

DEEP PREP GUIDE

FOCUS | OCTOBER 12 | BIG GOD STORY

BOTTOM LINE:

When we lose focus on God, our life gets blurry.

STORY TEXT:

Exodus 32:1-17

MEMORY VERSE:

“I look at this people—stubborn, people! But I’ll make a great nation out of you.”

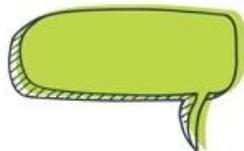
EXODUS 32:10 (MSG)

Our culture has a love/hate relationship with the word “idol”. It’s easy to say we idolize someone in the same sentence that we may say we “admire” them. At the same time, when was the last conversation with someone where you shared what may be a dangerous “idol” in your relationship with God?

We need to find an intersection of those feelings. On one level, idolatry and idols are dangerous things that draw focus away from our Creator, Father God. On another level, idols become ways for us to see where our focus has turned to when our life seems to get blurry. Some days we have idols we don’t even know we have. It can be even more confusing when we talk about things turning “into” idols by way of giving our attention in a wrong way. So where do we stand?

Have you had blurred vision before? Sometimes it happens suddenly or maybe over time. Either way, it tends to turn into an emergency situation because in many ways, we can only go as far as we can see, or to use our word tonight, focus. When life gets blurry, when things look more complex than they really are, when relationships appear to be more troublesome, what’s going on? Do we have an idol problem? The truth is, we have a focus problem.

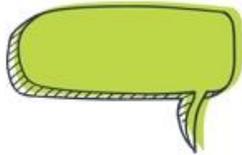
In our story tonight, we find the Israelites struggling to wait on God. Moses, as their leader, seeks to stand between the people and God, as the messenger. Unfortunately, as time passes, the people of Israel fasten a golden calf and begin idolizing the calf, thus creating hostility between God, Moses, and themselves. God becomes angry, and the people become disillusioned with the core reality of worship: focus.



TENSION

Students stand between several different worlds on a daily basis. Between their family life, social (in person) life, social media (internet) life, sports/activities, and trying to mix in church and community life in there, it becomes a complicated schedule to help students find focus. The tension in this text is that for many students (as with the Israelites), their response to what's happening in front of them blurs their vision. The fact that they respond to what is happening with creating an idol is a symptom of a much bigger problem than what the idol actually is. The point is not what the idol is, but what does the presence of idol represent? Consequently, what does that do to our relationship with God and others?

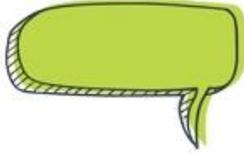
More often than not, focus and blurriness in life comes as a result of circumstances. It comes from lacking consistency in doing what God has called us into, and consequently, it appears as though we are wandering from day to day. But as J.R.R. Tolkien reminds us, 'all who wander are not lost.' Just because one may have blurred vision, doesn't mean the vision is lacking. It means there needs to be some reorienting, some focusing, to make sure we are focused on what really matters.



TEXT [CONTEXT]

While Moses was up on the mountain receiving God's laws, the people were getting anxious down on the plain. Moses spent forty days (Exodus 24:18) up on the mountain with God, and by the end of that time, the people were beginning to think Moses had died or left them. The people urged Aaron, their temporary leader, to make gods for them to follow. Since they were accustomed to having visual representations of gods, this was the natural (but sinful) result of their thinking. Aaron took their gold earrings, which they had brought from Egypt, and melted them down to make a golden idol. The idol he crafted for them was a calf, but Aaron maintained the name of the Lord in connection with it (Exodus 32:5). He was merging the pagan practices they were familiar with and the worship of the God they were just beginning to be re-acquainted with. Aaron called the people together and told them that the golden calf was the god who delivered them from Egypt.

The story creates a very simple picture of what happens to people when we have too much time on our hands. Not saying we are all going to create golden calves with our prized jewelry, but there are interesting parallels to life when we look at the story as it is. The Israelites were waiting for Moses to have his God encounter, and in their own attempts to draw themselves into worship, they create something that they can see and touch to be a god connection. Did they know what they were doing was wrong? Maybe. But they were anxiously waiting for God to show up. The problem is when we anxiously wait, what happens to our focus? Things start to misalign and fall out of picture with our relationships.



TRUTH

God is not to be worshiped with images, because any image we make will draw more attention to the work of our hands than the God who made all things. Also, there is no way we can ever fully represent the holiness and awesomeness of God through an image. To attempt to do so will always fall short. On top of this, God is Spirit, and we cannot form an image of a spirit. Idolatry is following our own intent. God is faithful to His end of the bargain, and he is showing Israel how to be faithful to our end.

Walking the road as the Israelites in the story and seeing how we walk in our lives is equally important. It's easy to judge the Israelites (as many have done), but the reality is that God STILL saw them as His people, chosen and beloved. God sees us with our blurred vision, our subtle lack of focus, and even our blatant back-turning of God and He still sees us as His beloved people. However, blurriness is a byproduct. What does blurriness lead us towards? Looking at where our focus is.

What time/energy/resources need to be reoriented and changed to draw more focus on our relationship with God? It starts with a simple life application. Find a simple way to daily draw attention to God. It can be a symbol (for Tim Balow, it's his inch marker tattoo on his wrist), it can be certain time during the day when you actually schedule a time to pray. It can be a simple question of "where is God in this" whenever something that you didn't expect. Find that way to draw attention and focus to God in life, and blurriness in life + relationships will start to fade.