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Session Time Frame

The sessions in this guide have been created to work in periods of 60 to 75 minutes. The sessions' core activities—listed at the beginning of each session under the “At a Glance” heading—will fill a 60-minute session. If you have more time, consider using the optional 15-minute session extensions. The session outlines include additional discussion questions and movie suggestions that can be incorporated to create sessions that go beyond 75 minutes.

2 HONORING God

Session Overview

The participants will begin this session exploring God's power as Creator of all life by creating a clay animal of their own. They will discuss another animal made by human hands as they explore the story of the Israelites' worshiping the gold bull-calf. This will be followed by the participants' discovering how the First Commandment calls us to honor God by giving God credit for God's great deeds. Finally, the young people will explore ways we may fail to honor God. In the optional session extension, the participants will create scenes and act as human statues to show how God is with us at all times of the day.

Objectives

Enable the participants to do the following:

- appreciate God's wonderful deeds and abilities
- recognize that in the story of the gold bull-calf, the Israelites failed to give God credit for the wondrous works God had accomplished
- discover that the First Commandment calls us to honor God by giving God the proper credit for all God has done
- learn about the ways we may fail to honor God and, as a result, break the First Commandment

At a Glance

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| A. Quick-Start Activity | (5 minutes) |
| B. Welcome and Opening Prayer | (5 minutes) |
| C. God's Wondrous Deeds and Abilities | (10 minutes) |
| D. The Gold Bull-Calf | (15 minutes) |
| E. Giving God the Proper Credit | (20 minutes) |
| F. Closing Prayer | (5 minutes) |

Optional Session Extension:

Honoring God: Morning, Noon, and Night (15 minutes)

Materials and Preparation

Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for each participant:

- ☐ lumps of modeling clay
- ☐ toothpicks
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ copies of handout 2-A, "Honoring God: Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due"

Gather the following additional items:

- ☐ several sheets of newsprint
- ☐ a roll of masking tape
- ☐ a set of crayons

Preparation Tasks

- ☐ Before the participants arrive, **post** several sheets of newsprint across the lower half of the board. Write across the top of the board the following instructions for the quick-start activity:
"Consider the wonderful things God does" (Job 37:14). On the sheets of newsprint below, draw pictures showing things God has done since the beginning of creation.
- ☐ Have the crayons available for the participants to pick up as they enter the meeting space.

Catechist Prayer

God, your First Commandment calls us to worship you, and you alone. Yet so often we turn to other things and give them the praise and attention that rightly belongs to you. Help me as I lead these young people to discover ways to focus all their honor and praise on you. Amen.

Background Reading

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, chapter 34
- CCC, numbers 2083–2086 (The First Commandment); 2110–2126 ("You Shall Have No Other Gods before Me")
- Exodus 20:2–5a (First Commandment), Exodus 32:1–10 (The Gold Bull-Calf), Job 37:14b (God's deeds)

Session Steps

A. Quick-Start Activity (5 minutes)

Greet the participants as they enter the meeting space, and invite them to begin the quick-start activity. Point out the following instructions on the board, but also share them verbally for those who might have trouble referencing the board:

"Consider the wonderful things God does" (Job 37:14). On the sheets of newsprint below, draw pictures showing things God has done since the beginning of creation.

B. Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Welcome** everyone and make any announcements.
2. **Light** a candle, make the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."
3. **Invite** a volunteer to read Exodus 20:2–5a.
4. **Pray** the following:
 - ▶ Lord, your First Commandment reminds us of your wondrous deeds and your desire to be first in our lives. As people with busy schedules, we often get distracted or even forget that you are there. Guide us today as we seek to understand how we can truly honor you by giving you the credit you deserve. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Close with the Sign of the Cross.

5. Briefly **explain** that this session will explore how we honor God.

C. God's Wondrous Deeds and Abilities (10 minutes)

1. **Ask** volunteers to share what they drew on the newsprint during the quick-start activity. **Introduce** the topic in these or similar words:
 - ▶ Look at the many wonderful accomplishments of God we identified in just a few short minutes. Today we will be exploring how we can honor God by keeping the First Commandment. By frequently considering the wonderful things God has done, we can begin to give God the honor that is due to God alone. So let us start by considering God's power and role in the world as Creator.
2. **Invite** each participant to think of his or her favorite type of animal. **Instruct** the young people to create the most realistic models of their animals that they can make out of the clay you will be handing out. Now

give each participant a lump of modeling clay and a toothpick. Explain that they may use the toothpicks as tools to give their animals detail.

3. When all the participants have finished their sculptures, use the following or similar questions to **lead** a discussion. Write the questions on the board while the young people are sculpting their animals.
 - ▶ In what way does your animal look like the real animal?
 - ▶ How is your animal different from the real animal? [*Highlight how the real animal made by God has life within and abilities that far exceed our mere piece of clay.*]
 - ▶ Even with the best materials and tools, would you ever be able to breathe life into your animal?
 - ▶ Would you ever dare to think that your animal was responsible for making rain or for making the plants grow?
 - ▶ Would you ever think your animal could answer your prayers?
4. Then **conclude** with these or similar words:
 - ▶ The First Commandment reminds us that God created everything in the universe, including all life, and that everything that happens to us and our world is ultimately in God's hands.
 - ▶ Obviously our mere clay animals can't compare to the work of God's hands. And it even seems silly to suggest that you would thank the clay animals or that you would even consider that these lumps of clay could answer prayers. But when we break the First Commandment and fail to honor God for creating everything there is, including us, it makes as little sense as thanking a piece of clay for making rain. Let us look at a story from the Book of Exodus to understand this further.

D. The Gold Bull-Calf (15 minutes)

1. **Explain** in these or similar words the context for the passage the young people are about to hear:
 - ▶ In this passage the Israelites have been freed from slavery in Egypt and have already agreed to follow the Ten Commandments. In particular, keep in mind the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God. . . . Worship no God but me."
2. **Distribute** a Bible to each participant, and ask the young people to turn to Exodus 32:1–10, the story of the Israelites and the gold bull-calf. When all are ready, **invite** a volunteer to read the passage aloud. (*Note:* The participants may also know this simply as the golden calf story. The term bull-calf is used in the Good News Translation to clarify that it was a young bull.)

- 2
3. **Lead** a discussion using the following questions:
 - ▶ What do the Israelites make out of gold? [*A gold bull-calf.*]
 - ▶ Who led the Israelites out of Egypt? [*God.*]
 - ▶ Whom do the Israelites thank for leading them out of Egypt? [*They thank the gold bull-calf. Highlight the similarities between the gold bull-calf and the participants' clay animals.*]
 - ▶ How does God respond? [*God threatens to kill all of them.*]
 - ▶ Why is God so angry? [*The Israelites broke the First Commandment by giving credit to a piece of gold for something wonderful God had done.*]
 4. **Ask** the participants if they have ever been in the situation where someone else got credit for something good that they or someone else did. Ask them how it made them feel, or how they think it would make them feel. Highlight the similarities between their stories and how God responded when the Israelites worshiped a golden statue. Then **make the following points** by saying these or similar words:
 - ▶ If we get upset when someone else gets credit for something we did, think about how unfair it was to God for the Israelites to worship the gold bull-calf. God had miraculously freed the Israelites from slavery by causing the plagues and parting the Red Sea, and the Israelites responded by turning to a piece of gold to say thank you!
 - ▶ This brings us to one way we can begin to understand the First Commandment and what it truly means to honor God. We can honor God by giving credit where credit is due. Namely, we give credit to God for creating and maintaining the universe and all that exists in it, including ourselves.

Conclude by saying these or similar words:

- ▶ Failing to give God proper credit goes well beyond thanking a piece of clay or worshiping a gold bull-calf. There are numerous ways we can break the First Commandment by failing to give God the proper credit or honor. We are going to explore some of these ways.

E. Giving God the Proper Credit (20 minutes)

1. **Divide** the large group into small groups of three or four. Be flexible about allowing some young people to work in pairs or even solo if that is their preferred way of working. **Distribute** a pen or pencil and a copy of handout 2-A to each participant. **Explain** that the page numbers after each question indicate where, in chapter 34 of *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, they will find the answers.

2. After the young people have completed the handout, **ask** for volunteers to share their answers with the group. **Reinforce**, or when necessary, **introduce** the correct responses, which are listed here, after the questions:
 1. What is idolatry? List some examples. [*It is making things more important than God: gold bull-calf, money, possessions.*]
 2. How does idolatry not give God the proper credit? [*God made everything and should be the focus of our love and attention.*]
 3. What are some superstitions people have? [*A black cat, a broken mirror, a lucky rabbit's foot.*]
 4. How do these superstitions not give God the proper credit? [*They pretend that objects have abilities that belong only to God.*]
 5. How does magic not give God the proper credit? [*The people involved in witchcraft are seeking to possess powers that only God possesses.*]
 6. What are spiritual favors? Give an example. [*An evangelist who claims you will be healed if you give him money, believing that donating lots of money to the Church will erase your sins.*]
 7. How does buying or selling spiritual favors not give God the proper credit? [*The person is selling something she or he does not own. The buyer is seeking from a person something only God can give.*]
 8. What is atheism? [*It is the total denial that God even exists.*]
 9. How does atheism not give God the proper credit? [*It is a total failure to see the works of God throughout creation and history, to the point of failing to acknowledge God at all.*]
3. **Conclude** the discussion using these or similar words:
 - ▶ As you can see, there are many ways we can fail to honor God. There are some ways, like superstitions, that you may not have even realized were offensive to God. That is why it is important to always be mindful of God's power and role in the world and in our lives.
 - ▶ When we seek to keep the First Commandment and honor God, we must first be mindful and "consider the wonderful things God does" [Job 37:14b], and then give God credit where credit is due.

F. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. Write on the board "Thanks be to God." **Invite** the participants to take out their handbooks. When all are ready, have them turn to page 391.
2. **Invite** a volunteer to read the prayer in the "Pray It!" sidebar. Then in these or similar words, **say**:

- I now invite you to name something you are thankful for that God has done for you. After each person speaks, we will all say the reply on the board: "Thanks be to God." *[You might give some examples of things the participants could name, such as getting to class safely, having food today, and so on.]*

3. After all the young people have had an opportunity to offer a prayer, **conclude** with the following:

- Lord, your First Commandment calls us to honor you and you alone. Help us to be ever mindful of your greatness and presence in our lives so that we may continually give you the glory and honor you deserve. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Close with the Sign of the Cross.

Optional Session Extension

Honoring God: Morning, Noon, and Night (15 minutes)

This session extension works best after step E, the "Giving God the Proper Credit" activity.

1. Divide the large group into three smaller groups. Be flexible about allowing some young people to work in pairs or even solo if that is their preferred way of working. Assign each small group one of the following times of day: morning, noon, or night.

Chapter 34: Honoring God

When we pray to God, worship him as he deserves, and keep the promises we make to him, we're obeying the First Commandment.

Whenever we pray, whether at church or in a private place, it's important to give our full attention and try to block out distractions that might get in the way of our focus on God. Those distractions could include our cell phones or thoughts about that cute star in the movie you saw last week.

The First Commandment is first for a reason. Our happiness in life is based on it. Our relationship with God brings us great joy.

God makes it clear that he will "tolerate no rivals" (Exodus 20:5). That was the case when the Israelites broke the First Commandment by worshipping a golden calf. The story presents God as being so angry with his people that he threatens to destroy them.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and Love your neighbor as you love yourself."
(Luke 10:27)

With stories like these, the Bible warns us against the dangers of false gods. Things like money, possessions, and popularity can become our golden calves—our idols.

A
PRAY IT!

O, God,
You are my God.
There are no others
in my life.

Give me the strength to
keep it that way.
Help me avoid things
that distract my focus
from you.

Keep my language clean
and my schedule clear.
Let my words and worship
praise only you.
Let nothing come between us.

Amen

2. **Write** the following two questions on the board and **instruct** the small groups to **discuss** them:
 - What happened yesterday during your assigned time of day?
 - Of the things your group identified, which ones would you like to thank God for?
3. After sufficient time for discussion, **instruct** the small groups to develop a scene or scenes, using the group members as human statues, to show what God did for them during their time of day yesterday. Have the small groups present their scenes, asking the presenters to **explain** each scene, highlighting God's role in their time of day.
4. After the presentations, **conclude** with these or similar words:
 - ▶ It is amazing when we stop to think about how much God did for us just yesterday! And if we want to keep the First Commandment and honor God, then we must frequently reflect on how God is present with us morning, noon, and night, and give God thanks and praise.

Discussion Starters

- What would the world be like if everybody honored God?
- Do you have any superstitious behaviors or beliefs? Do you think they make sense if we truly acknowledge that all life comes from God and that all things are in God's hands?
- Why do people like being thanked for things they do? How can we use this to understand the First Commandment?

Media Connection

- Listen to the song "You're Worthy of My Praise," by Big Daddy Weave, on the album *What I Was Made For* (Fervent Records, 2005). Then use the following questions to lead a discussion:
 - ▶ How do the lyrics speak of fulfilling the First Commandment?
 - ▶ The song speaks of bowing down. When are times outside of church that people bow down? How is bowing down a way we can worship God? Where and when can we bow down to God?
 - ▶ What are some ways we can give God praise?

Try using this song and set of questions after step E, the "Giving God the Proper Credit" activity, or use the song as part of the closing prayer.

HONORING GOD: GIVING CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

1. What is idolatry? List some examples. (see page 392)

2. How does idolatry not give God the proper credit?

3. What are some superstitions people have?

4. How do these superstitions not give God the proper credit? (see page 392)

5. How does magic not give God the proper credit? (see page 392)

6. What are some ways that people buy or sell spiritual favors? (see page 393)

7. How does buying or selling spiritual favors not give God the proper credit?

8. What is atheism? (see page 393)

9. How does atheism not give God the proper credit?
