

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 3–5

Even young children know what it is to struggle with something. For example, they might struggle with shoelaces or a zipper on a jacket, or learning to ride a bike, or learning to print, or trying to reach a light switch. In the process, they will experience a range of feelings as they learn about life's challenges: happy, frustrated, angry, sad, determined, relieved, and happy again.

Struggle is at the heart of the Bible story this week. Jacob finds himself in two struggles: one with his brother, Esau, and the other with God. The children need to hear as

much about the resolution of the struggles as the struggles themselves. We want to help them to see that life is about more than being beaten down by insurmountable challenges. We want them to come to the same realization as Jacob: God is with me in happy times, sad times, and difficult times. God is with us all the time. Pray that the children will grow into a deep awareness of God's presence with them as they persist in facing challenges and as they respond in God's way to the challenges experienced by others.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 32:22–31, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 51).
- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Growing Faith* (SGF) Songbook, *Seasons Growing Faith* (SGF) Music CD, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring "Welcome Song" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs and Poems](#)," p. 82) or "Thank God" (p. 28 in *SGF Songbook*, #18 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ❑ Bring story figures of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau (from poster [Storytelling Resources #1](#)) from last week.
- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Jacob's Struggle](#)."

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Messages:** copies of messages from "Option B" on resource sheet "[Respond Resources](#)," pieces of card stock, stickers
- ❑ **Storytelling:** copies of figure of Jacob from "Option A" on resource sheet [Respond Resources](#)," lengths of dowel or unsharpened pencils
- ❑ **Musical response:** variety of musical and rhythm instruments

Bless

- ❑ Bring "Blessing Song" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs and Poems](#)," p. 82) or "A Little Peace Song" (p. 5 in *SGF Songbook*, #1 on *SGF Music CD*).

For groups consisting mostly of three-year-olds, supplemental resources can be downloaded from the Library at www.seasonsonline.ca.



Face to Face

Scripture

Genesis 32:22–31

FOCUS To celebrate God's promise to be with us in all kinds of times

Gather

Welcome each child, saying "Hello, (*child's name*), we're happy you're here." Invite them to share experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space. Light the candle, saying, "This candle reminds us of God's love which is all around us."

Pray Thank you, God,
for the stories in the Bible,
that help us learn about your love.
Thank you that we can be
with our friends here today. Amen.

Sing "Welcome Song" (p. 82) or "Thank God" (p. 28 in *SGF Songbook*, #18 on *SGF Music CD*).

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

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

❑ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi (*names each child*). I had to struggle a lot this morning.

Leader: That's a big word, Priscilla.

Priscilla: Yes, I just learned it yesterday. I was struggling to do the zipper up on my jacket. But I kept trying.

Leader: Sometimes we have to do things over and over before we get it right. (*Encourage children to talk about times when they have struggled to learn or do something.*) Our story from the Bible today is about someone who had a big struggle, but it was a struggle in his dreams! (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

- ❑ **Struggles** Introduce the children to the word "struggle" by giving an example of something that you had struggled with when you were a child, for example, learning a new skill like printing, or riding a bike. Encourage children to talk about times when they have struggled. Then explain that in this week's Bible story someone has a big struggle, but in a dream!

Engage

Before the story

Invite children to look at the figures of Rebekah and Isaac, and of Esau, Jacob, and Rebekah from the poster *Storytelling Resources #1*, and remind them of the stories of Rebekah and Isaac getting married; of their twin sons, Esau and Jacob; of the time when Jacob tricked his brother and had to run away; and about Jacob meeting Rachel and getting married. (*Use the figures of Jacob and Esau to tell this week's story.*) This week we have another story about Jacob and a strange dream

that he had beside a river one night. Invite children to help you make an outline of a river on the floor with masking tape.

The Bible story

Gather beside the "river" and invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Genesis. Use the resource sheet "Jacob's Struggle," and the figures of Jacob and Esau to tell the story based on **Genesis 32:22–31**.

After the story

Invite a child to place the figures of Jacob and Esau on the worship table along with the figures of the rest of Jacob's family. Wonder together about what Jacob and Esau might have said to each other. What might the family do next?

Sing "Who Loves You?" (tune: "I'm a Little Teapot")

Do you know who loves you all the time?
Do you know who loves you rain or shine?
We know that God loves us all the time.
We know God loves us rain or shine.

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

- ❑ **Messages** We can tell others about God's promise to be with us in all times. Give each child several pieces of card stock and message strips from the resource sheet "[Respond Resources](#)." Invite them to glue the message on one side of the cards and decorate with stickers on the other side. When the church service is over, go together (possibly with parents or caregivers) and hide the messages in the hymnbooks. Explain that these messages will be a wonderful surprise for the people next Sunday.



- ❑ **Storytelling** Children love to engage in storytelling using their own words and props. Distribute the figures of Jacob from the resource sheet "[Respond Resources](#)" to decorate. Tape a length of dowelling or an unsharpened pencil to the backs of the figures. Encourage children to re-enact the story of Jacob's dream struggle using their own words.
- ❑ **Musical response** Encourage children to celebrate God's promise to be with us in all times. Invite them to choose from the musical and rhythm instruments and play some joyful music together. What are some things that they would like to celebrate in their own lives?

Bless

Gather in the worship space. Light the candle again and remind children that God loves them very much.

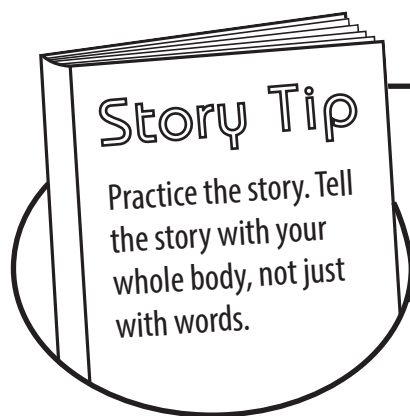
Pray Thank you, God,
for your BIG (*stretch arms wide*) love.
Thank you that you are
always with us, and that
you bless us with your love. Amen.

Sing the "[Blessing Song](#)" (p. 82) or the song, "A Little Peace Song" (p. 5 in *SGF Songbook*, #1 on *SGF Music CD*).

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), you are always loved by God."

Reflect

How can you continue to assure the children that God is with them in their struggles – in happy times, sad times, difficult times, and all times?



Jacob's Struggle

(based on Genesis 32:22–31)

(Show figure of Jacob.) Jacob wanted to go home to see his brother, Esau. Jacob had made a lot of mistakes. And now Jacob was sorry that he had tricked his brother. He sent some goats and donkeys and camels as a gift to Esau. He wanted to let Esau know he was sorry. But what if Esau was still angry with Jacob for tricking him? Jacob had to find out.

So Jacob gathered together his family, all their belongings, and their animals and began the long, long journey home.

One night when Jacob wanted to be alone, he sent his family across the river and asked them to wait for him there. Then Jacob lay down to sleep. *(Lay the figure of Jacob on the floor.)* While Jacob was sleeping, something very strange happened. Jacob started to toss and turn on the ground. *(Move the figure of Jacob so that he seems to be tossing back and forth.)* It felt like he was struggling and fighting with someone! Jacob didn't know if it was a dream or if it was really happening. Sometimes Jacob felt as if he was fighting with himself. Sometimes Jacob felt as if he was fighting God. Jacob tossed and turned, and tossed

and turned. All night long Jacob struggled. By morning, the struggle was over and Jacob had a very sore leg. *(Lift the figure of Jacob up again.)*

Soon Jacob heard a voice say, "What is your name?"

Jacob looked around and then answered, "My name is Jacob."

The voice said, "Now your name will be changed. Your name won't be Jacob any more. You will be called Israel. Bless you."

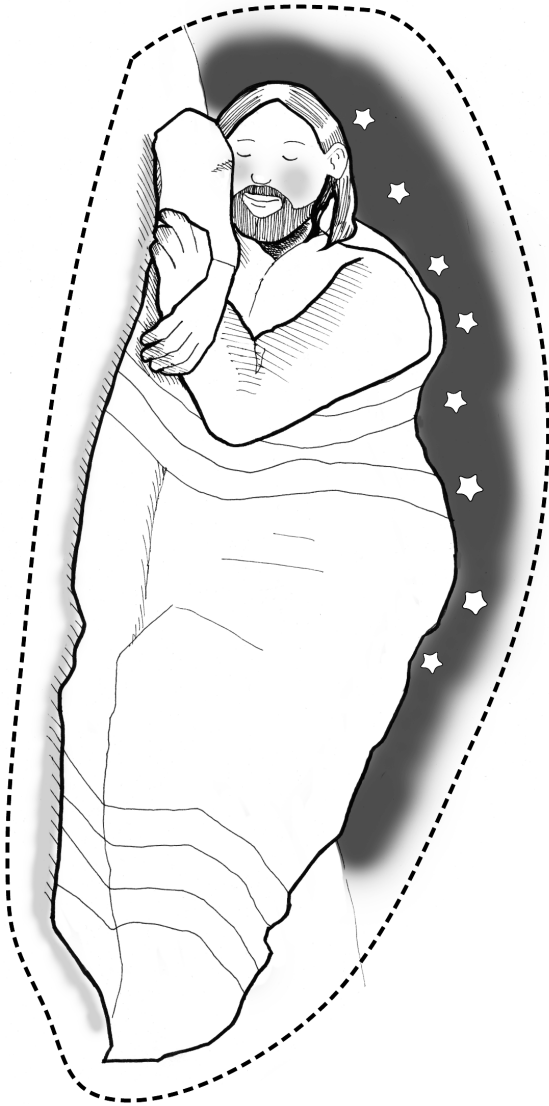
Jacob began to pray. Deep down and all around, Jacob knew that God had been with him – when Jacob was happy; when Jacob was sad. Through all Jacob's struggles, God had stayed with him. *(Pause.)*

Much later, when Jacob met his brother Esau, Esau wasn't angry with Jacob any more. *(Show Esau and Jacob together.)* Esau hugged and kissed Jacob, and they both cried. The two brothers would be friends. Jacob was home again.



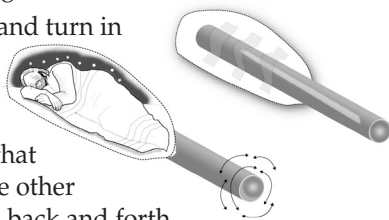
Respond Resources

(Storytelling)



Instructions:

- Cut out a figure of Jacob for each child.
- Decorate the figures.
- Tape a length of dowelling or an unsharpened pencil to the backs of the figures.
- To make Jacob toss and turn in his sleep, put one palm (face up) on a flat surface, and place the pencil on that palm. Then, with the other palm, roll the pencil back and forth.



(Messages)

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

God loves us in happy times,
sad times, and all the time.

ADDITIONAL SONGS AND POEMS

WELCOME SONG

(tune: "London Bridge")

Gather round with us today,
to sing and pray, to learn and play.
Gather round with us today,
God loves us in every way.

BLESSING SONG

(tune: "London Bridge")

God is with us as we go,
as we go, home today.
God is with us as we go.
God loves us in every way.

GOD'S LOVE

(tune: "The Wheels on the Bus")

God's love for me goes on and on,
on and on, on and on.
God's love for me goes on and on,
everywhere I go.
(Repeat song using the words "you" and
"us" instead of "me.")

I CAN SING AND PRAY

(tune: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star")

I can sing and pray and grow.
I can draw and laugh and throw.
I can push and pull and lift.
I can choose to share my gifts.
I can sing and pray and grow,
all because God loves me so.

I'M LOVED

(tune: "Head and Shoulders")

Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
knees and toes, knees and toes.
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
all of me is loved!
(Other verses: Wiggly fingers, wiggly
toes... Eyes and ears, and mouth and
nose... Neck and elbows, hips and
feet...)

LISTEN, LISTEN

(tune: "London Bridge")

Listen, listen, God loves us,
God loves us, God loves us.
Listen, listen, God loves us,
God helps us to be friends.

SLEEP LITTLE BABY

(August 23)

Sleep little baby (close eyes and lay
head on folded hands),
safe in my arms (hug arms around
self).
I'll hug and rock you (cradle arms and
rock back and forth),
and keep you from harm (pretend to
hug a baby).
Hush little baby (put finger to mouth
and say "Shhh"),
don't start to cry (wave finger back
and forth and shake head),
I'll hug and rock you (cradle arms and
rock back and forth),
'cause I love you, that's why! (Fold
arms over heart.)

