

Face to Face

This week we hear a story of Jacob coming face to face with God, and face to face with himself, all in anticipation of coming face to face with his brother, Esau, from whom he is estranged. These face to face encounters are moments of awakening, of deep awareness of who Jacob is, of who God is, and of what it means to be human. It is a theme that, in some fashion, runs through all of our texts for this day.

Focus scripture: Genesis 32:22–31

Genesis 32:22–31 is the well-known story of Jacob wrestling with a stranger in the evening. Earlier in the Jacob story, we become aware that struggle is a familiar experience for him. Today's encounter, however, has an altogether different twist.

Jacob was born into a world of competitive struggle through which victors garner material blessings at the expense of losers (Genesis 25:22–26). The people in Babylonian exile for whom Genesis was first composed understood how empires exploited and profited from this struggle. The material gain was and is a prime motivation for the domination of one people over another. Jacob knew how this system of privilege and acquisition worked and was a skilled practitioner. With his mother's help, he used cunning and deceit to gain the blessing of his father over his brother. With the same cunning, he outmaneuvered his uncle Laban, becoming a wealthy man.

Yet for Jacob, something was incomplete and broken in his world. He longed for a restored relationship with Esau. Material wealth was no substitute for the wealth and blessing of being one with his brother. Jacob struggled with these two contrasting approaches to blessing: one grounded in the material blessing of empire and the other grounded in the covenantal blessing of relationship. It is at this place Jacob would call Penniel that he awakens to the awareness this is a holy struggle. It is this struggle in which he holds fast to relationship that he comes face to face with God. It is in this relational struggle that he comes face to face with his own identity. As the story unfolds, it is in this struggle that he discovers restored relationships are ultimately what continue bringing us face to face with our God (Genesis 33:10).

Psalm 17:1–5, 15 is an invitation to experience the face of God in righteousness, which is the justice and love of God infused into all of life, from the personal to the rule of nations. For the writer, encountering the face of God means turning away from the deceit and violence required by systems of domination and, instead, holding fast to the path of steadfast love.

Romans 9:1–5 reminds us that living in a covenantal relationship is no assurance of a life free from grief and sadness. On the contrary, refusing to cut ourselves from those with whom we are at odds can be painful, as it was for Paul. Paul could do no less because his faith is in the one who is "overall."

Matthew 14:13–21 contrasts the scarcity values of empire with the abundance values of God's realm. The former leads the disciples and us to what seem like practical decisions, sending people off to fend for themselves. The realm of God values proclaimed by Jesus is one of compassionate assurance that through the abundance of God, there is enough for all.

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Whether in personal encounters or questions of social policy, coming "face to face" means making ourselves vulnerable to living in relationship and the truth that relationships require. Seeing someone face to face makes avoidance of uncomfortable truths much more difficult. The notion of coming face to face with someone, ourselves, situations or circumstances, and ultimately God places a high premium on honesty. Deception may still be possible but at a much higher cost. In what ways do you see the significance of "face to face" encounters playing out in this week's scripture readings? How might they speak to us about our own relationships and relatedness?



Focus scripture
Genesis 32:22–31

Additional scriptures
Psalm 17:1–7, 15
Romans 9:1–5
Matthew 14:13–21

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

Holy One, we long to be in relationship with one another, with our world, with you and all that exists. We sense our very humanity depends on the depth of these relationships. Yet too often we feel estranged, cut off from that which is most vital. Lead us to an awakening of all that might yet be possible for us and for our world. 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

Although it sometimes appears as if childhood is carefree, the challenges faced by all children in this age group are very real to them. For some, doing something new for the first time, such as going to school, playing in a recital, or joining a team, is experienced as a challenge. Others will face the struggles that come with unwelcome transitions such as a move, a pet dying, or changes in the family.

Older children may struggle with schoolwork and with finding a place amongst their peers. They face the increasing influence of peer pressure, and standing up for what is right when everyone else wants to go in a different direction is not easy.

This week's session offers an opportunity for the children to talk about their struggles and explore the support available to them. God's presence in the struggle is emphasized, but it is important to talk about the ways in which we can support and stand by each other as a community. One of the greatest gifts that we can give children is providing a safe place for them to share their joys and concerns and the affirmation that God is always with them in the challenges that they face.

Pray that as the children identify the struggles in their lives they will recognize God's presence and be assured of that presence at all times.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 32:22–31, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 67).
- ❑ 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 Night of Struggle](#)."
- ❑ **Drama group:** copies of resource sheet "[Jacob Wrestles with a Stranger](#)"
- ❑ **Prayer group:** paper and pens or pencils

Respond

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

- ❑ **Story zone:** strips of paper in different colours and different widths, sheet of poster board, instructions from resource sheet "[Story Gallery Project-1](#)" (p. 110)
- ❑ **Puzzle zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Hidden Message](#)"
- ❑ **Craft zone:** used magazines, poster board
- ❑ **Prayer zone:** used newspapers and news magazines
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** small gift bags, tissue paper, cards, small re-sealable bags, snack food and treats

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).



Face to Face

Scripture

Genesis 32:22–31

FOCUS To discover, with Jacob, that God is with us even in our challenges

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

Divide into pairs and invite the children to thumb wrestle. Link hands with forearms parallel to the ground and elbows against sides. Thumbs rest on top of curled fingers. The aim is for one player to pin down the thumb of the second player. Each player needs to keep the thumb moving to avoid being pinned down while trying to cover the top of a partner's thumb. Be prepared to demonstrate for those who have not played this before. After a few moments explain that this week's story is about someone who wrestles with his feelings.



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 to Haran, where he married Leah and Rachel and had many children. In this week's story Jacob decides to go back home to face his brother.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[A Night of Struggle](#)" to present the story based on **Genesis 32:22–31**.

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

- **What problems were causing Jacob to struggle?**
- **What happened in Jacob's dream?**
- **What happened when Jacob and Esau finally met?**

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 prepare a brief skit about the Bible story. Provide copies of the resource sheet "[Jacob Wrestles with a Stranger](#)," decide who will play each part, and rehearse together.

Prayer group This group will have the opportunity to explore God's presence in times of struggle. Invite children to name the things Jacob was struggling with. Affirm again that God was with Jacob in those hard times. Then have them write some of their own struggles and scary times on pieces

of paper notes, placing them in the worship space beside the candle, as prayers to God.

Reporting Invite the drama group to share their skit and invite the poster group to share the comments added to each poster.

The Bible story and us

Jacob knew that God was with him, even during the scary times.

■ How can we remember that God is always with us?

This experience marked the beginning of a different way of life for Jacob.

■ When has something challenging been a mark of a change of direction for you?

Respond

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

- ❑ **Story zone: Story gallery** *(Option: ongoing project)*
In his struggle and in the challenge of meeting his brother Esau, Jacob felt God around him. Follow the instructions for this week on the resource sheet "[Story Gallery Project-1](#)" (p. 110) for making the paper sculptures.
- ❑ **Puzzle zone: Word puzzle** *(for younger children)* Jacob's dream showed him a truth known by other people of faith. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Hidden Message](#)" and invite children to complete the puzzle to discover the message. *(Answer: When we call to God, God will answer.)*
- ❑ **Craft zone: Two-part collage** The story of Jacob and Esau shows us how God works with us in every challenge. Invite children to find images of struggles between people in newspapers and magazines, cut these out, and create a collage on the top half of a sheet of poster board. Then have them find images and stories of reconciliation and connection between people and collage these onto the bottom half. Add titles, such as "God is with us in our struggles" and "God helps us to re-connect" and consider displaying the poster in the church hall.



- ❑ **Prayer zone: Prayers for others** *(for older children)*
Jacob struggled with many things, but through it all God was present. Invite children to look through newspapers and news magazines to find images and stories of people who are struggling; for example, refugees, those who are homeless, areas of war and strife. Help the children write a group prayer for people today who are wrestling with difficult situations. Print the prayer in the middle of a sheet of poster board and glue the images around the prayer to form a frame. Consider publishing in a church newsletter and submitting it to the Prayer and Poem Gallery on the *Seasons* website (www.seasonsonline.ca).
- ❑ **Outreach zone: Reminder gifts** The stranger encouraged Jacob by giving him a new name and words of blessing. Give each child two cards. Invite them to write words of encouragement to their families on one card, and prayers for their families on the other. Then place the cards and some treats inside a gift bag, with a few sheets of tissue paper on top. Encourage children to share the gifts with their families.

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 *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 in our struggles.

Blessing Offer the following blessing to the child next to you: "*(Name)*, God is with you." Then invite that child to bless the next person until each one has been blessed.

Reflect

How did hearing Jacob's story help the children recognize the struggles in their own lives? What did you learn from the children that you can include in your prayers this week?



A Night of Struggle

based on Genesis 32:22–31

The mood of this story is different from the previous stories, which had dramatic moments. Think about how you can build the story to peak at the new name for Jacob.

Jacob, the twin son of Isaac and Rebekah, worked for Laban in Haran for many years. He married Leah and Rachel. Jacob had many children, eleven boys and a girl. His flocks of sheep and goats became quite large, making him a rich man. Through it all Jacob knew that God was with him in the good times and the difficult times.

After working for Laban for so many years, Jacob decided to go home. Jacob believed that God wanted him to go home, too. But there was a problem. Was Esau still angry that Jacob had tricked him out of the blessing and birthright that should have been Esau's? With questions like this in his mind, Jacob gathered his family together and told them his plan to leave Haran. They worked for days at packing all their belongings and getting ready to travel. They had to take food for themselves

and prepare to take their sheep and goats with them for this long journey.

About halfway between Haran and home, Jacob wanted some time alone. He needed to think and plan. So he sent his family on ahead and he lay down for the night. It seemed so quiet under the stars. But Jacob's mind was anything but quiet. What would he do when he saw Esau?

Then a most curious thing happened. Was Jacob dreaming? Was this a nightmare? A stranger appeared and began wrestling with Jacob. They struggled together all night. When the sun came up, Jacob had a sore hip and a new name. God named Jacob "Israel", a Hebrew word that means "one who struggles with God."

After that night of struggle, Jacob and his family headed for home...and Esau. As they drew near, Jacob sent servants ahead with many gifts for Esau. But Esau did not want the gifts. Was Esau still angry?

But when Esau saw Jacob, he ran to greet his brother. They kissed each other with tears of joy in their eyes. Now was the time to begin over.



JACOB WRESTLES WITH A STRANGER

Genesis 32:25-29

Narrator: But Jacob stayed behind by himself, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he couldn't get the better of Jacob as they wrestled, he deliberately threw Jacob's hip out of joint.

Stranger: Let me go; it's daybreak.

Jacob: I'm not letting you go 'til you bless me.

Stranger: What's your name?

Jacob: Jacob.

Stranger: But no longer. Your name is no longer Jacob. From now on it's Israel (God-Wrestler);¹ you've wrestled with God and you've come through.

Jacob: And what's your name?

Stranger: Why do you want to know my name?

Narrator: And then, right then and there, he blessed Jacob.

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¹In Hebrew, one of the meanings of the word Israel is "a man who has wrestled with God." Jacob's descendants were eventually known as the people of Israel. In the Bible, being given a change of name often indicates a change of direction, and a different way of life.



Hidden Message

Σ	Ξ	Π	Λ	W	H	E	N	Δ	Φ	Θ
W	E	Σ	Ω	Υ	Ω	C	A	L	L	Δ
Φ	T	O	Θ	G	O	D	η	Ω	Σ	Γ
Π	θ	Ψ	Π	G	O	D	Φ	ϑ	Δ	Φ
Θ	Γ	W	I	L	L	Φ	Θ	Γ	Θ	ϑ
β	Λ	A	N	S	W	E	R	Σ	Σ	η

What truth did Jacob discover when he wrestled with the stranger?

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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.

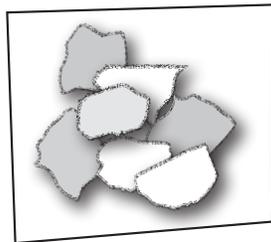
July 5: Clay shapes

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.



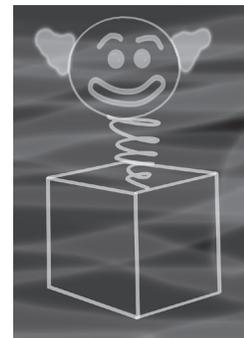
July 19: Rock sculpture

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.

