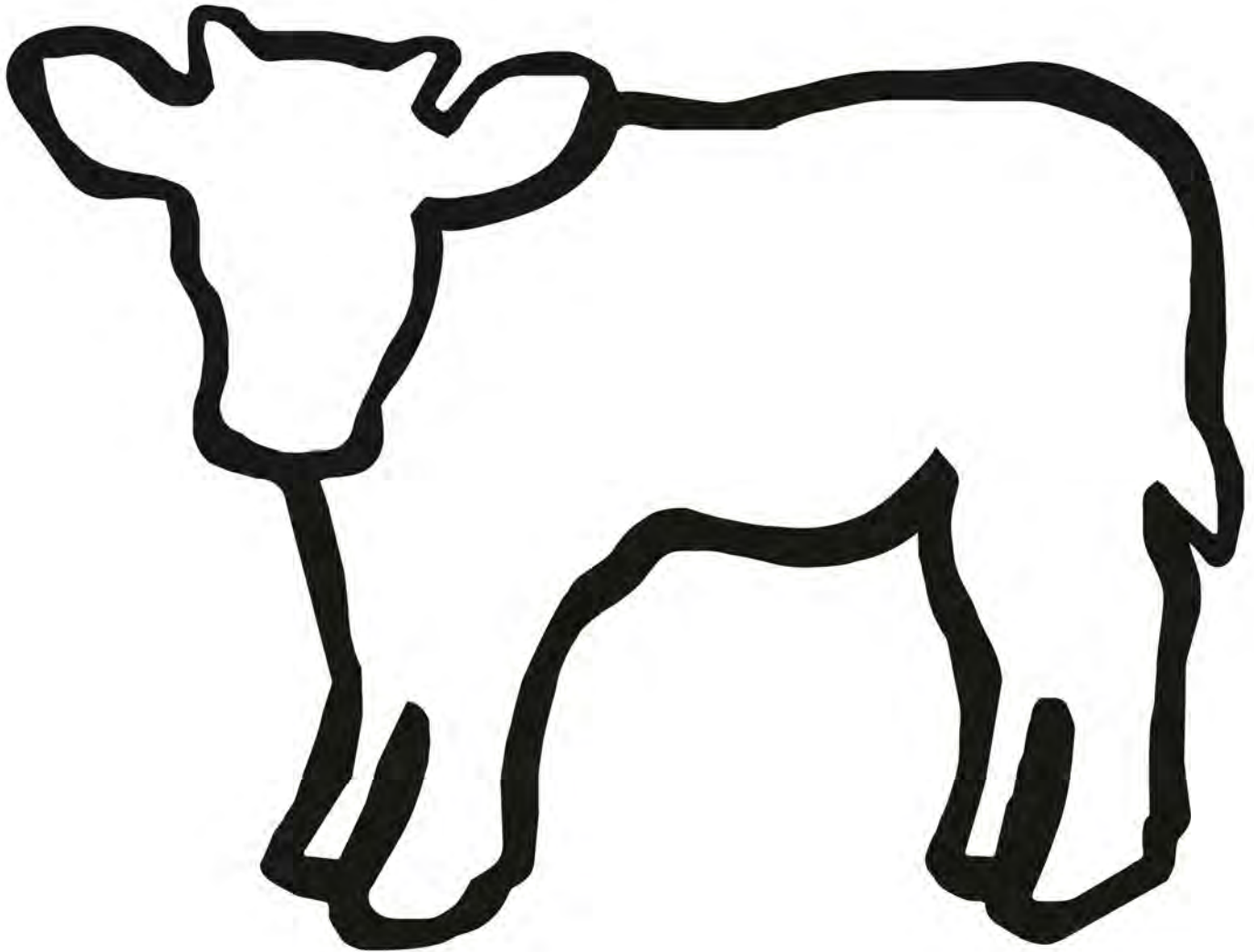
Children will make a model of the golden calf on a plate and decorate it with macaroni “earrings” to show that the children of Israel stopped listening to the Lord.



1. If you have not prepared ahead of time, ask children to cut around the *Golden Calf Template* in a big circle and glue it to a disposable plate.
2. Give each child a ball of play dough. Invite them to fashion the play dough into a calf, following the lines on the template. Some may choose to make just the body. Others may also form legs, head, etc.
3. *Optional*: Give each child a handful of macaroni elbow “earrings” to press into the calf to remember how the calf was made. You could invite children to pretend the macaroni noodles are earrings by holding them up to their ears and then “taking them off” before pressing them into the calf.
4. What happened to the calf when Moses came down from the mountain?
5. The calf the children of Israel made had to be destroyed because making it broke one of the Ten Commandments.

New Church Concept Teacher Background

The people gathering to Aaron means that they turned to the externals of the Word, of the church, and of worship. Aaron represents these externals separate from the internals because in Moses' absence he was the head of the nation. Moses represents the Word in the internal and the external sense. This can be seen from the fact that Aaron made the calf, proclaimed a feast and did not restrain the people. People who separate the internal of the Word, of the church, and of worship from the external, separate it from the holy Divine. For the internal of these is their spirit; but the external is the body of this spirit, and the body without the spirit is dead. Accordingly to worship what is dead is to worship an idol, in this case to worship the golden calf and to proclaim a feast to it. See *Arcana Coelestia* 10397.



Ages 7-10: Model the Golden Calf

Materials Needed

5 pieces of aluminum foil approx. 5x5" (13x13cm) for each student, copies of *Model the Golden Calf Photo Directions* to share

Prepare in Advance
Cut foil into pieces and read through the directions.

New Church Concept Teacher Background

"Earth's living creatures correspond to affections, the mild and useful ones to good affections, the fierce and useless ones to evil affections. Specifically, cattle and calves correspond to affections of the natural mind." *Heaven and Hell* 110

Faith in the one and only true God is what makes our goodness truly good even in its inner form. Faith in a false God, on the other hand, makes our goodness good in outer form only. This type of goodness is not intrinsically good; for example, the faith ancient people used to have in Jupiter, Juno, and Apollo; the faith the Philistines had in Dagon, and other Canaanites had in Baal. These kinds of faith are completely different from faith in the Lord, who is the true God and eternal life. See *True Christian Religion* 655

Children will model a "golden" calf from aluminum foil, as the children of Israel modeled a calf from the earrings they took from their ears. We recommend watching our video directions for this project at <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/resource/video-how-to-make-a-foil-calf>.



1. We're going to make a model of the golden calf to show what it takes to make gods in our own image.
2. How can you make something that looks just the way you want it to? You will probably think hard about what it is you want to make and then choose materials that can be shaped the way you want.
3. Can you remember a time when an adult told you to do something that you didn't want to do? Did you try to make what they asked you to do into something else—something you would prefer to do instead? For example, have you ever said, "No, *that's not what you said?*" or "I didn't hear you say *that!*"?
4. People sometimes react that way to the Lord's Word. This is like making a golden calf to worship.
5. Give each child five pieces of foil and copies of the *Photo Directions* to share. Help children follow the directions. You might also show them the video mentioned above.
6. As children work the foil, encourage them to think about what the children of Israel might have been thinking as Aaron shaped the calf from their earrings.
7. As they finish, remind them that the one the children of Israel made had to be destroyed because making it broke one of the Ten Commandments. Depending on your group, you may want to suggest they represent this part of the story by crushing the calf they have made.

New Church Concept Teacher Background

The Egyptians knew that a calf represented the good of charity. But when they began to make calves of gold, and to place them in their temples and worship them, they then inverted a true representative into a false representative. See *Arcana Coelestia* 7779

The children of Israel would not have been told to plunder the Egyptians if such actions had not represented something hidden. This can be deduced from the [negative] symbolism of silver and gold. False notions are gods of silver, and corrupt desires are gods of gold. See *Arcana Coelestia* 1551

Commandment 1: The Golden Calf

Model the Golden Calf Photo Directions

For video directions, go to <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/resource/video-how-to-make-a-foil-calf>.

1. Use 5 pieces of foil. Take one piece and crunch into a body.



2. Put another layer of foil over the body and shape it into legs.



3. Add another layer of foil. Bulk up the legs and shape a tail.



4. The tail and legs will look like this when you have finished.



5. Crunch one end of a new piece of foil into a head leaving foil at the back to attach it to the body.



6. Attach the head to the body.



7. Wrap another layer of foil on top of the head and shape horns.



8. Your finished calf should look pretty much like this.



Ages 11-14: When the Lord Feels Absent

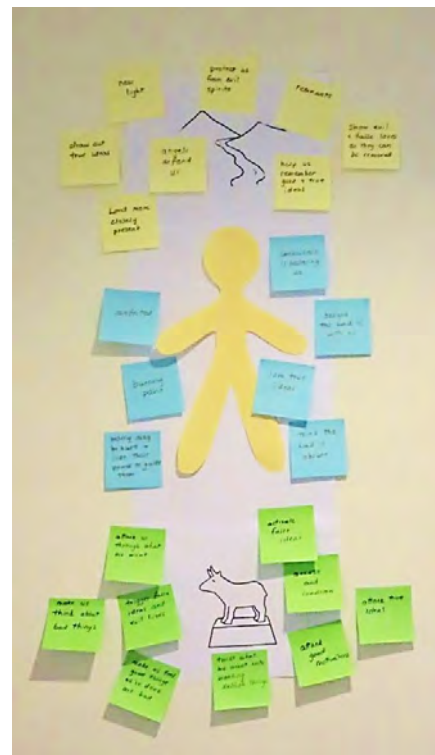
Materials Needed

Sticky notes in three colors; pens or pencils; scissors; paper; copy of *Mount Sinai* and *Golden Calf*; space on wall, table or floor to lay out large chart; a color copy of *When the Lord Feels Absent* for each student

Prepare in Advance

Gather materials. Set up the chart using the picture on the right as a guide. Put the *Golden Calf* at the bottom and *Mount Sinai* at the top. On a piece of paper draw a human figure (or cut one out) to put between them. Decide which color of sticky notes to use for angels, human beings, and evil spirits.

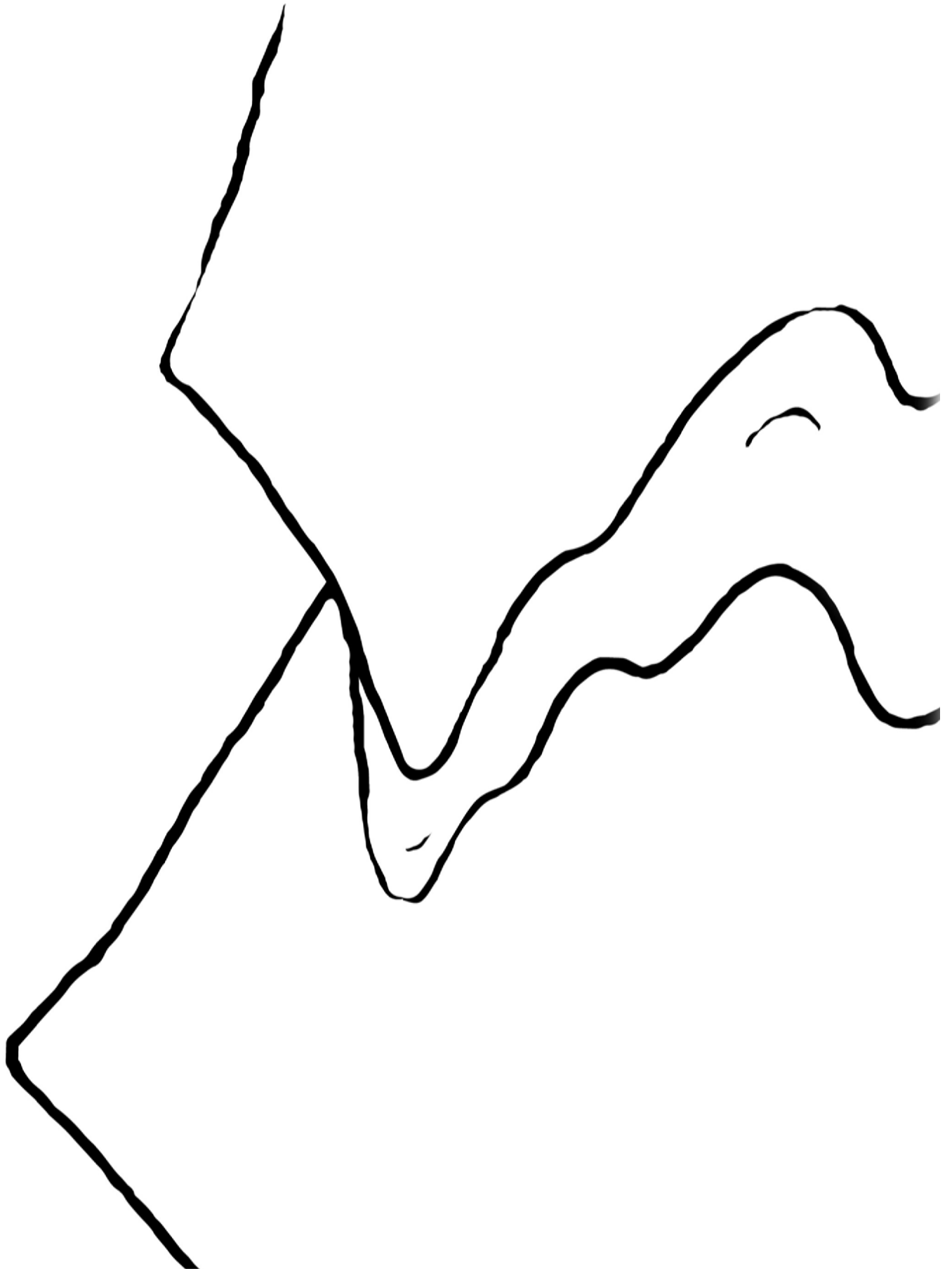
While Moses was up on Mount Sinai the children of Israel did not see him for forty days and nights. “Forty” means “temptation”. The children of Israel were tempted to think that the Lord was no longer with them. Like them, we sometimes feel the Lord is absent and experience temptation. This happens so we can grow and experience heavenly life. We experience heavenly life to the degree that we reject selfish and worldly feelings and thoughts. Without temptation, this growth would not take place. This activity helps students understand the inner structure of temptation.

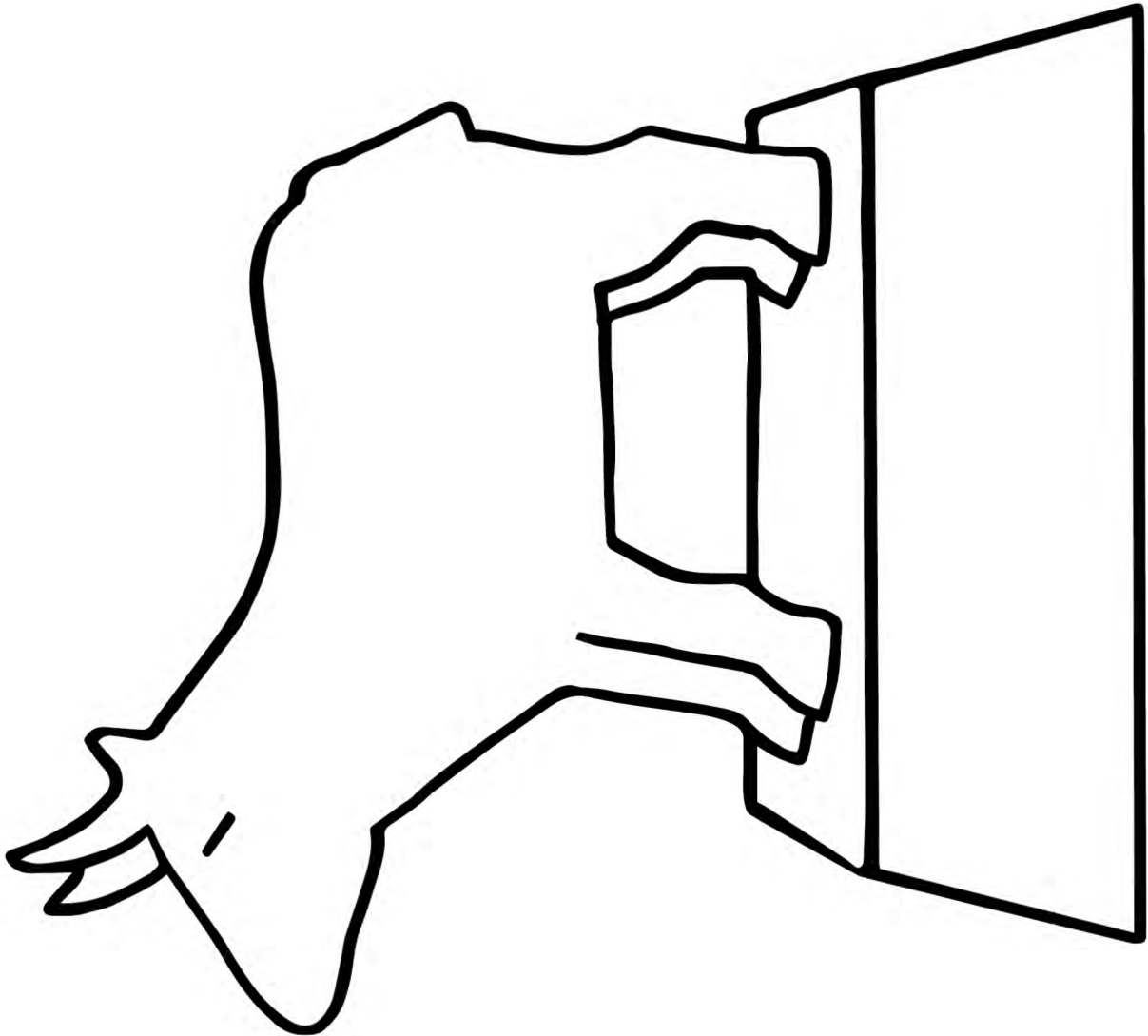


1. Have you been “tempted”? For example, wanted to eat something you knew you shouldn’t, to say something that would hurt another person, cheat on a test, etc.
2. What does “temptation” mean? (Knowing what’s right and wanting to do it, but struggling because you also feel like doing something wrong.)
3. During such struggles, we may feel that the Lord is not with us, or that our conscience is just pestering us, making us feel unhappy. But the Lord is most closely present with us at these times. He is reminding us what the Word teaches, so we can make good choices.
4. The Writings for the New Church talk about the battle we experience during temptation. While the Lord and His angels steer us towards what is right, evil spirits encourage selfish choices. We are going to make a chart to show the spiritual structure of a temptation, and what we experience as it is happening.
5. Hand out copies of *When the Lord Feels Absent*, sticky notes in three colors, and pens or pencils. Assign each person a quote or work as a group to read through all the quotations, to identify what is happening in a temptation.
 - For each quote, write the words shown in red—what *the Lord and His angels* do—on one color of sticky notes. Stick these notes around the mountain.
 - Write the words shown in blue—what *we* are thinking and feeling—on the another color of sticky note. Stick these notes around the human figure.
 - Write the words shown in bold black—what *evil spirits* want us to think and feel—on a third color of sticky note. Put these around the golden calf.
6. Discuss the process and the ways in which temptation makes us aware of how we need to change to become a heavenly person.

New Church Concept Teacher Background

As long as temptation lasts, people assume that the Lord is not present, for they are being harassed by evil genii, so harassed in fact that sometimes they have so great a feeling of hopelessness as scarcely to believe in the existence of any God at all. Yet at such times the Lord is more present than people can possibly believe. But once temptation subsides they receive comfort, and for the first time believe that the Lord is present. See *Arcana Coelestia* 840





When the Lord Feels Absent

Temptations help show us our **evil loves and false ideas** so they can be **removed**.

(*Arcana Coelestia* 5246)

We experience temptations when evil spirits **attack true ideas or good motivations**. When this happens, **angels defend us**. Temptation only happens when someone **loves the true ideas they know**. People who do not love true ideas are not troubled about them. But people who love true ideas **worry that they might be hurt and lose their power to guide them**. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 4274)

There are two types of temptation. The first involves what we think. The second involves what we love. When temptations involve what we think, evil spirits **make us think about bad things** we have done. They use these to **accuse and condemn us**. They also **bring up good things we have done but make us feel they were actually bad**. This kind of temptation is mild. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 751)

During temptation evil spirits **trigger false ideas and evil loves**. They **cleverly bring out memories** of things we have thought and done. But angels who are with us **help us remember good and true ideas**. We feel like our **conscience is pestering us**. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 751)

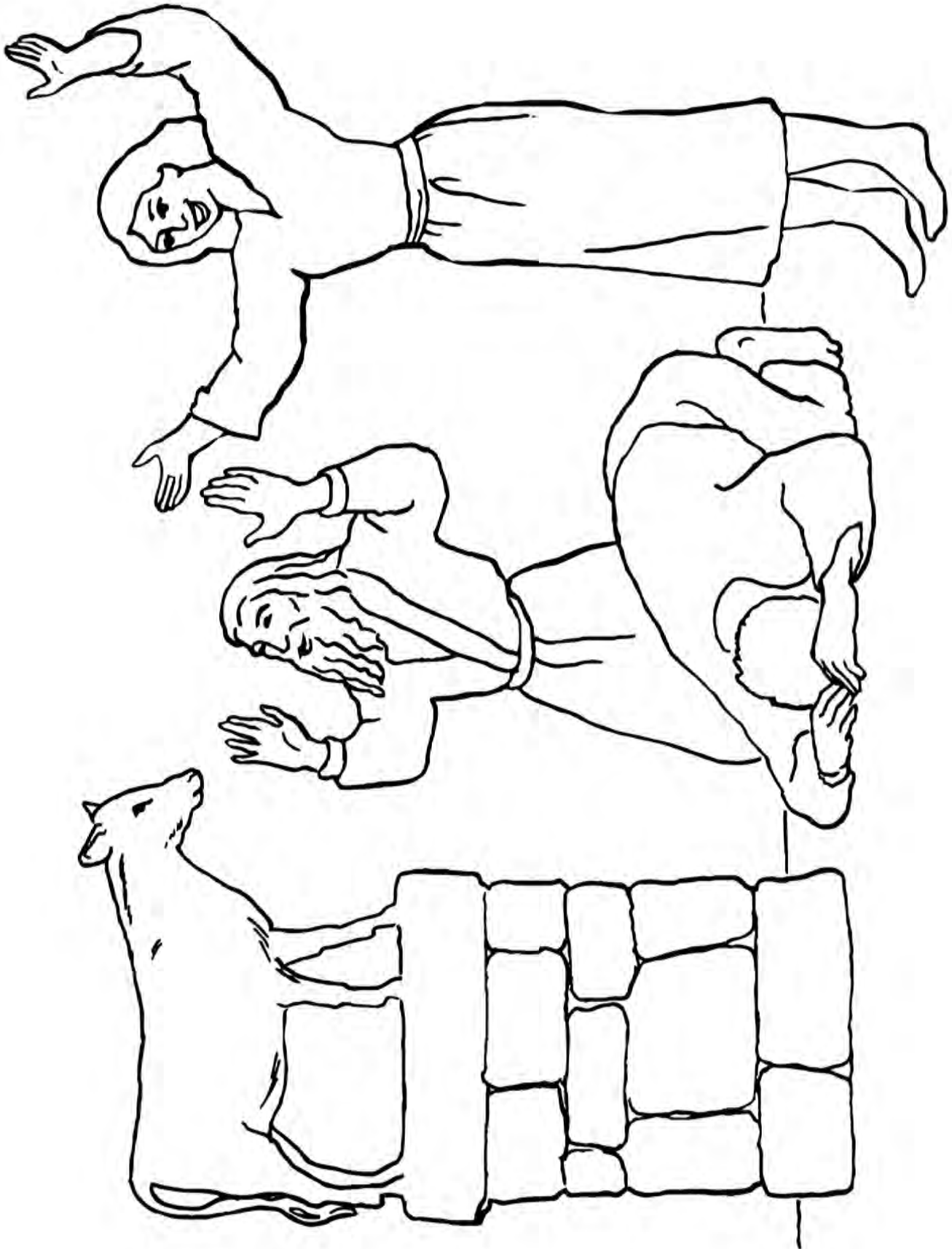
The Lord gives us true ideas and good loves called remnants. When we experience temptations, angels with us **draw out these true ideas that protect us from evil spirits** who **activate false ideas**. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 737)

When temptation involves things we love, evil spirits **secretly attack us through what we want**. Nobody believes they are doing it. They **twist what we want**. They **turn it into wanting things that are selfish and untrue**. They do this in a way that makes us think it is coming from us. Temptations like this are hard. They feel like **burning pains**. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 751)

As long we are being tempted, we **think that the Lord is absent**. Evil spirits can make us **doubt that God exists**. Yet **the Lord is more closely present** than we can ever believe. When temptation stops, we **are comforted** and then **believe the Lord is with us**. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 840)

When temptation stops, **new light** shines forth.

(See *Arcana Coelestia* 5246)



Closing & Recitation

The first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before My face” means that we should always put the Lord first. At times, we may feel as if the Lord is absent and find that hard to do. If that happens, we can stop and remember that the Lord is always with us, that He is close to us and caring for us at every moment.

Throughout this program, we will be memorizing the Ten Commandments. We will start by learning the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before My face.” Let’s say it together now. Take home a recitation slip and practice it each day.

1. You shall have no other gods before My face. Exodus 20:3	1. You shall have no other gods before My face. Exodus 20:3
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Online Extras

Looking for something “extra”? Try these online ideas!

Ages 3-6 Make a puppet and act out the story <http://www.sundayschoolcrafts.net/10-commandments-gold-calf-lunch-bag-craft.php>

Ages 7-10 *Golden Calf Idol*, a paper craft <https://craftingthewordofgod.com/2013/08/28/golden-calf-idol/>

Ages 11-14 *Golden Calf Word Search* <https://biblepathwayadventures.com/activities/golden-calf/>