

Presence

God's presence is felt throughout all of today's readings. This presence is met with mixed reactions, from fear and awe to a gained sense of belonging and being known. The texts ask us to consider what it means to know God and to be known by God, as well as how this knowledge shapes the way we live our lives.

Focus scripture: Genesis 28:10–19a

This passage depicts the time directly after Jacob has received the blessing of Isaac – a blessing that traditionally would have gone to his elder brother, Esau. This is the final reversal of the brothers' saga that began when they were in Rebekah's womb. Now Jacob and Esau have gone their separate ways. Alone, Jacob falls asleep and enters a liminal space through a dream where he receives a message directly from God. Mirroring the covenantal promises given to Abraham and Isaac, Jacob receives assurances of land and descendants. It continues with a promise that God will be present with Jacob and will provide for his safety, further signifying that he will carry on the Abrahamic line.

Jacob's response is one of awe and reverence for the sacred interaction that has taken place. Calling it the gate of heaven, he acknowledges that this is a liminal place where God has come in contact with Earth. As was custom in ancient Israelite culture, Jacob marks the spot with a stone pillar. He also performs an act of naming, renaming the place Bethel, or the House of God. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, we witness the importance of naming and renaming, such as Abram's name change to Abraham. Naming is a signal of contact and interaction with God or among humans that has transformed the parties involved, along with the places they come in contact.

Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24 highlights the intimate knowledge that God has of a person. No thought, word, or action escapes God's knowledge because God is always present.

Despite those who threaten, the psalmist seeks a life led by God.

In **Romans 8:12–25**, Paul demonstrates the relationality of God and God's people through the language of adoption. God offers believers a new familial structure in which they are rightful heirs to God's realm. This creates an alternate societal structure to that of the Roman Empire and its paterfamilias. This new structure also invites believers into relation with Earth. For both the children of God and creation suffer under the present imperial powers and wait with hope-filled anticipation for freedom and redemption.

In **Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43**, Jesus provides another agricultural parable on the reign of God using the imagery of wheat and weeds. Both weeds and wheat grow together in the world and may look similar to one another, but in the end, they will be sorted and dealt with accordingly. Jesus highlights that this separation does not happen until the seeds have borne fruit. It is important to approach the text with caution, as it has the potential to harm and hurt by drawing lines between "insiders" and "outsiders." There is mystery in how God plants, nurtures, and weeds to secure a harvest of promise, and we are invited into hope-filled trust in God.


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Today's texts paint images of the relationship between God and God's people. God is ever-present, all-knowing, and all revealing. What other images do you have for your relationship with God?



Focus scripture Genesis 28:10–19a

Additional scriptures
Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24
Romans 8:12–25
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

 *Seasons of the Spirit*
is based on semi-
continuous readings of the
Revised Common Lectionary.

**Loving God,
you are with us
throughout our
lives. You know
our dreams and
desires, our fears
and failures. Help
us to more fully
welcome your
presence into our
lives and grant us
the courage to be
more present in
the lives of others.
Amen.**

Lection Connection

links current events
with this week's
scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and
click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Children are sometimes frightened by their dreams. Like adults, children often dream about the concerns and situations they encounter during the day. Others might have happy dreams that focus on their excitement about a new pet, a special visitor, or a holiday. Children also have experiences of discord within families, and may have wished they could run away from a situation. In this week's story, children may be able to identify with Jacob's desire to run away from Esau's anger as well as with Jacob's vivid dream in the midst of this running away.

Older children in the group, who have a strong sense of right and wrong, may feel that it is unfair that Jacob receives good words and promises from God. Yet it is also

a great story to feed their imaginations, an important component of their growing faith. Children can intuitively sense the greatness, wonder, and love of God, but may not yet have the language to describe what they have experienced. They are able to comprehend in theory that God communicates with them, though may need help to recognize this in their own lives. As the children offer their thoughts and insights, you can point out that God is indeed communicating with and through them.

Pray that as the children engage with the story of Jacob's dream they may experience the mystery that is God and come to a greater understanding of the ways in which God might communicate with them.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 28:10–19a, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 51).
- ❑ Set worship space with green cloth; bring candle and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 9), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring song "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[A Stone for a Pillow](#)."
- ❑ **Dream group:** copies of resource sheet "[Dreaming with Jacob](#)"
- ❑ **Bible research group:** copies of resource sheet "[Trickery and Lies](#)"

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Story zone:** rocks, acrylic paints, strip of paper, instructions from resource sheet "[Story Gallery Project-1](#)" (p. 110)
- ❑ **Prayer zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Walk and Pray](#)" (p. 112)
- ❑ **Music zone:** recording for song "Be God's" (#3 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9), rock or other item
- ❑ **Craft zone:** small stones, permanent markers
- ❑ **Art zone:** plain pillowcases, fabric crayons or markers, iron

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "As Long As We Follow/*Na Nzela Na Lola*" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ❑ Bring a stone for each child.



Presence

Scripture

Genesis 28:10–
19a

FOCUS To be assured, with Jacob, that we can be a blessing

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce any newcomers. Share stories and experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and invite a volunteer to light the candle as you say:

This candle reminds us
of God's presence with us.
In this space, we hear stories
about God and God's people.
(Place Bible beside candle.)

In this space, we know God's Spirit
is with us.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray (Invite children to repeat each line after you.)

Loving God,
thank you for this place
where we can learn and share.
May we be open to the work
of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to help you define the word "mystery." Encourage them to talk about experiences of something mysterious. Then challenge them to look for signs of mystery and wonder in the story for this session.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Genesis. Help children recall last week's story of the twin boys named Jacob and Esau, children of Rebekah and Isaac, and about how Jacob tricked his brother Esau into trading something very important.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[A Stone for a Pillow](#)" to present the story based on **Genesis 28:10–19a**.

Wondering questions Use some or all of the following questions to wonder together:

- **What is surprising about the words that Jacob heard in his dream?**
- **Why do you think Jacob wanted to mark the place where he had the special dream?**

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Dream group (for younger children) This group will have the opportunity think more about Jacob's dream about God's blessing. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Dreaming with Jacob](#)" and encourage children to draw Jacob's dream, helping them recall the dream by reviewing the story together.

Bible research group (for older children) This group will have the opportunity to dig a little more into the events that led up to Jacob's departure for Haran. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Trickery and Lies](#)" and form pairs or small groups to read the biblical texts and discuss the questions.

Reporting Invite the dream group to share their artwork and invite the research group to share some of their responses to the questions.

The Bible story and us

There are many stories in the Bible and today too about God communicating with people through dreams. Ask:

■ What are some other ways that God might communicate with us?

In his dream Jacob felt God's blessing and heard God promise never to leave him alone.

■ How does it feel to know that God will always be with us, no matter what happens?

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Story zone: Story gallery** (*Option: ongoing project*) Jacob used a rock to mark the special place where he felt God with him. Follow the instructions for this week on the resource sheet "Story Gallery Project-1" (p. 110) for making the rock sculpture.

- ❑ **Prayer zone: Walking prayer** We can pray and talk to God when sitting still or moving about. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Walk and Pray" (p. 112) and read about this method of prayer. Invite children to each choose a phrase to repeat as they practice a walking prayer. Talk about the experience afterwards. Encourage children to take the instructions home and practice when they can.

- ❑ **Music zone: Blessing meditation** God promised Jacob that he would be a blessing. We can be a blessing too when we show love to others. Gather in a circle and give one child a rock or other object to hold. Play the song "Be God's" (#3

on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9) and have the children pass the rock around the circle. When the music stops, the child holding the rock names one way we can be a blessing. Continue until all have had a turn.

- ❑ **Craft zone: Prayer rocks** The stone in Jacob's story became a symbol of a holy place, where something important happened. Give each child a stone and invite them to decorate these using the markers, adding words and symbols to remind them of God's love and presence. Encourage them to keep their "prayer rock" in a place where they will see it in the morning and at bedtime, as a reminder to pray to God.

- ❑ **Art zone: Prayer pillowcases** God can encourage, support, and guide us, even when we are asleep. Give each child a pillowcase to decorate with fabric crayons, using shapes and colours that remind them of God's love and presence. Press the cases with a hot iron to set decorations permanently.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song the song "As Long As We Follow/*Na Nzela Na Lola*" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Lead the children in the following prayer, inviting them to repeat each line after you:

Loving God, as we remember you around us,
we will try to be a blessing to others. Amen

Blessing Give each child a stone as you offer the following blessing: "(Name), may this stone remind you that God is always with you and that you can be a blessing to others."

Reflect

How did the children express an awareness that God communicates with them? In what ways did they understand that they can be a blessing to others?



A Stone For a Pillow

based on Genesis 28:10-19a

Setting the environment for a dream story can help children remember that the major action takes place in Jacob's dream.

Darken the area as much as possible. Invite the children to sit or lie in relaxed states. When the mood is established, tell the story.

Esau and Jacob, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, had a terrible argument when Esau found out that Jacob had tricked their father into giving Jacob the blessing that should have gone to Esau, the oldest son. The blessing would have given Esau all the property and money and the responsibilities that are due the oldest son. Esau was so angry that he said things like he wanted Jacob dead.

So even though Jacob now had all the rights of the oldest son, it was not safe for him to stay at home and claim them. When their mother Rebekah realized how angry Esau was, she looked for Jacob.

"Jacob, my son, it is not safe for you here. Go to Haran, where your father and I grew up. Go to our relatives there."

Jacob knew that his mother was right. It was not safe for him at home. So he started the long journey to Haran.

He reached a certain place by the end of the first day. There was no town or house, so he took one of the stones and used it for a pillow.

He was tired from all that walking and went to sleep right away. As he slept, he began to dream. In his dream, a stairway went from the earth up into the sky. On that stairway, some angels walked up and some walked down. As he watched the angels going up and down, Jacob heard God say, "I am the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebekah. This land where you are sleeping will be home for you and any family you have, which will be many. Know that I am with you wherever you go. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised."

Then Jacob woke up and said, "This is awesome! Surely God is in this place."

Early the next morning, before Jacob left that certain place, he took the stone that was his pillow and stood it up like a pillar. Jacob poured oil over the stone and named this certain place Beth-el, the house of God.



Dreaming with Jacob





Trickery and Lies

In the previous story Jacob and Esau made a swap. Esau swapped his birthright and his inheritance for a bowl of soup. This may seem like a bad swap at first. However, in those days a special blessing was needed to make the inheritance valid. Without the blessing, the swap didn't mean a thing. Esau knew that his father Isaac would not give this special blessing to Jacob, so Esau thought his inheritance was safe. Now the time has come for Isaac to give the special blessing.

Read **Genesis 27:1–4**.

■ **What do you think will happen next?**

Rebekah was listening and told Jacob what she had heard. They planned to trick Isaac. Rebekah made some stew and bread. Then she dressed Jacob in his brother's clothes. She even put goatskin around his arms, so Jacob would feel hairy like his brother Esau. Jacob went to Isaac and lied to his father, assuring Isaac many times that he was Esau. Eventually Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob. The blessing was a very solemn prayer and could not be taken back and given to another person. Now Jacob had the blessing and the inheritance.

■ **What do you think will happen next?**

Esau returned from his hunt, made the food for Isaac, and went to get the blessing. At that terrible moment, both Isaac and Esau realized that Jacob had tricked them.

Read **Genesis 27:41–42**.

■ **Now Jacob is on the run. What do you think will happen next?**

Story Gallery Project-1

The following projects can stand alone as an activity for that week, or the activities can be part of an ongoing project to create a “gallery” of images based on the stories from Genesis and Exodus. If you choose to do an ongoing project, mount each week’s art pieces as indicated and keep in the meeting room until August 31, when the group can host an “art gallery tour” for the rest of the congregation.

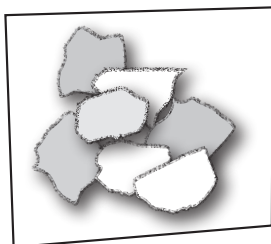
July 5: Clay shapes

Rebekah knew deep down how to live in God’s way and this knowledge helped her to make loving choices (*Genesis 24*). Invite children to play with the modelling clay, moulding it with their fingers as they think about what it means to know something deep inside, and to make loving choices. Then have them make a shape to symbolize God’s presence deep down inside, helping them as they make choices. Display the clay symbols on a tray, adding a title and scripture reference.



July 12: Torn paper art

Jacob and Esau learned that choices can bring people together or tear them apart (*Genesis 25*). Invite children to express the mood of the story by tearing pieces from different colours of construction paper and glueing these onto sheets of white paper. The torn pieces of paper can be layered to create texture and can be glued to form different shapes. Glue the individual creations onto a sheet of poster board, adding a title and scripture reference.



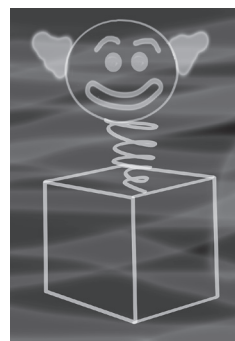
July 19: Rock sculpture

Jacob used a rock to mark a special place where he felt God with him and heard a comforting message (*Genesis 28*). Invite children to talk about how Jacob might have felt in that special place. Then have them paint and decorate rocks with images and words to express those feelings. When the paint is dry, pile the rocks to form a cairn, placing a strip of paper beside it with a title and scripture reference.



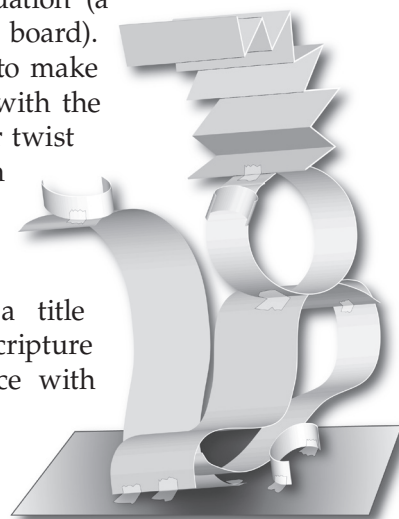
July 26: Wax relief painting

Jacob had some surprises in his life, one being when he discovered that he had married Leah (*Genesis 29*). Invite children to make wax-relief images to symbolize the surprises in our lives. Distribute sheets of white paper and have them draw shapes or words using white crayons or candles. Exchange drawings and show children how to brush watercolour paints over the pictures to reveal the surprise images. When the paintings are dry, tape them onto a sheet of poster board and add a title and scripture reference.



August 2: Paper sculpture

In his struggle and in the challenge of getting ready to meet his brother again, Jacob felt God’s presence around him (*Genesis 32*). Invite children to create sculptures by taping ends of strips of paper to a foundation (a piece of poster board). Encourage them to make different shapes with the strips of paper, or twist or loop them through each other, to symbolize the theme of struggle. Make a title strip, adding a scripture reference, to place with the sculptures.





You can pray when you are lying in bed. You can pray when you are sitting in a tree. You can pray when you kneel, and you can pray when you are waiting in line. You can also pray when you are walking, not just as you walk from one place to the next, but when you walk just because you want to pray.

Find a space where you can walk without running into something or someone. Begin to walk slowly, and keep your eyes open so you can see where you are going.

After you have established a comfortable pace, select one of these phrases to say to yourself (silently or quietly aloud):

- ☐ God, be with me.
- ☐ Peace be with me.
- ☐ Jesus, remember me.
- ☐ God is love.
- ☐ The Holy Spirit is with me.
- ☐ Jesus is my friend.

Say the phrase over and over, keeping pace with the way you are walking. After a few moments, you will find yourself walking and saying the phrase without thinking about it. This is a way to prepare yourself to connect with God. As you continue to walk, you can pray with words to God or you can open your mind and heart for God's word to you.

