



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 1—Genesis Part 1

Lesson 5: God's People Rebel Again; God Scatters God's People—Genesis 11

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

INTRODUCTION

God's pursuit of humanity is relentless. God does not sleep nor does God slumber. God always, because God is love, has the best interest of humanity in mind. God's best interest remains intact because God's mission is to restore the world to its intended wholeness. The love of God isn't based on humanity's response to God but it is designed for a response from humanity. We are created so that we might bring glory to God through our willing decisions to love God and love others.

Genesis 11, much like Genesis 6 and the story of Noah and the flood, reveals again that humanity chooses to love self and the things of this world more than God. God is a just God, jealous for our love. God's justice is evidenced in his destruction of humankind and the possible restoration as a result of that destruction. God's justice is active. God's justice is penetrating. God's justice is grounded in peace, reconciliation, redemption, holiness, and hope. God's justice is righteous and in God's justice humanity has a chance to thrive as it lives into the hope of a restored relationship with God, self, others and the world. Outside of God's justice, however, humanity merely works for self. This causes injustice and chaos, the opposite the peaceful, just world God intended.

The story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) reveals what happens when humanity chooses to usurp God's power and authority and live for self. There are several views as to why God chose to scatter the people. First, many speak of the pride of the people. Many assume that the people were merely trying to reach God by creating a structure that led them to the heavens. Secondly, some believe that the people of God were acting in disobedience. The actions displayed by the builders of the tower proved once again that the disappointing reality of humanity's choice to act on behalf of their desires rather than the desires of God. The privilege or blessing that was given to humanity was to be fruitful and multiply. Some believe that by choosing to build a tower and remain in close proximity to one another they did not multiply the earth, they merely took advantage of the Lord's offering and remained in survival mode protecting the possessions (land animals, wealth, and so on) that they had accumulated. Although urbanization doesn't spread people throughout the earth, it doesn't mean that God was angry that they were not obeying God's call to be fruitful and multiply. After all, urbanization allows people to cooperate with one another to live in a smaller landmass, sharing resources. God calls us to share also. I contend that God scattered the people not because of pride, disobedience or urbanization. I contend that God chose to scatter the people because this tower was byproduct of the way the people of God chose to see gods in human terms. Instead of building a tower to reach the heavens, the human race chose to build a tower to bring God down to their level. Indeed, God does come down to the human level (11:5) and in doing so, God is very dissatisfied. Upon seeing what the human race has created, God realizes that humans have crossed another line. This line causes God to remark; "nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (11:6). God's remark indicates that God sees within the human race the potential for all kinds of more evil. God scatters the people to undermine the people's creative potential for even more destructive behavior. Although hard to believe, this scattering is an act of God's loving judgment. God desires righteousness and justice—wholeness. God scatters and confuses the languages and this makes it harder, impossible, to work cooperatively to do more evil.

GOD'S STORY

Often when we interact with God through the Old Testament we only see the harshness of God love. We see God throwing Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. We see God casting Cain to the east. We see God flooding the earth. We see God scattering and confusing people. To many, God is nothing but a harsh God who imposes God's will on humans. However, we see God's loving acts of clothing and protecting Adam and Eve, recreating the earth to produce a righteous relationship between God, self, others and the world and scattering and confusing the language of the human race in order to destroy the potential of evil.

God's nature must be explored holistically in the context of the entire Scriptural narrative. One of the best places to explore God and understand God's nature is through the writing of the psalmists. Reflect on these characteristics of God's nature:

Psalms 23:5-6

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalms 26:2-3

Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.

Psalms 31:7

I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul.

Psalms 31:16

Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

Psalms 33:5

The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

Psalms 36:5

Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

Psalms 59:16

But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.

Psalms 63:3

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

Psalms 66:20

Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

Psalms 86:5

You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.

Psalms 86:15

But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Psalms 89:14

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

Psalms 100:5

For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Psalms 103:9-12

He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalms 115:1

Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

Psalms 147:11

The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

OUR STORY

At times throughout our lives we distort God's nature by choosing to live our lives in such a way that usurps God. We take from God many great things that God offers to the world and we bend and shape them to fit our needs and wants. We struggle daily to let God be God.

There are three very common ways in which Christians take from God. First, we distort God's power by choosing to rely on our own strength rather than the strength that God provides. Because we are such intelligent beings, and capable to solve many problems, we trust our own self. This independence can reign higher than our dependence on God. This causes us to needlessly worry and scurry about trying to fix things we cannot fix. When we behave in this way, we usurp God's power.

Second, we distort God's sovereignty by choosing to practice faith in such a way that allows us to settle into a faith in which we feel God is obligated to us. Because of the money we give, the service we provide to people in need, the time we spend at church, and so on, we can in some way develop the idea that we are entitled to something or that God owes us. When we behave this way, we usurp God's sovereignty.

Finally, we distort God's mission by assuming that it is our work we are accomplishing rather than God's grand work. We merely join in what God is already doing; we do not produce the work ourselves. God's mission is all around us. God goes before us, beside us, and in front of us in order to bring wholeness forth out of this broken world. We should never fall into the trap of thinking that this is our mission and our work. Our faithfulness to God's mission is important, but we are not to think that God could not accomplish God's mission without us.

OTHERS' STORY

What happens when humankind seeks security in self? Babel, that's what happens. Complete confusion and chaos sets in and we no longer can cooperate with one another. This is not God's plan for us. When we are determined to seek selfish motives, we are not acting in cooperation with God's mission to restore the world to its intended wholeness.

The church needs to become more ecumenical. The church must, for the sake of the world, become as interested as those outside the faith as they are interested in their doctrinal distinctions. The church must find a way to work harder and harder to come together for evangelism, social justice, wellness, and so on. This cooperation is how, together, we can join in God's restoration movement for the sake of the world.

Here are several ways to work closely with other churches to cooperate with God's mission:

Share church buildings with faith communities for worship. *Do we all really need our own buildings? What if we spent more money on reaching people than erecting new buildings?*

Work together with other churches on particular projects, such as help for the homeless, counseling centers, youth ministry initiatives, local community and global social action projects, and evangelistic outreach. *There is no reason for churches not to partner more closely together with local agencies and organizations to reach out to more and more people in need.*

Start new faith communities in a number of new housing areas with other churches. *Theology is important, no doubt. However, is there a way for some churches who have very similar theological convictions work together to start churches?*

THE WORLD'S STORY

The only way for our world to be brought closer into a life of spiritual humility and out of its confusion will be for men and women to stop trying to rely on their own towers of strength.

We, as a world, must remember that God's truth and God's love and God's judgment still reign and no worldly power can ever bring them down to humanity's level.

Nations must come into the realization that there is a common language of the human spirit and that language is love. We must stop being so selfish and open ourselves up to the needs of others, praying for our countries leaders to guide us there, under God's supreme leadership.