



## Chapter 7

### The Golden Calf: Been There, Done That Reflections to Journal and Share

- What are some of the implications for you of this wilderness case history? Like the early Hebrews, God's people today still live in a polytheistic culture. The Western ideological gods that consistently get offered up to us as either replacements for, or as a helper to Jehovah, are materialism, the American Dream, the Good Life, individualism, financial security, to name but a few.
  - ◊ What would you add to this list of contemporary idols that we are tempted to embrace?
  - ◊ Does this idol-making tendency hit close to home right now in your life?
- An idol is anything that either takes God's place, misrepresents Him, or takes some attention and focus away from Him. C. S. Lewis once observed that our hearts can so easily become "idol making factories." In examining our lives for possible idols, perhaps some helpful diagnostic questions are:
  - ◊ What is it that you think about more than God and His Kingdom?
  - ◊ What is it that you devote more time and energy to instead of pursuing Him?
  - ◊ In analyzing your last 100 prayers, what do you seem to be desiring more than God?
  - ◊ What one thing, e.g., a spouse, the perfect job, a financial wind fall, etc., that if it suddenly showed up in your life right now would finally put you on the road to happiness, or at least, that is what you have been telling yourself?
  - ◊ What do you worry about? Most likely the thing(s) you are worrying about can easily become more important than God Himself, and therefore an idol. As Helmut Thielicke once observed: Worry is idolatry.
- Now revisit this issue of idols depending on your responses to those diagnostics questions:
  - ◊ Do we depend upon and trust in God alone, or do we pragmatically depend upon God + Something (from either our secular or religious cultures) for our daily manna? What has been, or still might be, the "something" in your life that you have made into a god to help God out in case He doesn't deliver for you on your timetable?
  - ◊ The irony of the Golden Calf debacle is that God's people took a gift from God, the gold and silver He purposed for them, and used it to make something to meet their present, perceived needs. In doing so, the end result was that it lessened their need for sole dependence upon Him. Ring any bells? Remember Paul's challenging question in I Cor. 4:7b: What do you have that you did not receive? What gifts, abilities, capacities, resources, and endowments have you received from God that you might be using to actually lessen your total dependency on Him? In other words, what idols might still co-exist in your life with God right now?
- What did you learn about God in this chapter? About our human nature?
- Where are you challenged most in this chapter? What did you hear the Spirit whisper to you as you journeyed through this chapter?

### A Point to Ponder

**W**e seem to be particularly susceptible to creating "religious" idols, e.g., church growth models, the carefully crafted monthly para-church fund raising letter, our pet evangelism techniques and discipleship formulas – and there are many more that could be cited. The issue is not so much with our theology. Rather, it is how we pragmatically live life each day in the circumstances and stresses we face, particularly during those wilderness periods that God leads us to in order to detox us from our idols. There is nothing wrong with any of these religious models and templates per se, unless, of course, we start to rely upon them, and then come to depend on them instead of solely on God's provision and sustenance.

God's gifts and blessings are not the issue. The problem resides in how we receive and accept those gifts and blessings; what we do with them and make of them. If we take comfort in His gifts and put our faith and confidence (ever so slightly) in what we construct with them rather than the One who gave them to us, we become contemporary Israelites living as Egyptians in the wilderness of today's culture. We need to be people who never forget to remember who God is and how God does things, regularly reflecting on His utter faithfulness always and for everything. The theme of "remembering" is the most prevalent theme in all of the Scriptures. It occurs over 250 times. God must have a reason for this emphasis. He knows us so well! Failure to remember who God is and how God does things makes us vulnerable to being seduced (yet again) by the golden calves of this age.

Take time to reflect on what God has already done in your life – His faithfulness in the Egypts and deserts of your life. Become a superb historian of your own journey. Then ask yourself: Where do I need to build monuments of remembrance to the faithfulness of God just as Joshua did in front of the nation when they entered the Promised Land. Doing so will tend to keep you on your knees in grateful prayer.