WEEK 02 · FURTHER READING & REFLECTION

SUBSTITUTES

what are you trusting to do God's job?

A substitute can be **good** - it just can't be **God**.



25TH OCTOBER 2026

PASTOR DARRYLL

follow the gold...

01 WHAT'S SITTING IN THE CHAIR?

We all have things we turn to when life gets difficult.

It might be a person we call, something we buy, an achievement we're working towards or a plan we've made to feel more in control.

None of those things is necessarily bad.

But what happens when we begin depending on them for something only God can give us?

SUNDAY ORDER

25.10 · 11:00AM

GOD **x1**

** UNAVAILABLE? **

SUBSTITUTED WITH:

- ☐ a person I call
- ☐ something I buy
- ☐ an achievement
- ☐ a plan to stay in control
- ☐ my career
- ☐ money & security
- ☐ a relationship
- ☐ _____

REF: EXODUS 32

tick yours... which do you reach for first?

You can tick these on screen or with a pen. Nobody else sees it.

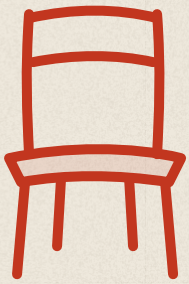
In Acts 7, Stephen stands before the religious leaders and retells the story of Israel. He reminds them how God rescued His people from Egypt, led them through the wilderness and remained faithful to them.

Yet there's a moment in Stephen's account that tells us something important about the human heart.

Although the Israelites had physically left Egypt, Stephen says that "**in their hearts they turned to Egypt**" (Acts 7:39).

They had been rescued, but part of them still wanted to return to what was familiar. And we can do the same.

We can follow Jesus, attend church and genuinely believe in God while quietly allowing something else to take His place in our lives.



Pastor Darryll described it as **a chair at the front of our lives**. Whatever occupies that chair influences our decisions, our priorities and the things we depend on most.

who's sitting in yours?

An idol isn't simply something we worship instead of God.

IDOL =

anything we trust to do **God's job.**

The question isn't just whether we believe in Jesus. **It's whether we're allowing Him to lead.**

READ ☐ Acts 7:35-43

02 WHEN WAITING GETS DIFFICULT.

In Exodus 32, Moses goes up Mount Sinai to meet with God. The Israelites are left waiting below.

Days pass. In fact, Moses is on the mountain for **forty days and forty nights** (Exodus 24:18). He hasn't returned, and the people begin to grow restless.

Eventually, they approach Aaron and ask him to "**make us gods**" who will go before them. They build a golden calf.

What's striking is that they haven't forgotten everything God has done. They've witnessed their rescue from Egypt, walked through the Red Sea and experienced His provision in the wilderness.

But now they're facing uncertainty. They want something they can see. Something they can hold. Something that doesn't require them to keep waiting.

> **THEY DIDN'T STOP BELIEVING IN GOD. THEY STOPPED WAITING FOR HIM.**
>
> *- an observation from Pastor Darryll*

Waiting can expose what we're really trusting.

When prayers seem unanswered, plans don't work out or life takes longer than we expected, it's tempting to find something that promises a quicker solution.

We might try to control the outcome, look for reassurance in the wrong places or make decisions out of fear rather than faith.

And yet, while the Israelites were building their calf, God's glory was visible on the mountain.

> Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain **in the sight of the people of Israel.**
>
> — EXODUS 24:17

they could see it!

He hadn't disappeared. **Sometimes God's apparent silence doesn't mean He's absent.**

The challenge is learning to trust Him even when we can't see what He's doing.

READ ☐ Exodus 24:15-18 ☐ Exodus 32:1-6

03 WHEN A GIFT TAKES GOD'S PLACE.

There's an easily missed detail in the story of the golden calf.

The Israelites made it using their own gold: **the earrings they were wearing** (Exodus 32:2-3).



a gift from God

But where had that gold come from?

In Exodus 12:35-36, we read that when the Israelites left Egypt, the Egyptians gave them silver, gold and clothing. God had provided for them as they left slavery.

And now, in the wilderness, they were using those gifts to make something to worship.

> **THEY TURNED A GIFT FROM GOD INTO A REPLACEMENT FOR GOD.**

It's an uncomfortable thought because many of the things we depend on most are genuinely good. Our families, relationships, careers, abilities, opportunities and possessions can all be blessings.

The problem isn't enjoying them or being thankful for them. The problem begins when we ask them to give us what only God can provide.

A relationship can't carry the full weight of our identity. A career can't guarantee our worth. Financial security can't promise that we'll never face uncertainty.

These things have value, but they were never meant to take God's place.

AS PASTOR DARRYLL PUT IT

A SUBSTITUTE CAN BE GOOD - IT JUST CAN'T BE GOD.

Recognising an idol doesn't always mean removing something from our lives. **Sometimes it means changing the place we've given it.**

We can love people deeply without making them responsible for our happiness.

We can work hard without allowing success to define us.

We can appreciate God's gifts while remembering who gave them.

READ ☐ Exodus 12:35-36 ☐ Exodus 32:2-5

04 ARE WE TRUSTING GOD ON HIS OWN?

In Exodus 32:5, Aaron builds an altar before the golden calf and announces "**a feast to the LORD**."

That's a surprising detail.

The people weren't necessarily trying to abandon the language of worshipping God. They were attempting to combine worship of the Lord with something they had made themselves.

They wanted God, but they also wanted **something they could control.**

It's possible for us to do something similar. We might say we trust Jesus while keeping other things in reserve, just in case.

Or we might begin shaping our understanding of God around what feels comfortable to us, accepting the parts of His teaching we like and avoiding the parts that challenge us.

But following Jesus means **allowing Him to shape us,** rather than trying to reshape Him around our preferences.

Later, in Acts 7:48, Stephen reminds the religious leaders that God doesn't live in houses made by human hands.

GREEK *χειροποίητος*

CHEIROPOIETOS

made by hands

Stephen's word for the temple in Acts 7:48 - the same idea as the calf the people made with their own hands (Acts 7:41).

Even something as significant as the temple could become a substitute if people valued the building or their religious practices more than the God they were meant to worship.

That's a reminder for us as a church, too. We can love gathering on Sundays, appreciate our leaders and be committed to serving without allowing those things to replace a personal relationship with Jesus.

> **CHURCH IS WHERE WE GATHER TO WORSHIP HIM. IT ISN'T A SUBSTITUTE FOR HIM.**

READ ☐ Exodus 32:5-6 ☐ Acts 7:44-50

05 THE GOD WHO HOLDS US.

The story doesn't end with the golden calf.

In Exodus 32:32, Moses pleads with God for the people, even asking to be blotted out of God's book for their sake.

In Exodus 33, God tells the Israelites to remove their ornaments (Exodus 33:5-6). The things that had contributed to their idol become something they must lay down.

It's a moment of turning away from what they've trusted and recognising their need for God.

Then, in Exodus 33:14, God says to Moses:

> *"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*
>
> EXODUS 33:14

What a promise. The Israelites had asked for something that would go before them. God offers them **His own presence**. And He promises rest.

Pastor Darryll shared the picture of carrying a sleeping child from the car into the house.

The child doesn't have to work out how to get home. They don't even have to stay awake. **Someone who loves them is carrying them.**

It's a beautiful picture of the difference between the substitutes we create and the God who loves us.

We spend so much of our lives trying to hold everything together. We try to manage every outcome, protect ourselves from disappointment and find something secure enough to depend on.

But the things we hold on to can't ultimately hold us.

A SUBSTITUTE IS A GOD YOU CAN HOLD,

THE REAL GOD IS THE ONE WHO HOLDS YOU.

And we see the depth of that love in Jesus.

At the end of Acts 7, as Stephen faces death, he looks towards heaven and sees **Jesus standing at the right hand of God**. The God Stephen trusted hadn't abandoned him.

The same Jesus who gave His life for us invites us to trust Him with ours. We don't need to keep searching for something else to take His place.

> *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."*
>
> — JIM ELLIOT missionary, killed in 1956 while sharing Jesus

READ ☐ Exodus 33:1-14 ☐ Acts 7:54-60

YOUR TURN

QUESTIONS TO SIT WITH

You might want to spend some time with these questions during the week, write down your thoughts or talk them through with someone you trust.

01 · TRUST

When life feels uncertain or overwhelming, what do you instinctively turn to first? What might that reveal about where you're placing your trust?

02 · WAITING

Is there an area of your life where you've grown tired of waiting on God? Have you been tempted to take control or look elsewhere for answers?

03 · GOD'S GIFTS

Is there something good in your life that has started to carry more weight than it should? How could you enjoy that gift without allowing it to take God's place?

04 · LETTING GO

What might it look like for you to take something out of the chair and allow Jesus to lead in that area of your life?

05 · CHURCH

Is there anything about church, serving or Sunday routines that has started to replace time with Jesus Himself?

SOMETHING TO TAKE INTO YOUR WEEK

Spend some time reading Exodus 33:12-14.

After everything that happened with the golden calf, God still promises His presence. He doesn't offer the Israelites another object to carry or another thing to depend on. **He offers Himself.** And with His presence comes rest.

Think about the things you've been trying to hold together lately. The situations you've been trying to control, the outcomes you've been worrying about and the responsibilities that feel heavy.

What would it look like to trust God with those things this week?

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

Am I holding on to something that was never meant to hold me?

READ ☐ Exodus 33:12-14

LET'S PRAY

Jesus, thank You that You are faithful, even when I struggle to trust You.

Forgive me for the times I've allowed other things to take Your place in my life. Help me to recognise where I've been looking for security, identity or peace in things that can't truly provide them.

Teach me to trust You when I'm waiting, when I don't understand and when life feels uncertain.

Help me to enjoy the good things You've given me without allowing them to become more important than You.

And remind me that I don't have to carry everything on my own.

Thank You for Your presence and the rest You promise.

Amen.