



Babel

Focus: Unity can be a bit tricky to define. There is a surface level unity, but what could happen if our true-selves, our souls, and God’s mission unified us?

Scripture:

- Genesis 11:1-9

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Jenga Set (this will be given out at the end of the lesson)

Background on scripture and topic:

The story of the Tower of Babel (‘Babble’) tells about a unity that’s established on the whole earth. Everyone speaks the same language. Everyone is working on a single project together. This is unity right?

In the myth, God steps down and creates language diversity and spreads people around the world. The workers can no longer understand each other, and they are scattered in different directions.

What does it mean to be unified? Your students may answer ‘having things in common.’ Let’s challenge this presupposition, isn’t unity more than just appearance and simple commonality? In Babel, the workers are unified in language, and they’re working together “to make a name for ourselves.” “This text suggests a different kind of unity sought by fearful humanity organized against the purposes of God. This unity attempts to establish a cultural, human oneness without reference to the promises or mandates of God.”¹ The workers in Babel longed to make their individual names great... they weren’t interested or aware of God’s presence and voice on the earth.

It’s likely that we view scripture, God’s voice, and the life of Christ all in our own context. Jesus never spoke a word of English. In God’s great plan for the world, America is much later to the game than the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Europe. How often do we picture Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes? How can we have unity with someone without speaking their language?

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. Interpretation “Genesis” p.100

The truest unity is found in participation and co-creation of people with God. By living into God's plan in our lives and living as Christ, then we can have unity- despite background, language, appearance, and other 'differences.' Our souls and true-selves are unified when we serve and care and share life's burdens together.

Parent email prompt:

The story of Babel is often misunderstood or simply passed over. In our world, we have tall buildings that attempt to reach into the heavens. Often our desire as humans is to 'make our name great.' God desires unity for us... but what exactly does that mean? We'll discuss unity and Babel and everyone learn a few non-English words tomorrow night!

Text Prompt the night before:

Have you ever heard the word, "shemomedjamo" before? There's no English equivalent, it's a word from the Republic of Georgia, and it means, "I accidentally ate the whole thing." Come to youth tomorrow, and we'll find out more about language and the Tower of Babel.

Game: Train Wreck

This game is a lot of fun especially if your group is still getting to know each other. Have your group sit in chairs in a circle. Make sure there's one less chair than participants. The person in the middle will announce who they are, "Hi, I'm Chris!" then the person in the middle will say a true statement about him or herself. "I go to such and such high school" or "I'm wearing blue socks!" For those listening around the circle, if this statement is true for them- they have to leave their seat and find a new chair at least 2 spots away from their own. The person without a chair starts the process over, "Hi, I'm Kelsey, and I have an older sister."

Prayer Request:

Prayer for unity for your group, but challenge your students in what unity means. We too often look for surface level things like we did in train wreck. Instead, we can have differences- different languages, be from different places, but we can find true unity in honoring God and in listening for God's voice in our lives.

Activity: Tower to Heaven

If the size of your group is right, then try and play a couple of games of Jenga with your group. This will help set up the idea of building a tower to the sky like in Babel.

Scripture Reading:

Read Genesis 11:1-9 out loud to the group. Ask them to close their eyes and try to imagine what they see as you read.

Large Group discussion questions:

- The tower of Babel is a story of unity. What does unity look like?
- Why would God disperse people around the world?
- What benefits would this creation of language create?

Small group questions:

- In the story of Babel, God celebrates diversity. Who have you met that's different from you, and what have you learned from him/her?
- Part of the issue with Babel is that there's no consideration of God in the beginning of the story... how do we consider God in our normal/average lives?
- Can you name a unifying experience that you've been a part of? What did it look like/ feel like?

Small group activity:

Can you create a new language in your small group? Have your students try to explain a prompt using only single syllables...

Prompts:

1. Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side... (Only syllable "gra" can be spoken)
2. My name is _____, and I'm here to help you. (only syllable "Ya" can be spoken)
3. Is your refrigerator running? Then you better go catch it! (only syllable "Bruh" can be spoken)

When speaking about language it may be interesting to share a few of these-

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/50698/38-wonderful-foreign-words-we-could-use-english> These are words to which there are not English equivalents.

Tangible Item they leave with: A Jenga block for each student

Remind Youth:

God celebrates unity and diversity. The two are not opposites. We may come from different parts of the world. We may speak different languages. We may enjoy different things or live lives that look very different, yet we can find unity in God's mission. God calls us to serve and love all people.