

## READ

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Genesis 11

## REFLECT

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The tower of Babel is a deeply complicated story. Very often it's understood to be an example of human vanity – human thinking that they had the ability to find equal footing with God in heaven – and God's punishment for that vanity. The problem with that understanding is that the result of the "punishment" was the creation of a variety of languages and cultural diversity, which leads us to believe that diversity is a punishment, which it is not. If we are to understand the diversity of Spiritual gifts as a blessing, which enables us to become the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), we should understand human diversity in the same way. But if its not punishment, what is it? Important to understand what the text itself says about motivation for building the tower. Notice it doesn't actually say humanity wanted to be like God, it says that humanity was afraid of becoming dispersed. It wasn't vanity that drove this action, it was fear. But God had commanded humanity to fill the earth and multiply after Noah and his family were released from the Ark, and that can't be done if the people were locked up in a tower that kept them homogeneous. So, God confused their language and the people split up so that they could do as God commanded. In that action is a blessing, not a curse, because it forces humanity to be intentional when we interact with diverse peoples. No longer can we just assume that everyone is like us, they are different, their likes and dislikes are different, their motivations are different – and it takes work, a holy kind of work, to bridge the differences to see one another as the same, as we are all beloved creations of God.

## REACT

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- How do you remember being taught about the Tower of Babel? Was it primarily a story of punishment or something else? How does the interpretation of it as blessing sit with you? What questions are you left with?
- Think about a time you've had to interact with someone from a different part of the world. How did you bridge language gaps, culture gaps, or

other kinds of difference? Was it difficult? In the end, were you able to find common ground?

- How can a broader understanding of the Tower of Babel lead you to interact with others in a different way? Can you be more forgiving of the frustrations that can come when trying to bridge differences? Can you be more accepting of the differences that make us who we are, just as God has made us?

## RESPOND

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*Cultural Immersion: Push yourself to explore a new culture. Whether it's food, travel, or media, engage a new culture and try to find beauty there. Try a new restaurant that serves food you've never heard of and ask the wait staff for a recommendation, go to an ethnic grocery store and pick out a new snack to try, watch a tv show or movie from another country, listen to a radio station from a different corner of the globe ([radio.garden](http://radio.garden) is a great resource for world radio). In your encounter with this new culture, find what is similar to something you're more familiar with. If that's too difficult or it's so different it seems totally disconnected from your reality, explore how it can be seen as beautiful. In our ability to find beauty in the things that are different we're able to draw nearer to God, not in a tower, but in our hearts, as we see just how amazing God's creation is!*