

In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 12. Show Me Your Glory

Reading: Exodus 32:1-34:35

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers the gravity of the golden calf, the cost of mediation, and the mercy by which God renews covenant fellowship.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches the gravity of idolatry, the power of intercessory prayer, Christ's unique mediation, divine immutability, and the mercy by which God restores communion after grave sin.

Israel breaks the covenant almost as soon as it is ratified. Moses descends, judges the apostasy, returns to intercede, and refuses to continue without God's presence. The Lord does not minimize Israel's sin, yet he hears Moses, reveals his merciful name, and renews the covenant. Help the group hold judgment and mercy together. The goal is not to make God seem less holy or sin less serious, but to notice that God's mercy restores a relationship Israel could never repair by itself.

What You Need to Know

The crisis comes at the foot of Sinai

The golden calf is not a failure by people who have never encountered God. Israel has heard the covenant, assented to it, and watched Moses enter the cloud. The location and timing make the apostasy especially grave. Aaron even announces a feast to the Lord, showing that idolatry can attempt to combine the Lord's name with worship shaped by human desire.

The Lord's relenting and his immutability

Exodus 32:14 says that the Lord relented, using the Hebrew verb *naham*. The narrative presents Moses' intercession as genuinely consequential. Catholic doctrine also confesses that God is unchanging in his being, wisdom, and loving purpose. These truths need not compete. Scripture narrates God's eternal purpose as it is encountered within history, including his free decision to make creaturely prayer a real means through which he acts. Moses does not correct God by appealing to a higher moral law. He appeals to God's own name, saving work, reputation among the nations, and promises.

The judgment in the camp

The destruction of the calf, the deaths carried out by the Levites, and the subsequent plague make this one of the hardest episodes in Exodus. Do not rush past it or turn it into a transferable warrant for religious violence. The passage presents a unique act of covenant judgment within Israel's theocratic setting. It gives no authority for private vengeance, coercion, or violence in the name of correcting another person's worship.

Moses is a costly but limited mediator

Moses repeatedly stands between the Lord and Israel. He appeals for mercy, returns up the mountain, offers to be blotted from God's book, and refuses to lead without God's presence. Yet his offer does not itself atone for Israel's sin. He is a real mediator whose limitations direct the Christian reader toward the perfect mediation of Christ.

The tent outside the camp

Exodus 33 describes Moses meeting the Lord at a tent outside the camp while the tabernacle commanded in Exodus 25 to 31 has not yet been constructed. The distance dramatizes the rupture caused by sin. At the same time, the pillar of cloud and the Lord's conversation with Moses show that communion has not been abandoned.

Seeing God's glory

The Hebrew word *kabod* carries the sense of weight, majesty, or glory. Moses asks to see God's glory, but the answer is not unrestricted visual possession of the divine essence. God promises to make his goodness pass before Moses, proclaims his name, shelters him, and permits a limited vision. Exodus 34 therefore joins glory to God's freedom, mercy, justice, and covenant fidelity.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

A covenant broken almost immediately

Exodus 24:3-8 records Israel's assent, sacrifice, and reception of the blood of the covenant. Exodus 32 exposes how quickly human beings can violate what they have sincerely promised. Covenant renewal must therefore rest on God's fidelity and mercy, not Israel's unaided constancy.

Intercession within the covenant

Abraham pleaded for Sodom in Genesis 18:22-33, and Deuteronomy 9:7-10:11 later remembers Moses' fasting and intercession after the calf. Biblical mediation includes standing before God for a guilty people while appealing to God's own justice, mercy, and promises.

Moses and the greater mediator

Moses risks himself for Israel but cannot finally bear away Israel's guilt. Hebrews 7:25 and 9:15 present Jesus as the enduring high priest and mediator whose own saving sacrifice establishes the new covenant. Moses' intercession is real, but Christ's mediation is unique and definitive.

Glory unveiled in Christ

Moses receives a protected and partial manifestation of glory. John 1:14-18 proclaims that the Word made flesh reveals the Father's glory, while 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 contrasts the fading radiance on Moses' face with the transforming glory encountered in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, c. 315-386

St. Cyril points to Aaron's making of the calf and Moses' plea to be blotted out with the people as evidence that even very grave sin need not lead to despair when God's loving mercy is sought through repentance.

Catechetical Lecture 2.10.

How this is cited. This is a close summary of St. Cyril's use of Aaron and Moses in his catechesis on sin, repentance, and God's loving-kindness.

For the group. Let the gravity of sin produce repentance, not the hopelessness that refuses to return to God.

St. Gregory the Great, c. 540-604

St. Gregory presents Moses as a model of compassionate spiritual leadership because Moses is willing to be blotted from God's book rather than abandon the people entrusted to him.

Pastoral Rule 2.5.

How this is cited. This is a summary of St. Gregory's explicit appeal to Exodus 32:31-32 when describing the pastoral leader's compassionate solidarity with others.

For the group. Christian leadership does not stand above another person's failure. It carries that person before God in prayer.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, c. 335-c. 395

St. Gregory teaches that Moses' desire to see God is not extinguished by what he has already received. The true vision of God draws the soul onward, following God rather than imagining that the infinite God has been mastered or contained.

The Life of Moses 2.230-239.

How this is cited. This is a summary of St. Gregory's interpretation of Moses' request to see God's glory and the command to follow behind God.

For the group. A real encounter with God should deepen desire, humility, and faithful following rather than produce spiritual self-satisfaction.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 210. After Israel's apostasy, God reveals himself to Moses as merciful, gracious, patient, and faithful, showing that divine mercy belongs to the revelation of his name.

CCC 212. God is everlasting and unchanging, remaining faithful to himself and to his promises.

CCC 2113. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God and remains a constant temptation whenever a creature takes the place due to God.

CCC 2576. Moses' intimate prayer grows from his divine mission and from his encounter with the living God.

CCC 2577. Moses stands in the breach and intercedes after Israel's apostasy, appealing to God's honor and fidelity rather than merely presenting his own wishes.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

God dwelling among his people (develop). Let the group feel the threat of Exodus 33:3 before discovering why Moses refuses to proceed without God's presence.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). Trace Moses' repeated movement between God and the people, then allow his costly but limited offer to prepare the comparison with Christ.

Where is the lamb? (develop). Moses offers himself but cannot remove Israel's guilt. Do not force the Passover connection. Let the insufficiency of every merely human mediator sharpen the need for Christ's effective self-offering.

Why God brings Israel out (develop). Israel was brought out to belong to God, serve him, and live in his presence. The calf reveals that liberation without faithful worship can become another form of slavery.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Contrast Israel's impatient fear, Aaron's surrender to the crowd, and Moses' bold reverence before the Lord.

Deliverance through water (hold). Do not force this thread into the session.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

If God is unchanging, Exodus 32:14 cannot really mean that Moses' prayer affected what happened. Calling the verse anthropomorphic seems to empty it of meaning.

The text presents Moses' prayer as a real part of the outcome, and Catholic theology should not reduce prayer to theater. Yet Moses changes neither God's character nor his covenant purpose. He appeals precisely to what God has already revealed and promised. God's unchanging will can eternally include both a threatened judgment and the freely chosen intercession through which mercy is given within history.

The killing in Exodus 32:25-29 makes religious violence appear holy.

The passage presents an extraordinary covenant judgment in ancient Israel, not a standing command for believers. Nothing here authorizes private vengeance, forced conversion, or violence against those judged unfaithful. Acknowledge the horror of the episode, keep it within its unique narrative setting, and resist speculative claims about details the text does not supply.

Session Goals

1. Identify the actions and desires that make the golden calf a direct covenant betrayal.
2. Trace Moses' intercession and distinguish his real mediation from his inability to atone fully for Israel.
3. Reconcile the real efficacy of prayer with the Church's confession that God is unchanging.
4. Discover why God's presence matters more to Moses than reaching the promised destination without him.
5. Observe how God reveals his glory through goodness, mercy, justice, and covenant renewal.

6. Compare Moses' veiled radiance and limited mediation with the definitive mediation and transforming glory of Christ.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Allow 10 minutes for prayer and Win, 14 minutes for the selected readings, 48 to 53 minutes for Build, 10 minutes for Send and Live It This Week, and 3 minutes for the closing prayer and memory verse.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper conversation under Question 3 first.
2. Ask Question 10 only at ground level, without extended discussion of every phrase in 2 Corinthians 3.
3. Condense Question 2 into a two-minute comparison with Exodus 24.
4. If necessary, assign Question 9 as personal reflection after the session, but still read Exodus 34:6-9 aloud.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Holy God, you are merciful and gracious, yet you do not treat sin as something small. Give us honest hearts as we listen to your word. Teach us to turn from every idol, to trust the mediation of your Son, and to desire your presence above every lesser gift. Holy Spirit, guide our observations and our conversation. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. When have you discovered that receiving what you wanted was less important than having the right person with you?

W2. What tends to make waiting difficult for you?

Keep this warm and personal. Do not turn the second question into an early judgment of Israel.

Read

Read aloud

Use four readers. Read Exodus 32:1-14, 32:30-35, 33:1-23, and 34:1-10 aloud. Ask everyone to scan Exodus 32:15-29, 34:11-28, and 34:29-35 when those sections arise in the questions.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The covenant broken

1. In Exodus 32:1-6, what do the people want, what does Aaron do, and what details show that this is more than an innocent attempt to make worship tangible?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people want a visible god to go before them because Moses has delayed. Aaron accepts their gold, fashions the calf, builds an altar, and announces a feast to the Lord. The people then sacrifice, eat, drink, and engage in revelry. They replace worship directed by God's word with an image and ritual shaped by impatience and desire, even while attaching the Lord's name to it.

2. Compare Exodus 24:3-8 with Exodus 32:1-6. What makes the timing of the calf especially serious?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Israel has only recently heard the covenant, promised obedience, received the blood of the covenant, and seen Moses enter God's presence. The calf is therefore not a mistake made in ignorance. It is a rapid betrayal of a relationship the people have solemnly accepted.

3. Scan Exodus 32:7-29. What words, actions, and consequences communicate the gravity of Israel's apostasy?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List what Israel does and what follows.

Ground. Ask which details mark this as covenant betrayal rather than ordinary sin.

Depth. Discuss why the gravity of a sin is measured by the relationship it breaks.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Lord describes the people as corrupt and quick to turn aside. Moses breaks the tablets, destroys the calf, confronts Aaron, calls for a decision, and orders judgment in the camp. The narrative does not treat idolatry as a harmless preference. The broken tablets visibly correspond to a broken covenant, while the deaths and later plague show that sin damages both communion with God and the community.

Dig Deeper

Notice how Aaron explains himself in verses 22-24. What responsibility does he acknowledge, and what responsibility does he evade?

Standing in the breach

4. Read Exodus 32:30-35 together with Moses' earlier plea in verses 11-14. What does Moses appeal to, what does he offer, and where do you see both the cost and the limit of his mediation?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses appeals to God's saving work, his reputation among the nations, and his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. He then confesses the people's great sin and offers to be blotted from God's book if they cannot be forgiven. His willingness to identify himself with the guilty people reveals costly love, but God does not accept Moses as a substitute who can erase their guilt. Judgment remains, and Moses must continue to lead a people who still need mercy.

5. Now press the previous observation. What should we make of Exodus 32:14 saying that the Lord relented after Moses prayed?

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. The most natural reading is that God intended to destroy Israel, Moses supplied considerations God had not adequately weighed, and God then changed his decision. If God is said to be unchanging, that doctrine appears to override the plain text and make Moses' intercession merely apparent.

Answering from the text. The text does present Moses' intercession as real and consequential, so it should not be reduced to playacting. Yet every reason Moses gives comes from God himself: God's prior deliverance, his name among the nations, and his sworn promises. Moses does not improve God's morality or provide new information. Within the narrative, God has called a mediator who responds according to God's revealed covenant purpose. Numbers 23:19 and Malachi 3:6 also deny that God changes as creatures do. Catholic teaching therefore holds together God's immutable fidelity and his free choice to make prayer a genuine cause within the unfolding of history.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses' prayer truly matters, but it does not alter God's character or correct a forgotten promise. God acts through the mediator he appointed, and Moses' plea expresses the very fidelity and mercy God has already revealed. Divine immutability does not make prayer unreal. It assures us that prayer is addressed to the God who remains faithful to his name and promises.

If your presence will not go

6. In Exodus 33:1-17, what can Israel still receive, what is threatened, and what does Moses refuse to accept?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Israel can still be sent toward the promised land, with angelic guidance and the promise of victory, but the Lord's immediate presence among the people is threatened because of their stubbornness. Moses refuses to treat the destination as enough. He asks how Israel will be distinguished from every other people if God does not go with them. God's presence, not land or success by itself, is the heart of the covenant gift.

Live discovery

Divide into two groups. One group reads Hebrews 7:23-28 and the other reads Hebrews 9:11-15. Ask each group to list what Jesus does that no merely human mediator can accomplish.

Let them find it. Hebrews 7:23-28; Hebrews 9:11-15

7. Moses is a genuine mediator, but his offer cannot finally remove Israel's guilt. What do the New Testament passages reveal about Jesus' mediation?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jesus holds his priesthood permanently, lives to intercede, is holy and undefiled, and offers himself once for all. His blood purifies the conscience, redeems transgressions, and establishes the promised new covenant inheritance. Moses pleads for the guilty and offers himself, but Jesus is the sinless mediator whose accepted self-offering actually accomplishes redemption.

Glory and the merciful name

8. Read Exodus 33:18-23 and 34:5-9 closely. Moses asks to see God's glory. What does God promise to show or proclaim, and what limits does he set?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Name what God promises to show Moses and what he withholds.

Ground. Ask what God reveals instead of the sight Moses requested.

Depth. Consider why the proclamation of the name is a fuller answer than the vision would have been.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God promises to make his goodness pass before Moses and to proclaim his name. He also declares his sovereign freedom in showing grace and mercy. Moses cannot see God's face and live, so God shelters him and grants a limited vision. When the Lord passes by, his glory is disclosed through the proclamation of his merciful, gracious, patient, faithful, just, and holy character.

9. In Exodus 34:1-10, who takes the initiative toward renewal, what is Moses required to do, and how does Moses respond to God's self-revelation?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God commands Moses to prepare new tablets and come up the mountain, then descends, proclaims his name, and promises covenant action. Moses must cut the tablets, ascend, listen, and again plead for the people. He bows in worship, asks the Lord to travel among this stubborn people, and seeks pardon and restored belonging. Renewal is God's merciful initiative, received through obedient response and mediation.

Live discovery

Ask pairs to read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18. Have them circle words connected to glory, veil, Spirit, freedom, and transformation, then compare the passage with Moses' shining face.

Let them find it. 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

10. After scanning Exodus 34:29-35, what happens to Moses, how do the people react, and how does St. Paul develop this scene for Christians?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. What repeated words or contrasts did your pair notice?

Ground. How is Christian transformation greater than merely observing glory reflected on someone else's face?

Depth. How does St. Paul preserve the goodness of Moses' ministry while still declaring the surpassing glory of the new covenant?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses' face shines because he has spoken with the Lord, and the people are afraid to approach him. He veils his face after communicating God's commands. St. Paul acknowledges the real glory associated with Moses but points to a greater and enduring glory in the new covenant. In Christ the veil is removed, the Spirit gives freedom, and believers are transformed into the Lord's image from one degree of glory to another.

11. Looking across Exodus 32 through 34, what has been restored by the end, and what signs show that the damage of sin was not imaginary or inconsequential?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God renews the covenant, rewrites the tablets, promises to act, receives Moses again, and continues to speak through him to Israel. His glory is reflected from Moses' face. Yet the calf has been destroyed, judgment has fallen, the people have mourned, Moses has labored in intercession, and renewed commands are necessary. Mercy restores genuine fellowship without pretending that the covenant was never broken.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where are you most tempted to want God's gifts, direction, or success without wanting the demanding closeness of God himself?

S2. Whom might God be asking you to carry in persistent intercessory prayer rather than criticize from a distance?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Make a fifteen-minute examination of conscience focused on idolatry. Ask what receives the first claim on your time, money, imagination, loyalty, and sense of security. Name one concrete change and begin it within twenty-four hours.
2. Choose one person who is struggling or distant from God. Pray for that person by name each day for seven days, appealing to God's mercy rather than rehearsing the person's faults.
3. Spend at least twenty minutes before the Blessed Sacrament, if possible. Ask for no practical outcome during the first ten minutes. Simply pray, Lord, if your presence does not go with me, do not let me move ahead.
4. Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation this week if you are conscious of grave sin or have been postponing confession. If you are not Catholic or are unable to receive the sacrament, speak honestly to God about your sin and arrange a conversation with a priest or trusted Catholic mentor.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 34:6

"The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy and faithfulness,'"

Exodus 34:6

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in mercy, forgive us for the ways we exchange your glory for things we can control. Thank you for giving us Jesus Christ, who lives to intercede for us and whose sacrifice truly reconciles us to you. Keep us close to your presence, make us faithful in prayer for others, and transform us by your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Exodus 32:1-34:35** Golden calf, Moses' intercession, the threatened withdrawal of God's presence, revelation of glory, covenant renewal, and Moses' radiant face

Covenant background and intercession

- **Exodus 24:3-8** Israel's assent and the blood of the covenant
- **Genesis 18:22-33** Abraham's intercession
- **Deuteronomy 9:7-10:11** Moses' later account of the calf and his intercession

God's fidelity and immutability

- **Numbers 23:19** God does not change as human beings do
- **Malachi 3:6** The Lord does not change

Christ the definitive mediator

- **Hebrews 7:23-28** Christ's permanent priesthood and continuing intercession
- **Hebrews 9:11-15** Christ's self-offering and mediation of the new covenant

Glory fulfilled

- **John 1:14-18** The incarnate Word reveals divine glory
- **2 Corinthians 3:7-18** Moses' veil, the Spirit, and transformation in Christ

Next session

- **Exodus 35:1-39:43** The construction and completion of the sanctuary

Terms

- **naham.** A Hebrew verb that can express relenting, being moved, or turning from an announced course of action
- **kabod.** Glory, weight, majesty, or the manifested splendor of God's presence
- **panim.** Face or presence, a significant term in Moses' plea that God's presence accompany Israel

Catechism

- CCC 210. God reveals his merciful and faithful name after Israel's apostasy.
- CCC 212. God is everlasting, unchanging, and faithful.
- CCC 2113. Idolatry gives a creature the place owed to God.
- CCC 2576. Moses' intimate prayer grows from his mission and encounter with God.
- CCC 2577. Moses stands in the breach and intercedes for Israel.