

# Subversive Silence

Silence in the face of injustice is often portrayed as acquiesce, implicit acceptance, weakness grounded in fear. This week's scripture passages reminds us that silence can be a form of powerful resistance and subversion of imperial/patriarchal norms when the silence is grounded in the redemptive work of God's spirit.

## Focus scripture: Genesis 29:15–28

The exiles in Babylon, for whom the Genesis story was first composed, would have no problem recognizing their lives in the silence of Rachel and Leah who, in today's text, are traded as a mere commodity by their father, Laban. As the full story unfolds, it becomes clear these women are only biding their time.

Rachel, Leah, and no doubt Zilpah are all astute observers of the tools employed by patriarchy and systems of domination to maintain power and control. Deception and the self-justification evidenced by Laban is made normative in systems of domination. It may have caught Jacob off guard, but it came as no surprise to the women that Laban would swap out Leah for Rachel on Rachel's wedding night, in order for Laban to gain advantage over Jacob. The women also live with the challenge of being set up as competitors in this economic system of domination over which they have little control. All of this, the Babylonian exiles would recognize and understand.

However, as the three women know and the Babylonian exiles are reminded, they still have agency and the capacity to subvert the manipulative power of imperial, patriarchal domination. They have likely heard of how Jacob's mother, Rebecca, had herself subverted patriarchal norms with her own acts of resistance. As the story unfolds, Leah and Rachel join forces in persuading Jacob to leave behind their father. For the exiles in Babylon, it comes as a strong word of hope that the God of creation and liberation is present and at work among those and through those who appear to be without a voice.

**Psalm 105:1–6, 16–22, 45b** is an invitation to rejoice and celebrate the subversive nature of the Holy One, who is never constrained by human systems of domination. Sing praises, says the psalmist, give thanks, as the Apostle Paul would later say, in all circumstances, because the one who subverts empires with a promise of liberation is at work.

**Romans 8:26–39** offers strong words of comfort for all who suffer and who see little concrete evidence for hope. The encouragement is to never give up because even in our weakness the Holy One is there to strengthen us with a love from which we can never be separated.

**Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52** gives testimony to the often hidden and subtle power of the Realm of God at work in our lives and world. The parables tell that the reality of God's realm is at work now, and we are called to decide if this is the realm in which we choose to live.


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Silence in the face of injustice is sometimes the prudent and only option. Rebecca and Leah had little power or authority in a patriarchal world to overtly resist the dictates of their father Laban, no matter how unjust. Yet silence is not the same as acceptance. The sisters remain free to act when the time feels right. Their subversive silence enables Rachel and Leah to play their part in God's unfolding story of freedom, liberation, and covenant. How would the Babylonian exiles have heard this story? How might the example of these women be a guide for them in their own liberation? What keeps us from giving up in situations that seem overwhelming? How can silence reflect a deep resistance to injustice?



**Focus scripture**  
**Genesis 29:15–28**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Psalm 105:1–11, 45b or**  
**Psalm 128**  
**Romans 8:26–39**  
**Matthew 13:31–33,**  
**44–52**

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

**You whose voice thunders into the silence with the word of creative love, give us courage, resilience, and trust to know that silence need never be submission or acceptance of brokenness in our lives and in our world. May our actions be grounded in the power of your spirit at work, bringing healing into all creation. Amen.**

**Lection Connection**  
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on the link.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

Children in this age group experience love when they receive it from a parent or other significant person in their lives. They may have had a variety of experiences in witnessing love within families. Some know and see the love of happily married parents. Others have experienced the sadness when parents separate or divorce. They need to be assured that they are loved even when there are problems in the marriage.

The story of Jacob’s marriage to Leah and then Rachel is set in a time and culture that is quite different from our own. Many details of this story may be confusing to the children. Focusing on Jacob’s love and the work he will-

ingly did for love will be a connecting point.

Older children in the group will have experienced times when things did not work out as they expected. Perhaps they did not make the best team, got a lower mark than they were expecting, or were not chosen for a coveted part in the school play. This session provides the opportunity to acknowledge that life doesn’t always run smoothly and yet God works through both the struggles and the joys for good.

Pray that the children will come to a greater understanding of God’s steadfast love and the ways that God uses all the events of our lives for good.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Genesis 29:15–28, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 59).
- ❑ 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](http://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 “[Living into God’s Promise](#).”
- ❑ **Drama group:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Bible research group:** sheet of paper, Bibles

### Respond

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

- ❑ **Story zone:** white paper, white crayons or candles, watercolours, paintbrushes, containers of water, sheet of poster board, instructions from resource sheet “[Story Gallery Project-1](#)” p. (110)
- ❑ **Puzzle zone:** copies of resource sheet “[Jacob’s Family](#)”
- ❑ **Music zone:** recording for song “In God We Live and Move” (#21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9)
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of resource sheet “[Wrist Band Reminders](#),” craft foam or ribbon permanent markers
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of resource sheet “[Wrist Band Reminders](#),” small wooden treasure boxes (available in craft stores), self-adhesive stickers, strips of paper

### 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).



# Subversive Silence

## Scripture

Genesis 29:15–28

**FOCUS** To discover how Jacob worked with God to live into God's promise

## 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 *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 children to share some riddles or some tricks that they know. Comment that sometimes the tricks we play on one another can backfire and lead to trouble. Ask:

- **Have you ever played a joke on someone and it went wrong? What happened?**
- **Have you ever had a trick played on you? What happened? How did you feel?**

Suggest that the children watch for tricks and tricksters in the Bible 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 to recall the stories of Rebekah travelling to marry Isaac, their twin boys named Jacob and Esau, how Jacob tricked his brother Esau into trading something very important, and Jacob running away from home and having a special dream on the way. In this week's story he has arrived in Haran, the place where his mother Rebekah's family lived.

### The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Living into God's Promise](#)" to present the story based on **Genesis 29:15–28**. Explain that in biblical times it was customary for fathers to choose the husbands for

their daughters. Marriage was a business deal between two men (the father and the groom). It was also common for men to have more than one wife, so no one would have thought that what Laban did was strange. Ask:

- **In what ways was Jacob like his Uncle Laban?**
- **How do you think Jacob felt when he found he had been tricked?**

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

- **What might Jacob have been thinking if he remembered the trick he had played on Esau?**
- **How might Leah or Rachel have felt about what happened?**

### 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.)*

**Drama group** This group will have the opportunity to imagine some conversations between the main characters of the story. Invite them to first imagine a conversation between Jacob and Leah on the morning after the wedding. Then invite them to imagine a conversation between Jacob and Rachel. Have them create a skit called “After the wedding” based on these imaginary conversations.

**Bible research group** *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to review the main characters in the stories of Genesis. Provide the following references and ask children to list the

people, forming them into a family tree: Genesis 21:3; Genesis 24:67; Genesis 25:24–26; Genesis 29:23, 28.

**Reporting** Invite the drama group to share their skit and invite the research group to share the family tree drawing.



### The Bible story and us

Recall that when Jacob dreamed of angels walking up and down stairs, he heard God’s promise to always to be with him no matter what happened. Just like Jacob we go through good times and hard times. Invite children to recall times when something happened in their life that was great and times when they were disappointed or frustrated. Ask:

- **What might help us remember that God is with us when we are having a hard time?**

## Respond

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

- **Story zone: Story gallery** *(Option: ongoing project)* Jacob was surprised to discover that he had married Leah. Follow the instructions for this week on the resource sheet “[Story Gallery Project-1](#)” (p. 110) for making the wax relief paintings.
- **Puzzle zone: Word search** God promised Jacob would have many children, which was one way people were a blessing in Jacob’s day. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Jacob’s Family](#)” and invite children to discover how many children Jacob had. 
- **Music zone: Reminder song** All during his life, Jacob knew that God was with him. Some songs can remind us of God’s promise to always be with us. Invite children to listen to the promise in the words of the song, “In God We Live and Move” (#21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9). Listen to the song again and encourage children to hum along. Then teach the song line by line, inviting the group to repeat after each line, singing it over and over again until they know the chant. 
- **Craft zone: Wrist bands** The story of Jacob reminds us that God works through all events of our lives to bring healing and growth. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Wrist Band Reminders](#)” and help children follow the instructions to make their wrist bands. Encourage them to wear the bands as a reminder that God is with them wherever they are, in whatever situation.
- **Quiet zone: Promise boxes** Jacob discovered that God works in our lives to bring good. Distribute treasure boxes to decorate with self-adhesive stickers. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Wrist Band Reminders](#)” and invite children to choose some Bible verses about God’s promises to write on slips of paper and put inside their boxes. Encourage children to take a promise slip from the box to read when they have hard times.

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## Bless

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**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:

May we always remember that  
no matter what, God is with us  
and helps us to be a blessing.

**Blessing** Offer the following blessing: "*(Name)*, you are a blessing to the world."

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## Reflect

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In what ways did the children express their understanding that God is with them in good and hard times? What insights did you gain about their life experiences as you listened to their comments?



# Living into God's Promise

based on Genesis 29:15-28

How you use your body as you tell the story can help the children gauge the emotional side of the story.

When the story ended last week, Jacob was on his way to Haran. His mother sent him there to stay with her family. Jacob had to leave home because he had made Esau very angry. Jacob had tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing that should have gone to Esau, not to Jacob. Jacob has finally arrived in Haran.

In Haran he stopped to ask some shepherds for directions to the home of his Uncle Laban. While he was speaking to them, he saw Laban's daughter Rachel, who was tending the sheep. Rachel took Jacob to her father.

Jacob stayed with Laban's family for a month, working for Laban. Laban said to Jacob, "You have been working for me for nothing. What should I pay you?"

By then Jacob knew that he wanted to marry Rachel. In those days, the man had to talk with the father to make the arrangements.

"I love Rachel," Jacob said. "I will work seven years to have her as my wife." Laban agreed to this deal.

After seven years, Jacob's wedding day came. Jacob and Rachel were surrounded by family and friends for the celebration. Brides in those days wore a dark veil over their faces, covering them so you couldn't see them. The wedding party lasted late into the night.

The next morning when Jacob woke up he found that he had married Leah, Rachel's older sister. Jacob had been tricked. Jacob was angry and hurried to find Laban.

"You have tricked me!" Jacob yelled.

"Jacob," Laban said calmly, "you know that the younger sister cannot marry before the older sister is married. That is our custom."

Leah was a good woman, but Jacob loved Rachel. "This is what I will do, Jacob," said Laban. "If you work seven more years, you can marry Rachel, too."

Now Jacob knew what it was like to be tricked. But he loved Rachel so much that Jacob did work for Laban for seven more years. Then Jacob and Rachel were married and lived into God's promise to be a blessing in the world.

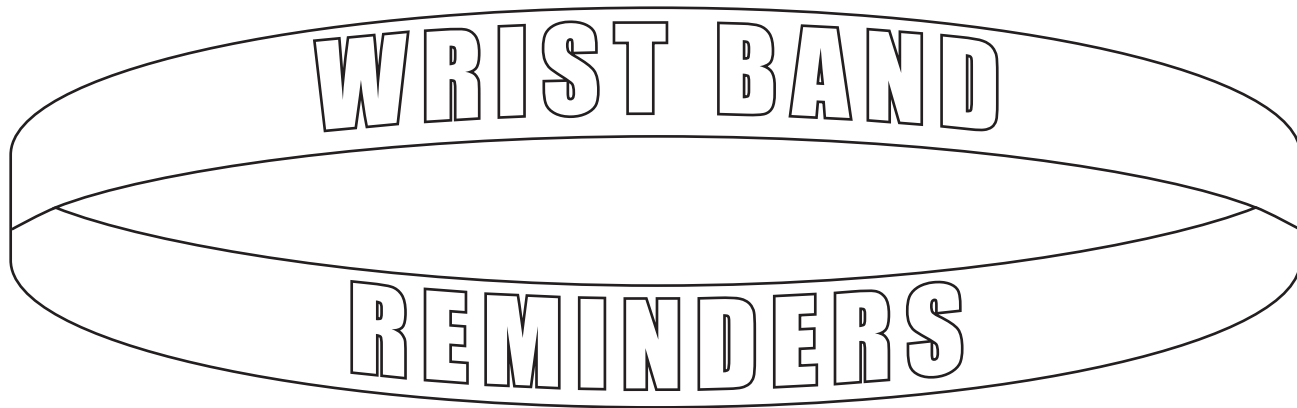


# JACOB'S FAMILY

Children were considered a blessing from God. Having many children was a sign of God's love. Find and circle the names of Jacob's children in the puzzle below. The names of Jacob's sons became the names for the 12 tribes of Israel. You will hear more about the children of Jacob in the weeks ahead.

- Reuben
- Simeon
- Levi
- Judah
- Issachar
- Zebulun
- Dinah
- Gad
- Asher
- Dan
- Naphtali
- Joseph
- Benjamin

B	C	U	A	M	Y	P	J	E	P	X	S	D
E	Y	J	U	D	A	H	P	O	C	E	B	I
N	F	N	G	O	P	K	N	W	S	X	Z	N
J	S	M	A	A	W	U	W	J	N	E	R	A
A	M	A	H	P	L	R	E	H	S	A	P	H
M	T	J	T	U	H	W	O	G	U	M	Y	H
I	E	N	B	R	R	T	L	V	T	Z	R	R
N	G	E	P	K	Q	M	A	E	B	W	E	Y
U	Z	B	N	H	F	G	O	L	V	K	U	P
S	I	M	E	O	N	H	G	D	I	I	B	H
G	B	R	N	B	Y	N	B	R	S	U	E	X
A	I	S	S	A	C	H	A	R	A	F	N	L
D	A	N	N	F	V	P	A	I	U	Y	U	G



**Now I pray that God, who gives love and peace, will be with you.** (2 Corinthians 13:11)

**The Lord gives strength to those who are weary.** (Isaiah 40:30)

**We tell you what worries us, and you won't let us fall.** (Psalm 55:22)

**Don't be afraid. I am with you. Don't tremble with fear. I am your God.** (Isaiah 41:10)

**Come, save us and bless us. Be our shepherd and always carry us in your arms.** (Psalm 28:9)

**If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest.** (Matthew 11:28)

**I have called you by name; now you belong to me.** (Isaiah 43:1)

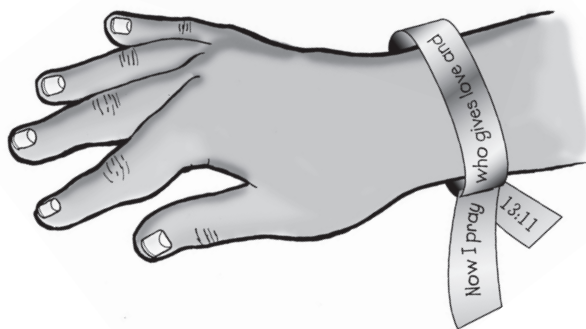
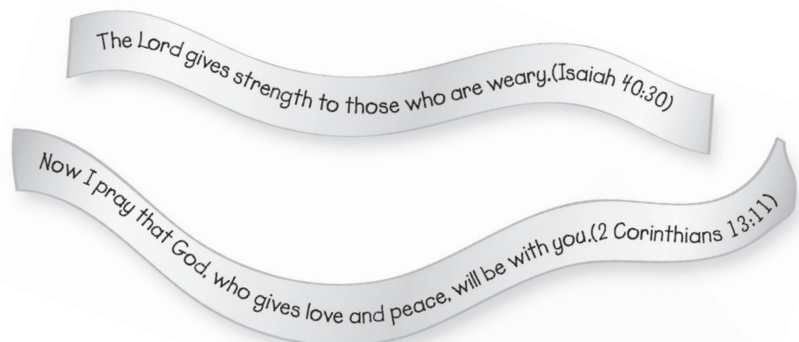
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### Materials

- ❑ sturdy ribbon, such as grosgrain or craft foam, cut into 30–37 cm/12–15 in lengths
- ❑ permanent, fine-tip markers

### Instructions

- 1 Select a Bible verse from above.
- 2 Print it carefully on a strip of sturdy ribbon.
- 3 Find a partner to tie it around your wrist. Help your partner too.
- 4 Or print verse onto strip of craft foam, punch holes in the ends, and thread with yarn to tie around wrist.





# 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.

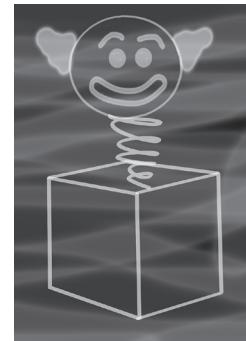
## July 5: Clay shapes

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.



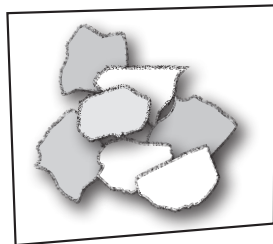
## July 26: Wax relief painting

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.



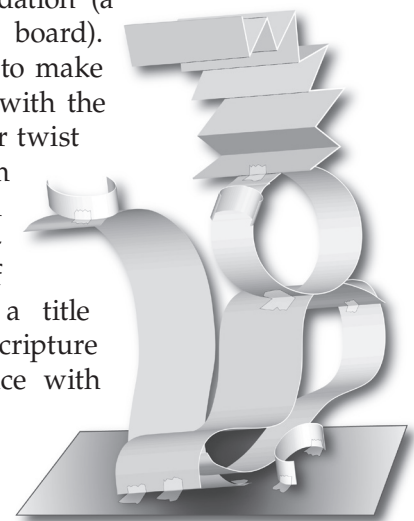
## July 12: Torn paper art

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.



## 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.



## 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.

