Control Issues · by Isaac Landis and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

"Then they said, 'Come, let us build 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 earth." Genesis 11:4 (NRSV).

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 11: 1-9

FAITH FOCUS:

The whole world had one common language as people continued to move eastward. When they settled in the plain of Shinar, they decided to build a city with a tower that reached to the heavens. They hoped the tower would prevent them from being scattered and would help them reach God. When the LORD saw what they were doing, he decided to confuse their speech and scatter them across the land. The LORD feared what they could do with a common language.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students realize that sin is when we try to take control over God.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this session, students will be able to recognize things they do to try to take control from God.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

1 A copy of *Beverly Hills Ninja*—cued to the part where Chris Farley is telling the driver where to go with a blindfold on. (Cue numbers: 1:15:00 - 1:19:15)
2 Blindfolds for each class member—bandannas or something that you can give them at the end of class.
3 TV and VCR or DVD player
4 Bibles for everyone
5 note cards and pencils for everyone.
6 A big card that says babel on one side and Babel on the other side.
7 Large poster board—one for each 3-4 students
8 Markers, crayons, colored pencils
9 Quiet worship music and CD player

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: *(5–15 minutes)*

Option A: Show the video clip from *Beverly Hills Ninja*. After watching the clip, ask the following questions: *How would you feel if you were Joey? What would you do in that situation? Why is it so stupid for the blindfolded person to be giving directions?*

Option B: Pair up students and have one student in each pair put on a blindfold. Go outside if that's an option, or to a part of the church that gives them more room to maneuver. Explain that the person wearing the bandanna will be verbally telling their partner where to go and what to do, and the partner must try to do it. You can either do this simultaneously—everyone at one time—or take turns, one pair at a time.

After this activity, talk about it together.

Ask: *Were you surprised at the instructions I gave you? Did it seem backwards? How did it feel to get directions from a blind person? How did it feel to give directions without being able to see?*

CONNECT: *(5 minutes)*

Ask: *Who was in control of the situation we just (watched/experienced) ? For the general health and well-being of everyone, who should have been in control?*

Say: *After the flood, Noah's descendents repopulated the earth. Who do you think was in control at that time—God or the people? Stand up if you think it was God and remain seated if you think it was the people.*

After the students have stated what they think about this "control issue," say *"I admit it—I gave you a trick question. Let's look at a Bible story and you'll see why."*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: *(10 minutes)*

1 Hand out the note cards and pencils to each student. Then hold up the big card with the word babel (lower case) towards the class. Ask them to write down a definition for that word. Then discuss the definitions. The dictionary says: A confusion of sounds or voices.

2 Turn your card around so the students see Babel. Ask them to write down what they know about that word—what's the story behind it? Discuss their answers.

3 Ask students to open their Bibles to Genesis 11:1-9. Read the story, then ask the class:

   Why did the people build the tower?

   Because they could. They had the technology. They wanted to make a name for themselves.

   They wanted to control their own lives.

   What was God's reaction? What did God do?

   God wasn't happy about this. God intervened and confused their language so they couldn't work together anymore.

   Why was this tower against God's will?

   Because it symbolized unfaithfulness on the part of the people. It meant they wanted control over their lives.

   Who was having control issues?

   The people and God.

APPLY: *(15 minutes)*

1 Optional: Show the clip from *Beverly Hills Ninja* again.

Ask: *What connections do you see between this clip and our lives?*

Whether or not you use the clip, ask: *How and when do you find yourself telling God how to drive? What are examples of you saying that you let God drive, but you are also driving from the backseat?*

2 Split students into groups of no more than 5-6. Give each group a poster board and markers. Give the following instructions: On the left side of your poster, draw symbols or pictures of things you do without consulting God or praying about it—things you want to keep in your control. On the right side, illustrate things you do ask God or pray about and that you want God to be involved with. In the middle, draw things that are sometimes on either side or could go either way.

Share the posters with the class.

RESPOND: *(5 minutes)*

1 Hand out the blindfolds. Ask each student to choose one aspect in their lives that they want to give over to God's control (they may want to take something from a poster.) Ask everyone to put on their blindfolds. Ask them to think about the aspect of their lives in which they are prepared to trust God and give God control—to be the blind person who trusts God to do the driving.

Play the worship music during this time—one song is about the right length of time.

2 Tell students they make take their blindfold home to use as a reminder of trusting God and giving God control over their lives.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

In the Genesis account, sin creeps into the Story not long after creation. God creates the world out of chaos, and it is all good. However, the serpent enters as the tempter to Eve in the Garden. The book of Genesis is a book that explains why things are the way they are, especially the first eleven chapters. These first few chapters is where sin is introduced into God's perfect creation. The stories of Adam and Eve and the Tower of Babel are ways in which humans are trying to be like God. They involve pride. This defines the sin problem—*Sin is trying to be like God.*

The tower story falls under the same light as the garden story. This act by the people is an attempt to be equal with God—it is a sin of pride. The major difference is that it is a corporate act, an act by all humans to be equal with God. The best and worst of human nature is shown in this story. The technological advancements are high, but their motive (pride) is to make a name for themselves, which is not so good. Control is also an issue in this story. The humans are trying to take control over their own lives. They do not want to be scattered throughout the land, so they do their best to create a means of unification. The tower and city are not necessarily the main issue, instead it is the unfaithful act by the people. The scattering and filling of the earth was a sign of God's blessing, and it was part of God's will. However, the people here act in a way that is against God's will. This action prompts God to take action.

He is forced to act in order to prevent future problems with the people. The people find confusion and chaos instead of unity (Roop 84).

These first chapters set the stage for the rest of the Bible by defining the sin problem, and therefore introducing salvation history and the need for Jesus. The rest of the Bible follows the story as God works with an unfaithful people. The result of sin is a separation, or loss of a peaceful relationship, between humans and God, with others, with themselves, and all of creation. The order that God brings out of chaos now returns to its original state. This story can also be seen in connection with Pentecost, when the people are united through the speaking of tongues. Here God overcomes the disunity and works through an incredible miracle.

WORKS CITED:

Roop, Eugene F. **Believers Church Bible Commentary: Genesis**. Ed. Elmer A. Martens and Howard H. Charles. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1987.