

JON NIELSON

GOD'S

GREAT

STORY



A DAILY DEVOTIONAL FOR TEENS

“*God’s Great Story* is an absolute treasure trove for teenagers. This daily devotional is a guided journey through the pages of the Bible, delivering bite-sized pieces of good news each day. I have been using the book with my own family for some time now and see how it helps reduce the intimidation factor that some feel when attempting to read through the Bible on their own. The practical prayer prompts and meditations at the end of each reading are helpful additions, making it easy for students to personally engage with the word of God. But what I like most about *God’s Great Story* is that it encourages our teenagers to get into the Scriptures for themselves, and that’s where the Holy Spirit does his best work.”

Trent Casto, Senior Pastor, Covenant Church of Naples, Florida

“Our teenagers’ valuable attention spans are pulled in different directions, and powerful narratives attempt to explain the world to them. However, there is only one story that deserves their thoughtful consideration and assigns meaning and value to everything they can see and everything they can’t see. Teens need to know this story and the one who wrote it. In a season of life when time seems to stand still, *God’s Great Story* is a devotional that will help teens get to know the one who stands above time.”

Gloria Furman, author, *Labor with Hope* and *Missional Motherhood*

“Any devotional worth its salt should motivate readers to understand and read the word of God themselves. I believe that Jon Nielson’s book *God’s Great Story* does exactly that. This book provides a very helpful structure for daily Bible reading to see how the story fits together to point us to Christ. If you have teenagers in your life, I’d highly encourage you to get this book for them. If you are a teenager, dive in and let this book guide you toward a lifetime of learning to live in this great story.”

Chris Bruno, Global Partner, Training Leaders International; author, *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* and *The Whole Message of the Bible in 16 Words*

“Devotionals are often either overwhelming or underwhelming. Here is a devotional aimed at young men and women that delivers perfectly. Nielson manages to emphasize the importance of Scripture reading while also informing the reader, pointing to Christ, upholding holiness, and emphasizing grace. This devotional equips theologically and stirs devotionally. As a pastor of a university church, I would be delighted if every one of our students began their day upon their knees with the Bible in one hand and Nielson’s devotional in the other hand.”

Jason Helopoulos, Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church,
East Lansing, Michigan

“The statistics are out there—America’s youth are in crisis. Both young men and women are experiencing frightening levels of depression, suicide, drug abuse, and confusion about themselves and the world around them. Worse, many (even those who are seemingly well-adjusted and happy) are drowning in a sea of apathy and ignorance about the only thing that can set their feet on solid spiritual ground: God’s word. None too late comes this thrilling book by Jon Nielson. Breaking down God’s story into a compelling play of five acts, *God’s Great Story* helps our teens (and perhaps their parents) navigate their way through the Bible in a year to see the big picture of redemption—and their place in it. I highly recommend this wonderful, much-needed resource!”

Chris Castaldo, Senior Pastor, New Covenant Church, Naperville, Illinois;
author, *The Upside Down Kingdom: Wisdom for Life from the Beatitudes*

God's Great Story

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A Daily Devotional for Teens

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God's Great Story: A Daily Devotional for Teens

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This book is dedicated to my daughters:
Adelyn, Averie, Emilie, and Lucy.
May you grow up reading, loving,
and obeying God's precious word!

Preface

Dear Student,

I've been there. It was the start of a new year. Your church, parent, or youth pastor had challenged you about daily devotions. Maybe you tried to do a “read through the Bible in a year” plan. Maybe you tackled the Old Testament—diving right in at Genesis. Maybe you got bogged down somewhere in the book of Leviticus and wondered when you were going to get out of the part about laws, sacrifices, and infectious skin diseases! Let's face it: reading the Bible—especially reading it every day—is hard work. It takes serious discipline. I think, though, sometimes it's hard for us to read it every day because we forget two important truths about the Bible—truths that make all the difference.

First, we forget that the Bible is not just a book *about* God; the *Bible is God speaking*. The apostle Paul tells Timothy that the Bible is God-breathed, that is, inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). There are, of course, many different human authors who wrote the books of the Bible over hundreds of years, but the doctrine of inspiration means that, ultimately, there is one author of the Bible: God himself. The God who made us—and everything else in the universe—made sure that his written word contained exactly what he wanted it to contain. Nothing in the Bible is there by accident! The Bible is God speaking to us, and he says what he says on purpose. This truth has huge implications for how we read, study, and listen to the words of the Bible. We don't read it just to get more knowledge or to get the “right answers” at youth group. We read it to hear God speaking to us! Reading the Bible should be, first and foremost, personal. Do you read the Bible that way? Sometimes I don't. I forget that the Bible is God speaking—to me—today. That fact makes a huge difference in how we approach it.

Second, we forget that the Bible is not just a collection of random books and writings; the Bible is *one story*. This truth comes from the fact that the Bible has one main author: God. If that is true—if God inspired the Bible and is the ultimate author of it—it makes sense that it would all hang together. And it does! The Bible has an incredible unity to it—a unity that would be impossible if God hadn't designed it that way. The Bible is one story. It's a story of God's love and salvation for the people he has created. It has a

beginning: creation (Genesis). It has an end: new creation (Revelation). It has a climax: the cross and resurrection. It has a hero: Jesus Christ, God's Son. And the best part is that we are living in the final act of the story. We are living as part of the church of Christ, waiting for Jesus to come back. In a way, we are "Bible characters"!

I've put this devotional together with you in mind. You're a student, between the ages of 15 and 21, and you (like many Christian people your age) have probably had some frustrations trying to get into reading the Bible every day. This devotional will take you through the entire story of the Bible in one year. You won't read every single chapter of the Bible, but you'll read at least portions from every part of the developing story of God's salvation for his people. Each day, you'll read a Scripture passage—usually one chapter or so and sometimes just a few verses. After reading the passage, you'll read an explanation of the passage, which will seek to make the passage clear, remind you of its place in the story, and make an application to your life.

I've called this devotional *God's Great Story* because that's what the Bible is. It is God's story, God's direct communication with us. This devotional has been organized into five acts, just as you would find in a theatrical play. This division comes mainly from Matthew, the Gospel writer, who begins his Gospel with a genealogy of Jesus, divided up into three main sections: Abraham to David, David to the Exile, and the Exile to Jesus. When we add an act on either side (Adam to Abraham and Jesus to the end of the world), we begin to understand that the story of the world can be summarized in this way. We're living in Act 5—we are waiting for Jesus to return!

Before you start, let me say one more thing. Please, please, PLEASE read the Bible passages. Don't just read my devotional thoughts. If you do that, you will have missed the most important and life-giving part of this process: hearing *God* speak to you through his inspired word. The devotional thoughts are meant to help you understand God's word better, not to stand alone as your time with God. If you stick with this thing—every day, with discipline, being consistent—I really do believe that God will speak to you and that you'll come to better understand the Bible as one big story of God's salvation for his people. And it's my prayer that you'll hear God's voice more and more as you get into his word!

In Christ,
Jon

A Bible Study Method

The theological principles that inform our understanding of and approach to God's word lay the groundwork for any Bible study method you choose to use. Your *attitude* toward the Bible is the most important thing; the specific methods are secondary.

But the methods are important! A very simple Bible study method is the observation/interpretation/application model. This method is a helpful one for people who are just beginning to study the Bible. It's easy to remember, and the three "sections" are clearly divided and defined. Here's how it works:

- **Observation.** The basic question in this section is, "What do I *see*?" At this point, you are focused only on making observations about the text. This section is helpful because there are no wrong answers; you can make observations about a biblical text even if it's your first time reading the Bible. Sometimes it can feel as if you're just stating the obvious—but this step is very important. Make sure you don't miss anything that's going on in the passage.
- **Interpretation.** The next move, according to this method, is to begin interpreting the passage. First you asked, "What do I *see*?" Now you are asking, "What does it *mean*?" It's usually helpful to tackle parts of the passage bit by bit, working through the things that it is teaching and communicating. The goal in this section, though, is to settle on the main point that the passage seems to be getting across. You're trying to summarize the "big picture" of the passage in one sentence. Put a sentence together, ironing out a simple and clear summary of your interpretation.
- **Application.** Finally, the last step is to ask the question, "What does this mean for me?" Here you move on from mere interpretation and begin talking about what difference the passage from God's word should make in the way you think and live. This is a very important place to get to, and it can easily lead into prayers that are very focused on the teaching of the Bible passage. Work toward real, practical, and

tangible applications of the passage. You can ask questions like, “What does that *really look like* in my life today?” or “How should this affect my mindset as I go about my day *tomorrow*?”

One benefit of this three-step method is that you will very quickly get used to the progression and get better at working through the steps. This method can work very well, especially as you understand the “big story” of the Bible, with the gospel as the center.

ACT 1

Adam to Abraham

And God Said

Imagine your family has a big, strong, beautiful English boxer. Seventy-five pounds of pure muscle, he can jump several feet in the air and sprint much faster than anyone. The dog gets excited when new people come to your house and jumps all over them, pawing at their clothes. Sometimes he wants to play so badly that he'll start trying to bite ankles or shoelaces. He knows how to sit, but when he gets wound up, he doesn't listen to anything you say. In this house—with regard to this dog—words have very little power!

Contrast this with the creation of the world. “In the beginning,” we read, “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (1:1–2). Then something happens: “And God *said*” (1:3). Have you ever really considered this? When God created the world, he didn't even get his hands dirty. He spoke *words*. The God we worship, know, love, and follow *spoke* an entire universe into existence.

As God created everything in the world, this refrain (“And God said”) is echoed by another refrain: “And God saw that it was good.” God was pleased with all that he had made; it was good.

Then comes something different. God has a brief “conversation” within the Godhead. The God we worship—one God in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)—says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness” (1:26). God creates human beings in a completely different way—for a completely different purpose—than anything else in all creation! Human beings alone are created in the image of the eternal, glorious, three-person God. God gives these beings dominion over the earth, and he blesses them and tells them to multiply.

So begins the story of the Bible—the story of the whole world. It begins with God speaking the world and human beings into existence. It begins with God's affirmation of every good thing he had made. And it begins with God's setting apart human beings in a special way for a special purpose. This, to God, is “very good” (1:31).

Take some time to praise God, the marvelous Creator of all things, including you. Marvel at the power of his word. Remember that he made you for his specific purpose. Don't forget to pray about the specific concerns and joys of your day today.

A Day of Rest

The first chapter of Genesis focused on God's work during the six days of creation. God is so powerful that all he had to do was speak and everything came into existence. And God is so powerful that he accomplished everything he had set out to do. Genesis 2:2 tells us, "On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done." Having finished, God did not work on this new day but "rested" (2:2), and through that rest God "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (2:3).

This passage may only be three verses, but they are verses that introduce a key concept that will echo throughout the whole Bible story: the *rest* of God. This rest of God becomes the foundation for the Sabbath day for God's people—a day for them to celebrate and remember God's rest. Followers of Jesus celebrate this as the Lord's Day until Jesus's return.

I want you to notice something interesting about this short passage. Do you remember the repeated phrase at the end of each of the first six days of creation? "And there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day." Look at verses 1–3 again. Can you find that phrase after the seventh day? It's not there. The seventh day never ended. In other words, we are living in the seventh day right now! God, enthroned in heaven, is dwelling now in a state of perfect rest. It's not that God has stopped working completely, but he has stopped the work of creation.

Much later in the Bible story, this theme of God's rest comes up again. The author of Hebrews references Genesis 2:1–3 and says these words: "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest" (Heb. 4:9–11). What is the rest of God that was ultimately foreshadowed in this passage from Genesis? It is the joyful rest of humans who are saved, not by works, but by grace. Have you entered God's rest—his gracious salvation—through Jesus Christ, who lived and died for you?

Take some time to praise God that he worked magnificently in creation. Think about the fact that now God rests—that we live in the seventh day of creation. Ask him to give you the deepest rest in your soul as you seek to know him more and follow him completely through faith in Jesus Christ, his Son.

Working for God's Glory

Our world sometimes has a warped view of work. People complain about having to work at all, wishing they could quit their jobs and just relax forever. Others make work an idol, viewing it as a way to gain influence, value, and prestige and deceiving themselves into thinking they are like gods because of their success. Sometimes these people desire success in their work so strongly that they neglect to invest in their relationships. In contrast to these views, Genesis 2:4–25 depicts a biblical framework for work.

Note that this passage takes place *before* the fall—before Adam and Eve give in to temptation and disobey the word of God. Therefore, we get a glimpse in Genesis 2 of what God intended for human beings. Here we see that God made the man to work under the authority of God's word in a God-designed, foundational relationship with the woman.

Look at verse 15: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *work* it and keep it.” Work is not a result of the fall; work is a good thing! Work is a God-given responsibility designed to bring joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment. How is Adam to work? Under the authority and guidance of God's word. In verses 16–17, God gives instructions to Adam about how he should live in the garden; he gives Adam his word to guide his life and work. Finally, we come to the record of God's creation of the woman. This is the perfect, God-designed helper for the man. You can see how fundamental and prominent this relationship is in verse 24. This is the beginning of marriage.

At the outset of the great story of God's work in the world, we find ourselves with a God-designed pattern for man. We were made to work. We were made to live under—and by—the word of our Creator God. And we were made as male and female because God invented the perfect pattern of companionship. Sadly, we'll see in Genesis 3 how human sin horrifically damaged this entire pattern.

Begin today by thanking God for his creative and generous gift of this amazing pattern. Then look at your life. Confess the ways that you do not work for the glory of God. Confess the areas of your life that may not be totally guided by God's word. Pray that God would help you live today with a clear realization that he is your Creator and that you need to be guided by his word every minute.

Attack on God's Word

The famous World War II invasion of the beaches of Normandy (known to most of us now as D-Day) has been immortalized in movies, books, and television shows. It was an amazing battle and one that cost the Allied forces around ten thousand casualties. In any war there are certain arenas—key geographical points—that must be secured to achieve victory. The beaches of Normandy were such a point. The victory there by the Allied forces led to the German army's loss of position in most of France. The battle for the beaches of Normandy was in some ways *the* key battle of the entire war.

There is an epic battle going on in Genesis 3:1-7. The key arena is not a beach; it is God's word. The serpent—Satan himself—chooses the word of God as the key arena for his battle against God and humans. Look at the very first phrase out of the serpent's mouth: "Did God actually say . . . ?" His first strategic move is to question the reliability and truth of what God has said. What should Eve do without hesitation? She should cry out, "Yes, God said it! I believe it! Everything he says is faithful and true, and I will live by and under his word!" But she doesn't. In fact, she attacks God's word in a different way. She adds to it. And Satan, seeing that God's word has already lost its grip on the humans' hearts, seduces them into rebellion against God's word with the promise of knowledge and life.

Men, where is Adam during this whole conversation? Surely if Adam had been there, he would have shut down the smooth arguments of the serpent! Look again at verse 6: "She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*." Adam is right there. He watches as God's word is attacked by the serpent and doubted by his wife. And he does nothing.

The serpent attacks God's word, Eve begins to doubt the truth of God's word, and Adam does not stand up for God's word. The man and woman rebel, and sin enters the world. This is a very sad day.

Begin today by thanking God for his word. Are you doubting it? Do you add things to it? Do you not stand up for its truth? Pray that today God would help you to listen more carefully to his word.

Run and Hide

One of the scariest phrases an eight-year-old can imagine is when his mother says, “Wait until your father gets home.” That phrase, spoken after the boy has done something wrong, is a clear warning—a serious punishment is coming. When that boy hears the door open and his father’s footsteps approaching, there is one thing we know he wants to do more than anything else: run and hide!

That’s a little, tiny picture of what Adam and Eve are feeling in Genesis 3 after they have blatantly disobeyed the word of God and eaten the fruit that he commanded them not to eat. As soon as they hear God approaching them, they run and hide like scared children. It’s not a pretty picture for Adam and Eve when God confronts them either. They begin to play the blame game. “The woman whom *you gave to be with me*,” Adam begins, daring to point the finger first at his wife and then even at God himself (3:12). Eve blames it all on the serpent: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (3:13). God, of course, knows how it all went down. The serpent—Satan himself—is not without blame. But Adam and Eve must be punished as well. Ultimately they will pay the price with their very lives, and they are sent out from the garden to live and work with toil and struggle until their deaths.

Where’s the hope in all this? It’s a chapter full of sin, sadness, judgment, and loss of life. It is the very end of paradise! Yet God speaks a word of grace into this seemingly hopeless situation. In the midst of his curse on the serpent, God points forward to the ultimate victory over Satan, sin, and death won by a descendant of Adam and Eve. The offspring of Eve will one day bruise the head of the offspring of the serpent. This promise in verse 15, sometimes called the *protoevangelium* or “first gospel,” is God’s way of pointing us to his Son, Jesus, even at the darkest point of the story thus far. Jesus, who is God in human flesh, is the one who will one day clean up this mess, conquer death and sin, and finally crush the head of Satan. The war is not lost!

Take some time to think about the wonder of God’s grace—that he would promise victory over sin and death even in the midst of human sin and resulting judgment. Praise him for Jesus, who has won the ultimate victory over Satan (and our sin!) by dying on a cross for us and rising from the dead.

A Deadly Cycle

In case we were wondering whether or not the fall of Adam and Eve really did something to the world, we have Genesis 4 as our clear answer. The sin that entered the world through our first parents' rebellion against God's word took immediate effect, even in the lives of their children. Think of sin as a deadly poison; it infects the entire world, dispersing itself to every corner of creation.

Genesis 4 is another sad chapter in the Bible. In verses 5–8, we see an effect of the fall—infectious sin—taking over Cain, the son of Adam and Eve. He evidently does not bring offerings of worship to God in the right way. He gets angry at God. Even after God warns him about the sin that threatens to devour him, Cain deceives his brother Abel, lures him into a field, and murders him in cold blood. This is a terrible day in God's creation.

Amazingly, God shows a measure of grace to Cain. While Cain will be a wanderer in the earth, God nevertheless puts a hedge of protection around Cain and warns to punish any person who might try to hurt him. This is the second time in the Bible that God shows mercy to sinful human beings. Cain is an angry, bitter, selfish man who murders his own brother very intentionally. Does he deserve to die? Absolutely. But God gives him mercy.

Unfortunately the cycle and infestation of sin seems to get worse as the chapter goes on. We are introduced to Lamech, who seems to be a violent, prideful jerk of a man. He brags to his wives about killing a young man and claims that no one should dare come near him to do him harm. Adam and Eve have loosed a plague—an infection—that would creep into every corner of creation. But God is not done. There is a faint glimmer of hope as the chapter closes with the birth of a son named Seth and the beginning of the public worship of God. We have an ugly infestation—and a God who still has a plan for his people.

Look at the world around you. It is not hard to see how sin infects every part of life—government, politics, relationships, and, of course, our own hearts. Remember that God is not done! Think back to that promise that God gave to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 of the final victory over Satan, sin, and death. Hold on to Jesus today, as the only hope against sin's ugly—but temporary—hold on this world.

Grace amid Evil

When God created Adam and Eve, he gave them a wonderful command: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). We see in that command God’s gracious intention for the human population to increase and live in the world he had created. But in Genesis 6 we begin to see how the multiplication of the descendants of Adam and Eve led to more and more people—and therefore more and more evil.

When you read the first few verses of Genesis 6, you probably asked yourself, “What in the world is going on here?” We read about sons of God marrying daughters of man and are introduced to a race of creatures called the Nephilim, who were mighty men in those days. Confusing stuff! It seems safe to say that the relationships between these sons of God and daughters of man were forbidden by God—probably because they involved relationships between God’s people and people who didn’t worship God and most definitely because they involved some kind of sexual perversion. The Nephilim (probably best understood as a race of giants) also seem to be lovers of violence and enemies of God, as they seem to be taking women by force.

One thing emerges clearly from this passage: evil has taken over the earth. We get a brutal summary of human life in the world in verse 5: “Every intention of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually.” This grieves God because God is holy and hates sin. God promises judgment against sin, vowing that he will destroy the earth he has made, along with the people who have rebelled against him so terribly.

The *but* in verse 8 is a beautiful conjunction. In the midst of the evil that has taken over the world, one man emerges who finds favor (or *grace*) with God: Noah. We don’t know much about Noah at this point, although we learn later in the story that he is not a perfect man. What does Noah have? Noah has “favor in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8). Because of God’s grace to this one man, there will be grace for humanity; God will save some people, even in the midst of his holy judgment against sin.

Are you absolutely sure that you have favor—or grace—with God today? Have you put your faith in his Son, whose sacrificial death for your sins allows you to have favor with God? If so, rest in Jesus today! Thank God that you have favor in his eyes because of Jesus. Ask God for strength to obey his word and follow him, even in the midst of a world that has turned its back on God.

Judgment of Sinners and Rescue of the Righteous

Do you remember singing children's songs about all the animals that paraded onto Noah's ark? They were quite nice—happy sounding and cheerful, with lyrics about the animals' bounding onto the ark two by two. Many of us sang those songs with big smiles on our faces! As nice as those songs are, they are not accurate representations of Genesis 6 and 7 at all! Why? Because the story of Noah and the ark is a story of God's righteous and terrible judgment against human sin.

Genesis 6 tells us that the earth is under the sight of God. God is not blind! He sees the violence and corruption happening in the earth he has created; he doesn't miss anything. And this infinitely holy Creator of all things hates sin. The reality is that human sin against an infinitely holy God must mean judgment and ultimately death. This is what God determines and reveals to Noah: "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them" (6:13). This is an important lesson to learn about God—your Creator. He is holy; he hates sin; our sin against him brings judgment and death.

These chapters in Genesis are filled with death, destruction, and judgment. But what we see in this passage is the beginning of an important pattern for the way that God will work in the world he has made: God, even as he righteously judges sin, always provides gracious rescue for those who fear him and are righteous in his sight. "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God" (6:9). Noah was not a perfect man. But he walked with God. He lived under the grace of God. This makes him righteous.

We see in this passage also, for the first time in the Bible, a special word that will come up again and again in the Bible story: *covenant*. God tells Noah, this righteous man who has favor with God, that he will make a covenant with him—a promise to Noah. God promises to save Noah, to rescue him and his family and show him grace.

Think about the holiness of God. God hates sin. God will judge sin. Confess your sins to God today—and be specific! As you confess sin to God, remember that God has shown grace to you. Thank God today for Jesus, whose death in your place rescues you from God's judgment.

God's Covenant with Noah

The great flood that God sent on the earth has finally subsided. This is in many ways a fresh start for human beings. God begins again with Noah and his family, and he even repeats the same command to them that he gave to Adam and Eve hundreds of years earlier: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (9:1). You can imagine how grateful to God Noah and his family must be! They alone have been spared from his judgment. They should be excited and ready to begin a new humanity, right?

I'm not so sure. Remember, God has just brought about the death of the vast majority of humanity because of their sin. Noah is a righteous man, yes, but what about his family? What about the children they will have? Who's to say that God won't judge the whole world again by the time Noah's grandchildren get old enough to start killing one another and rebelling against God? If I were one of Noah's sons, I would be terrified!

If you read through the whole Bible, there is one refrain that you will hear again and again: God is gracious and merciful. God shows us this again through the covenant he makes with Noah and his family. What is the covenant—the promise—that God gives to Noah and his family? It's that he will never again send a flood to destroy the earth. God repeats this promise several times, and he even gives them a sign in the sky—a rainbow—that will act as a symbol of his promise to never do this to the earth again. Does God know that Noah's descendants will grow up to sin and rebel against him? Of course he does. But God chooses to show mercy. There will come a day when sin will finally be dealt with permanently; God will finally judge the earth. But God is gracious and patient; he will let human life continue. Be amazed at this God today, who voluntarily makes and perfectly keeps his promises to sinful people—even though he doesn't have to.

Think about how the very life we have on this earth is a gracious gift from God. Thank him for your life! Remember that God is a God who makes promises to people who are sinful and undeserving, promises that he keeps! If you belong to Jesus, God has made a promise to you too. It's a promise that he will forgive you, accept you, guide you, and keep you until you see him face to face.

United by Pride

Think about a time when you did something wrong. Maybe you told a lie to your parents. Maybe you did something that you've never confessed even to God. As you remember that sin, think about what was behind it. My guess is that it could be boiled down to one impulse that began to take over your heart: pride. In a way, pride lies at the root of every sin; it is our sinful desire to make ourselves the god of our lives.

We see that sinful human impulse so clearly in this account. We read in the beginning of the chapter that people everywhere in those days spoke the same language and lived in close proximity. This was the very beginning of civilization; new discoveries were being made every single day. It must have been an incredibly exciting time for the human race! But somewhere along the line, that excitement began to turn into pride. As they looked at their God-given abilities and capacities, the people became dissatisfied with living under God, their Creator. They started wanting to *be* God. Just listen to their words as they begin their plans to construct their great tower: "Let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and *let us make a name for ourselves*" (11:4).

In an ironic twist God has to *come down* to see the tower that is supposed to reach into the heavens. Don't read God's words to mean that he is worried that humanity will rise up and overpower him! However, he does recognize the danger in a humanity that is unified not in praise to its Creator but in celebration of its own pride and accomplishment. The people would not destroy God; they would destroy themselves. So God brings judgment on this sinful, prideful, and ultimately laughable attempt of the people to rise into the heavens by their own strength. He disperses them, giving them different languages so that they can't understand each other.

Look carefully at your heart today. Are there ways that you try to make yourself the god of your life? Take some time to confess your pride to God and ask him to help you to want his name to be great in and through your life as you follow his Son, Jesus Christ.