

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Read the story of Babel
- Highlight how God is excluded from the people's lives
- Focus on the difficulty of language – especially when God is not involved

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Who's on first (The Sequel)* [from the Tonight Show]
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. Game of Balderdash (which should involve/include)
 - Slips of paper to write on (6 to 8 per student)
 - One writing utensil per student
 - List or cards of words with real definition (consider using <http://phrontistery.info/clw1.html> if you don't have the board game)

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we're going to do that now.
- So here's the opening question for today's class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we'll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- **Here's this week's question:** What's one of your favorite words? Why?

TRANSITION TO Video Clip

- Last class, we started a new session about God and Communication
- We read the story of creation and Adam naming the animals
- We focused on how God used language to “speak” creation into being
- We then saw how God gave that same tool to humans

- But what happens when we don't know how to use the tool we've been given?
- What happens when we don't understand the words we're using?
- In some ways, that's what today's scripture story is about
- So, to get started with today's lesson, let's watch the following video
- The clip is from the *Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* – in it, they are redoing an Abbott and Costello skit called, "Who is on first."
- Let's see what happens

WATCH Video clip

ASK

- What are the names of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd baseman? (Who, What, and I don't know)
- Does the guy on the far right understand what's going on most of the time? (no)
- When does he finally understand? (when the third baseman – Jerry Seinfeld – explains very clearly what the names of Who and What are)
- Does the guy on the right ever understand What (second base!) the third baseman's name was? (not really; hard to tell)
- What could be said to help the guy on the right understand what the third baseman's name actually was? (something similar to what Jerry Seinfeld said about the 1st and 2nd baseman, including spelling it out)

TELL

- The scripture story that we're going to read is not a story about the Israelites.
- The story happens in a time before the Israelites existed.
- In the story, we will see what people can do when they can all speak the same language, and what happens once they use that language beyond its design.
- Let's read the story and see what happens

READ Genesis 11:1-9 (recommendation: Have class read it aloud; one person per verse)

1Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

5The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. 6And the Lord said, "Look, they

are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." 8So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

ASK

- How many languages are there in the beginning of the story? (one)

- In verse 3 and 4, what do the people decide they are going to do? (build a city and a tower to the heavens)
- Verse 4 – why do they want to do this? (make a name for themselves **and** not be scattered)
- Verse 6 – Does God seem impressed by what the people have done? (yes, but in a worried way)
- Verse 6 – What is God worried that the people will be able to do? (anything-- everything)
- What do you think? Should God be worried about this – about people being able to do anything/everything?
- Verse 7 – What is God’s plan to keep the people from doing anything they want? (God confuses their language)
- Verse 8 – What happens when the people start speaking different languages (they scatter over the face of the earth)
- Did they finish the city and tower? (nope)
- What was the unfinished city and tower called? (Babel)

TELL - Nathanael

1st thing to talk about – power of language:

- In today’s story, we see that when everyone understands and speaks the same language, there is a great amount of power to create things
- In fact, God seems to think the people can do anything they want as long as they all speak the same language

2nd thing to talk about – portrayal of God / relationship with God:

- A couple things about the portrayal of God here
- There’s this idea in the story that God isn’t really paying attention to what is happening / going on for the people and has to “stop by” to find out what’s going on.
- Also, there’s this idea that God directly interferes with what the people are doing and in so doing actively stops the people from doing what they were planning to do.
- This makes God sound 1. Disinterested or distracted and 2. Disruptive and unfair.
- However, let’s also consider why God might not already know what’s going on and would then have to act independently rather than in tandem with the people:
 - a) When do the people ask for God’s help? (never)
 - b) When do the people tell God what’s going on? (never)
 - c) So, one of the reasons God might seem distant and then interruptive is because God was never invited into the decisions and actions of the people.
 - d) In other words, God is treated and then acts a lot like an outsider in this story.

3rd thing to talk about – design:

- Which brings me to this idea of creation having a particular design to it.
- In our last class, we talked about how language – the naming of things – is how God created
- We also saw how God encouraged Adam to practice naming things too
- But in today’s story, we see the people’s attempt to create something has nothing to do with being in relationship with God and has nothing to do with God’s prompting.
- And, without God being invited in and without God prompting the task to happen, the plan falls apart because God isn’t involved.
- One could argue God *forces* the plan to fall apart by making the language be different for others
- But one could also argue to that language, the naming of things, is very difficult and without God’s help, people were not able to use the tool of language very well.
- And, that second idea seems to still be true today: Even when we’re all speaking the same language, we often times do not understand the words of someone else.
- To help us think about what it means to speak the same language but not understand the words being used, let’s do the following activity.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- We're going to play a board game where we will hear and say words that we probably won't know.
- But that won't stop us from trying to use them!
- The name of this board game is "Balderdash."
- The way it works is that one person will read the word from the card and spell it for us. This person is the "reader."
- We will all write that spoken word on a piece of paper – and put our initials on it.
- Then, we will each write our own definition for that word.
- While we are doing that, the Reader is writing the REAL definition on their piece of paper.
- Now, you most likely will not know what the word means, so you'll have to make something up. Just pretend that you are writing a dictionary entry for the word. Be brave. Be funny. Be *convincing*.
- Once you are done writing, you will give your piece of paper with the definition to the Reader.
- Reader will shuffle all the pieces of papers
- The Reader then read each definition out loud to the class (without laughing and without saying which one is the correct one).
- Once all definitions have been read, we will go around the circle and each person chooses the definition they think is the correct one.
- You will get 1 point for every person who chooses your written definition, and you get 2 points for choosing the right definition. If you choose your own definition, you do not get a point for that. The Reader gets 3 points if no one chooses the right definition. You also get 3 points for writing a definition that is exact or very close to the actual definition.
- Person with most points wins
- Note: If you have more than 7 students, plan to make teams of twos and threes

DO ACTIVITY

TELL

- Can you imagine talking to someone who would be using these words from today's activity?
- It'd be pretty frustrating wouldn't it? You mostly wouldn't understand what they were saying.
- And, that's one of the things we see in today's story – that communication is tough
- And, when we don't invite God into our word choice and into our listening of what others are saying, then we are making communication even more difficult than it needs to be.

CLOSING PRAYER