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When I was around middle school age, I was fascinated with clocks, wanting to know how they worked. One day I decided to take apart a wind-up alarm clock to see how the mechanism inside. It seemed like such a good idea at the time, and things went well until I came to the mainspring, when suddenly it flew out of the clock and unwound all over the floor. I never could rewind that spring to put back into the clock, and the clock parts sat in a shoebox in my closet for years, reminding me that I could not fix everything, a lesson that I continue to strive to understand even as an adult.



I imagine we all have had what seemed like good ideas at the time, but when looking back they may seem a bit silly. For example, the idea of Smell-o-Vision seemed like a good idea to Mike Todd, Jr. in 1960. The technology allowed a film reel to release bottled fragrances into a movie theater in sync with certain scenes of a movie. The movie *Scent of Mystery* was the first and only movie to use the technology.¹ Today we have the



option of watching all kinds of creatures on the screen in 3D, but I'm glad we don't have to smell them.

How many times have we had what we thought was a really good idea, only to later regret that we tried it, such as the guy who strapped his four wheeler in the back of his truck and ran the tie-down straps through the wheels on his truck. It must have seemed like a good idea at the time, but I'm sure he didn't get too far.



When Moses went up into the mountains to spend time in prayer with God, his brother Aaron had what he thought was a good idea at the time. Moses and Aaron had recently led their people out of slavery from the Pharaoh, crossed through the waters to escape the Pharaoh's army chasing them, found food and water to survive in the desert, but now Moses had climbed alone up a mountain to talk with God.



After all this stress of escape and traveling, I imagine Moses did need some time away to get centered. Many of us still enjoy some time away, seeking places of quietness to refocus our lives and

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sense God's presence. Spending time in solitude can be a good spiritual practice for some of us, but for those people waiting at the foot of the mountain, they grew restless, wondering how long Moses' chat with God would last.

"Aaron, you need to do something," they complained. "Make us something that will help us feel secure. For all we know, Moses may have died up there, or maybe he's built himself a nice vacation home and isn't coming back. What are you gonna do about this? Will *you* lead us now?"

"Bring me all your gold earrings, and I'll come up with a plan," Aaron suggested. We may wonder where they found gold jewelry out in the middle of nowhere, but possibly they had collected it from the Egyptians before they left, a restitution for all their years of forced slavey.

Aaron melted down all their jewelry and formed a golden young bull, which may seem like an odd plan to us today. At that time, the image of a bull was a common form that neighboring nations used to represent a god, so it could be

that Aaron was making something to look like those around them.

How many times do we do a similar thing—wanting what those around us have? Most of us can recall certain fads that have been popular during our lives, when it seemed as though everyone had to have it. The latest fad is baby Yoda from the recent *Star Wars* movie, a toy in high demand when the movie was first released.

How many of us have ever wanted the newest car, cellphone, or other gadgets because the media told us we needed them, or our friends already got them? These become our golden calves, objects that we think will bring us happiness or security, only to discover the novelty soon fades.

As Aaron and the people were celebrating this new golden calf as their leader, God suggested to Moses, "You better hurry up and get down the mountain, for those people you brought out of Egypt are ruining everything! They've wandered off the path of following me, and now they're worshiping a golden bull."



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When Moses got to the bottom of the mountain and saw what was going on, he asked Aaron, “What did these people do to get you to agree to this plan?”

Aaron replied, “Don’t get upset with me. You know these people and how they can get out of control! They gave me their jewelry, I threw it in the fire, and this is what came out. It seemed like a good idea at the time.”

It came out of the fire by itself? Really, Aaron, that’s the best reason you could come up with? What kind of excuse is that?

An excuse similar to ones that many of us may have uttered at one time or another. We’ve all been afraid. Got desperate. Followed a golden bull that didn’t really work out so well. Found it hard to admit a mistake.

That’s because we’re all a work in progress. Most of the time we try to do the best we can, but

sometimes life is hard. We make bad choices. And there are times we’re not sure what to do, as was the case with

the council of a town in County Cork, Ireland, [who] was having a lot of trouble with criminals, and their jail was overflowing. But the town also had a great shortage of funds. The council dealt with the problem by passing a three-part resolution [which seemed like a good idea at the time]:

- (1) The city shall build a new jail.
- (2) The jail shall be built out of materials in the old jail.
- (3) The old jail shall be used until the new jail is completed.²

A work in progress. Moses, Aaron, you, me...all of us. Trying to make the best choices. Making mistakes. Trusting that God offers us grace—another day to try again. Since God seems to offer us another change, maybe that’s the grace we can extend to one another as well, for we’re all a work in progress.



¹ Dan Fletcher, “The 50 Worst Inventions,” *Time*, 5-27-2010, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1991915_1991909_1991849,00.html

² Eric W. Johnson, *A Treasury of Humor*