



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 3 *THE TOWER OF BABEL*

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

People decide that they want to reach heaven by building a tower so high that it touches heaven. God sees their foolish desires and messes up their act by causing them to speak different languages so that they cannot understand each other. In frustration at not being able to communicate, the people abandon their work on the tower and scatter over the earth.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Communication
- Arrogance
- The Way to God

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Genesis 11:1-9

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

Year A: The Day of Pentecost

Year B: The Day of Pentecost

Year C: The Day of Pentecost



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Here is another story of our continuing fall from God. This time we try to reach heaven by our own efforts! Instead of serving and worshiping God, we try to invade God. For this act of arrogance, the Lord scatters the people all over the earth, with different languages so they cannot understand one another.

Actually, by this act, we brought this punishment—more alienation from God and from one another—upon ourselves. Spiritual and moral confusion, which led to this effort, then led to confusion of languages.

The reversal of Babel's confusion happens on Pentecost, as related in Acts 2:1-14, when the disciples, receiving the Holy Spirit, begin speaking, and people from different lands—speaking different tongues—can all understand each other.



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

The sin of presumption is part of our Great Litany, in which we pray to be delivered from “pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy” (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 149).

The foolishness of the builders of the Tower of Babel is not that they wanted to reach God, but in the way they tried to do it. We all want to be with God, but this is not the way. Our way to God is not found through our own efforts, but in dependence on God.

Later, God will send us the Law and the prophets and then God's own Son, that we might be reconciled with God. And it will be in Jesus Christ that we will find the way to freedom and peace with God.



GATHERING

As the group members walk in, hand each one a Language Card (pp. 6-7). Invite members to speak to each other using only the words on their cards. Each person will then be speaking a different language. You also could give cards that tell students they can only talk in questions, can only start sentences with the first letter of their name, can only say one word at a time, etc.

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with your group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- large pillar candle or large Christ candle
- matches
- cross

After all the group members have had a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer. Ask one of the members to light a pillar candle while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read a brief prayer, such as:

- Dear Lord, help us to listen to your Word with pure hearts that we may share it with others so they, too, may know and understand your love. This we ask in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

Carefully extinguish the flame.



TELLING THE STORY

Set the Scene:

- Before you begin the story, ask the group how they felt speaking and being spoken to in a new language. Talk briefly about the problems this might cause if they were trying to complete an important task.

Read today's from the Bible, or tell the story in your own words.

Today's story is a myth with a clear lesson. You'll find suggestions for ways to dramatize a story along with more ways to bring the story to life on pages 1-2 in the Appendix, also found on the website.

The story of the Tower of Babel is an important part of the story of our salvation. This part of the story helps explain why we need saving—we keep choosing paths that lead not to God but to alienation from God. It is only when we understand this that we understand why God needed to send God's Son to bring us back to God.

Let the group hear the story without analyzing it for them or asking them to explore its meaning. For now, we just want them to absorb the story in their heads and hearts and to remember its power. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help the group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.



ACTIVITIES: ARTS, CRAFTS, GAMES, DRAMA, ETC.

Select one or more activities to supplement and enhance today's story. For each lesson, there are five suggested activities, one from each of the REACT categories. For a detailed explanation of REACT, see page 10 of the Introduction. All activities are meant to reinforce the concepts that were central to the day's lesson.

Suggested story-related activities are provided at the end of this lesson. Here are a few additional suggestions for today's lesson:

- Play songs in another language.
- Teach a song in another language, such as a Taize song. There are some Taize songs in the alternative hymnal *Wonder, Love and Praise: A Supplement to the Hymnal 1982* (New York, NY: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1997).
- Teach a word or phrase or two in different languages or In American Sign Language, such as *Hello* or *I love you* or *God*.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 2-6 in the Appendix where we've provided suggestions and directions for a variety of general activities that can be adapted to any lesson.

Also included are outreach and service projects that can be done at any time.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK'S SESSION



WEAVING OUR FAITH

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*
- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a student to act as class *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- What might have been the motivations of the people for trying to build a tower that would reach heaven?
- What kind of attitude problem did the people have?
- How does God want us to reach heaven?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the scribe to write the lesson on the card, date it, and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in participants' words.



Weaving God's Beloved

Community

Our words matter. We can use our words to help or to harm. We can share Good News. We can share

our pain. We can explain new things. We can ask questions to learn. When we start using our words to hurt others or don't try to make sure our words are understood or we don't let everyone's voice be heard, we are working against creating community.

- How can words hurt those around us?
- How can we make sure we understand what others are trying to say?
- How can we make sure that all voices are heard?



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing. The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- O God, let us be united;
Let us speak in harmony;
Let our minds apprehend alike.
Common be our prayer;
Common be the end of our assembly;
Common be our resolution;
Common be our deliberations.
Alike be our feelings;
Unified be our hearts;
Common be our intentions;
Perfect be our unity.
Amen.

—Attributed to the Rig Veda, public domain
(*Chapel Service & Prayers 2005*, St Paul's School,
Concord, New Hampshire)

End the class with a dismissal that we say in church, such as:

- The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The youth respond:

- And also with you.



Weaving God's Promises

LANGUAGE CARDS (for use in today's Gathering)

Cut on the dotted lines to make individual language cards for each student. If your group is large, make several copies of these cards.

German

Word/Phrase	What to say:	How to say it:
Hello	Guten tag	Gooten tock
How are you?	Wie gehts?	Vee gates?
Fine	Intermitte	Inter-mit-uh
Thank you	Danke	Donka
Please	Bitte	Bitta

Spanish

Word/Phrase	What to say:	How to say it:
Hello	Hola	Oh-la
How are you?	Como estas?	Co-mo-ay-staas?
Fine	Bien	Bee-en
Thank you	Gracias	Gra-see-as
Please	Por favor	Por fah-vor

French

Word/Phrase	What to say:	How to say it:
Hello	Bonjour	Bone zhoour
How are you?	Comment allez-vous?	Comawn tuh-lay-voo?
Fine	Tres Bien	Tray bee-en
Thank you	Merci	Meer-see
Please	S'il vous plait	Seel voo play

Russian

Word/Phrase	What to say:	How to say it:
Hello	Dorbi den	Dobree dien
How are you?	Kak vui pozhivaete?	Kok vouee pu-zhee-vy-eh-the?
Fine	Ochen shorosh	O-chin-ko-ro-sho
Thank you	Spacibo	Spuh-see-buh
Please	Pazhaluista	Puh-zhah-loos-tuh

Chinese

Word/Phrase	What to say:	How to say it:
Hello	Ni hao	Nee how
How are you?	Nee how ma?	Nee how ma?
Fine	Hun how	Hun how
Thank you	Shieh shieh	Shyeh shyeh
Please	Qing	Ching

Italian

Word/Phrase	What to say:	How to say it:
Hello	Ciao	Chow
How are you?	Come va?	Ko-may-vah?
Fine	Multa	Mool-tah
Thank you	Grazie	Graht-zee
Please	Per favore	Pear fah-vo-ray



Weaving God's Promises

WORD WEBS

Participants write down a word or phrase sparked by the word in the center of the web.

Materials:

- 5 large sheets of paper
- tape
- markers

Preparation:

On each large sheet of paper, draw a word web (a large circle with lines radiating from it. Make sure there are as many lines as there are group members). The web will look much like a spider.

In each circle, write one of the following words: *confusion, abandoned, arrogance, understanding, prayer*. Feel free to use other words, as long as they pertain to the day's story.

Directions:

1. Tape the sheets of paper to the wall. Explain:
 - For each word in the center of the web, think of an incident, an image or a feeling it brings to mind.
2. Distribute markers and ask group members to write each incident, image or feeling mentioned on a line beside the appropriate word.
3. Once they have finished, invite volunteers to share and explain their contributions to the web.

Close:

- Before taking down the sheets of paper, ask the group how their words and phrases relate to the story of the Tower of Babel.



Weaving God's Promises

IT'S ALL A JUMBLE

Directions: Unscramble the words in each sentence below. Then, write each boxed letter in its corresponding square to spell out the message at the bottom of the page.

1. The people _____ _____ to a land called Shinar.

(GDMAEITR)

2. They decided to build a tower up to God so they could
 _____ God even closer.

(RIHWSP0)

3. God came down from _____ to see what was going on.

(EENAHV)

4. God saw the tower and told the people that their idea was
_____ _____.

(LFOIHSO)

5. As punishment for the people's arrogance, God made them speak different
_____ _____.

(AAGLGESNU)

6. Suddenly, the people were _____ _____.

(SNUOEFCD)

7. If everyone spoke a different tongue, they could not _____ _____ each other.

(NETUSRDADN)

8. God _____ _____ the people all over the world.

(TTDSEAREC)

9. The people were forced to _____ _____ their homes.

(NNAAOODB)

10. From then on, many languages were found all over the _____.

(AHETR)

11. We learn that God would rather have our _____ _____ than a tower.

(YEPARR)

Secret message:

7 3 10 2 1 11 8 6 5 4 9



Weaving God's Promises

IF YOU BUILD IT

Group members learn about the process of building from an architect or contractor.

Materials:

- index cards
- pens and pencils
- easels

Preparation:

In the weeks before the Tower of Babel lesson, invite a local architect or contractor to come in and speak to the group. Explain that you will have read the story of the Tower of Babel, and that the group members will have questions about building structures, especially tall ones. You might consider sending a list of questions to your guest speaker so that he/she has time to prepare for the talk. Ask the guest to bring photos, a PowerPoint presentation or other type of presentation to demonstrate the work.

Directions:

1. Set up the guest speaker's display or presentation.
2. Distribute the cards and pens or pencils to the group. Ask participants to write questions they'd like to ask of the guest. Possible questions include:
 - What's the tallest building in the United States? in the world?
 - What are some of the challenges you have faced building a tall structure?
 - What are some of the dangers of such projects?
 - How do such tall buildings keep from falling?
 - Is there such a thing as "too tall" for a building?

Close:

- After thanking the guest for participating, ask group members to summarize what they learned and about the day's highlights.



Weaving God's Promises

WE ALL UNDERSTAND GOD'S WORD

Participants make up "God's Word" cards to distribute to the congregation.

Materials:

- 3" x 5" index cards, multiple colors
- pens and markers
- assorted stickers
- glue, glitter, etc. for embellishment
- hole punch
- yarn or narrow ribbon
- scissors

Preparation:

With the help of your rector, church secretary or the congregation itself, find out which languages, in addition to English, are spoken by church members. Look up and print out translations for the phrases below (or others of your own choice) on <http://translate.google.com>. Make sure every language is represented and find out how many of each language you will need.

- God loves you.
- I will pray for you.
- God is great.
- Have a beautiful day.
- Believe in me.
- Life is good.
- Go in peace.
- Welcome .

Directions:

1. If the participants have access to computers in or near the class, have them look up the translations after the story. Then, tell them to write the phrases on the cards; one card should have the language written on it and will serve as the book cover. Remember to include English booklets in the group.
2. Encourage the group members to embellish the cards with appropriate stickers, paint or other accessories.
3. Punch a hole in the upper left corner of each card. When all of the cards are complete, tie them together with a length of yarn or ribbon.

Close:

- Distribute these cards to the congregation during coffee hour or during an upcoming worship service.



Weaving God's Promises

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH STRONG

Working in pairs or small groups, participants build models of their own church. Then, they will write about the characteristics that make their own churches spiritually strong.

Materials:

assorted Legos®, Lincoln Logs®, K-Nex®, and other construction toy
bases for structures (heavy cardboard, trays, etc.)
large index cards
pens and pencils

Preparation:

Gather the assortment of construction toys each in its own area of the meeting space. Place cards and pens or pencils at each area.

Directions:

1. Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Invite each pair/group to design and build a model of their church using the materials they've chosen. The only requirement for the structures is that they resemble the church, and that they are able to be carried and set up as a display for the congregation.
2. When the buildings are finished, ask each group to think about what makes a church (people, faith, purpose, vision, mission, etc.). Ask each group to then write about what they think makes their particular church spiritually strong and alive. Groups might want to include suggestions as to what else could be done to make the church even stronger and more vibrant. Ask group members to sign their cards.

Close:

- Display the models with the accompanying cards in a public area of your church. Be sure to indicate in the display that the activity was based on the Tower of Babel lesson.

Note: You may wish to spread this activity over more than one session.