

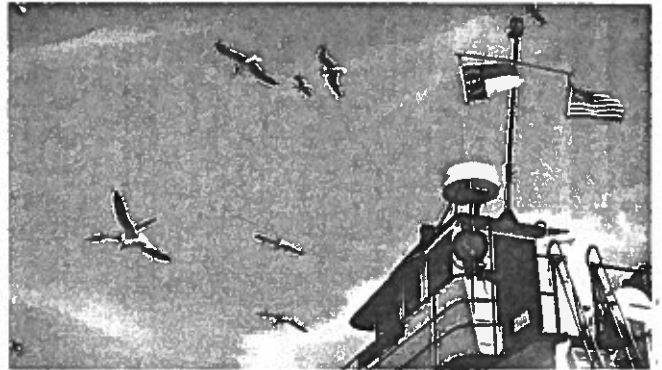
# 3 TOWARD RECONCILIATION

Tom didn't know much about his grandfather. His grandfather had worked on a merchant ship that carried freight around the world in the 1940s and early 1950s. Tom had known some of his grandfather's brothers who were also sailors. They had a reputation of being wild and crude, often fighting among themselves and with others. Tom wondered whether his grandfather had been like that as well.

One day Tom found an old letter dated September 21, 1952 in an old trunk in the attic. The letter was written by his grandfather from a faraway seaport. It was addressed to his grandfather's parents. The letter told of how one of his brothers had fallen overboard and drowned in a terrible storm.

In almost poetic style and with deep emotion, Tom's grandfather wrote of his hope that God would be merciful to his now departed brother. He wrote of how important it was to know God as his refuge and strength in the hard and lonely life on the sea. In all of this, he wrote, "I pray that God may watch over us and give us forgiveness and strength." The letter ended with these words: "I can't write any more about my dear brother's death. The tears cloud my eyes and my hands are trembling. May God be with you, my parents."

Tom got a very different image of his grandfather from that letter. Although a hard and crusty sailor, his grandfather also had a deep faith in the God of Jesus Christ, the God of hope and forgiveness and love.



## 3 STATEMENTS

- The Bible shows that conflict, jealousy, and rivalry are part of every human community, including the family.
- God's love works in and through the imperfect lives and relationships of human beings.
- God invites people of faith to join in the forgiving and reconciling work of God in their own lives.

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# Source

## A DECEIVING JACOB AND A FAITHFUL GOD

What were your ancestors like? Were they a rowdy, bolsterous, and ungodly crowd? Or were they quiet and faithful saints? Our image of our grandparents or great-grandparents and certainly our own parents can tell us something about who we are. The stories in Genesis 25–33 give us a glimpse of our ancestors in the faith. They reveal something of who they were and so reveal something of who we are and how God acts among us.

Abraham and Sarah had a son named Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah and they had twin sons named Esau, who was the firstborn, and Jacob. The younger son Jacob was, among other things, a crook.

The two brothers, Esau and Jacob, were constantly fighting with each other. Even in their mother's womb, the twin boys fought and struggled (Genesis 25:22). Their rivalry continued on into their adult life. *The Bible shows that conflict, jealousy, and rivalry are part of every human community, including the family.*

1. Read Genesis 25:27-28. What do these verses suggest were reasons for the brothers' conflict?

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Twice Jacob cheated his older brother Esau out of what was coming to him. In their culture, the older brother was always entitled to the birthright or inheritance of his parents' wealth as well as the blessing of his father.

Jacob once tricked a hungry Esau into selling his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29-34). Another time Jacob stole the blessing intended for Esau from his old and blind father by disguising himself as Esau (Genesis 27:1-35).

2. Read Genesis 27:41-45. What did Esau plan to do to Jacob?

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3. What did Jacob's mother instruct Jacob to do?

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*God's love works in and through the imperfect lives and relationships of human beings.* Jacob's life and relationships with others were anything but perfect. Indeed, one could think of many names to call Jacob: a crook, a cheat, a liar, and a coward who ran away rather than face his older brother. Jacob was definitely not a model of goodness.

Yet, Jacob is the one God goes after and chooses as the receiver of God's special promise and love. This happened as Jacob was running away from Esau on his way to Haran to stay a few years with Uncle Laban. When sunset came and nobody seemed to be after him, Jacob decided that it was safe to camp out for the night. He tucked a stone under his head for a pillow and went to sleep and dreamed a most remarkable dream. (See "Focus" on page 19.)

4. Read Genesis 28:10-17. What was the dream and the message God gave to Jacob?

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5. What does this say to you about the kind of people God can choose as God's own special people?

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*The Bible shows that conflict, jealousy, and rivalry are part of every human community, including the family.*

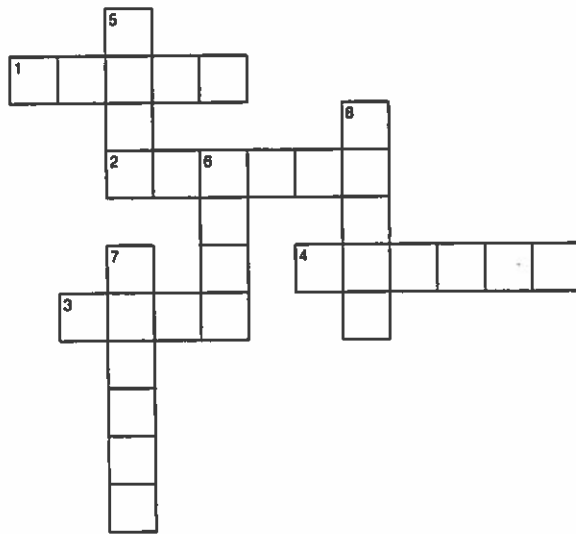


## JACOB'S WRESTLING WITH GOD

Jacob spent many years working for his uncle Laban in the faraway land of Haran. But finally Jacob decided it was time to go back home to Canaan. God had blessed him with many good things: a family, children, and plenty of possessions. What he needed most was to go back home and face his brother Esau once and for all.

As Jacob prepared to meet Esau, he met God again as well. At their last meeting, God had given a wonderful promise of blessing to Jacob: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go" (Genesis 28:15). Now again God gave a blessing to Jacob.

● Read the story in Genesis 32:22-32. Complete the following crossword puzzle.



- 1 Across The part of Jacob's body the wrestler touched.
- 2 Across The name Jacob gave the place.
- 3 Across Jacob said, "For I have seen God \_\_\_\_\_ to face."
- 4 Across Jacob's new name.
- 5 Down Jacob walked with this for the rest of his life.
- 6 Down Jacob asked for the man's \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7 Down The name of the river where the wrestling took place.
- 8 Down Jacob asked the man to \_\_\_\_\_ him.

*God's love works in and through the imperfect lives and relationships of human beings.*



Shepherds in Galilee

Editorial Development Associates

Jacob had wrestled with his twin brother Esau when they were in the womb. They had struggled and fought many times over the years. Through his own cleverness, Jacob stole the blessing from his brother. In the wrestling match with the angel of the Lord, Jacob was not able to steal the blessing from the angel by his own power or cleverness.

● How was the way Jacob received the blessing from God different from the way Jacob took it from his brother?

## JACOB'S RECONCILIATION WITH ESAU

*God invites people of faith to join in the forgiving and reconciling work of God in their own lives.* Jacob's encounter with God gave him the courage and the humility to meet his brother face to face and beg his forgiveness. Earlier, Jacob sent gifts to Esau to show his desire to heal the broken relationship with his brother. But as Jacob approached his brother directly, "he himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother" (Genesis 33:3). Jacob's behavior showed his newfound humility.

But what would be Esau's response? Would Esau kill him as he had promised to do many years ago? Would Esau only laugh at Jacob's show of humility and regret?

1. Read Genesis 33:4. How did Esau react to meeting Jacob?

2. What did Esau say in Genesis 33:9 concerning all the gifts Jacob had sent him?

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3. In your own words, what did Jacob say in Genesis 33:10-11?

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4. Earlier in his life Jacob had stolen and grabbed anything he could get his hands on. How had Jacob changed?

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*God invites people of faith to join in the forgiving and reconciling work of God in their own lives.*

## *Shaping* life

### RECONCILIATION: THE WAY OF GOD

God loved and accepted Jacob as he was. In many ways Jacob did some bad things, yet God loved and blessed

him as God's own child. God seems to delight in choosing the most unlikely people you can imagine. When we see that we are so deeply loved in spite of our faults and failures, it is bound to make a difference in how we act.

In Baptism, God chose to love you and to call you God's own special child. God did that in spite of your faults and imperfections. Name three things you



do not like about yourself or that you think make you less than perfect.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Now name at least three things you do like about yourself. The first one is the most important because it is what God says about you. It is a promise from God to Jacob, which is also a promise to you from God. Read Genesis 28:15 and read God's promise to you. Add two other good things about yourself.

- "Know that I am \_\_\_\_\_ and will \_\_\_\_\_ wherever you go."
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

If God loves you in spite of your faults and failures, think of a member of your family or other person with whom you have had some conflict or rivalry. Do they have faults and failures that you might be able to overlook and forgive? What could you do as a first step of reconciliation with that person? God loves and accepts us as we are with all our imperfections. What does this show us about what should be our approach to other people?



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## RECONCILIATION IN THE MIDST OF BROKENNESS

The possibility of reconciliation with one person in your life does not mean all relationships will be healed. Some relationships are so broken that they will never be restored. Even for Jacob, his reconciliation with Esau did not mean that their lives were full of joy and success at every turn. In fact, Jacob's life was full of broken relationships. One of his sons slept with a prostitute. A daughter was raped. A son named Joseph was reported dead but actually was sold into slavery in the land of Egypt. Another favorite son was threatened with death. Jacob knew the pain of brokenness even after the joy of being reconciled with his brother Esau. The same is true for us. With a forgiving hand, God calls us to continue to work to heal those broken relationships of which we are a part.

## FURTHER

### *opportunities*

#### *Bible Reading*

Select one or more passages from the list below. After reading it, summarize its main point. Tell how it relates to this session. List one or two thoughts you had as you read the passage.

- Genesis 4:1-16
- Genesis 50:15-21
- Matthew 18:15-20
- Matthew 25:31-46

#### *Memory*

Memorize Genesis 28:15. It is the promise to Jacob that is also God's promise to you. You also may want to memorize the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and its meaning in The Small Catechism as a way to remind yourself of God's desire to forgive.

#### *Activity 1*

Design and draw a poster using the words of promise in Genesis 28:15. Include your name as part of



# FOCUS

## ON JACOB'S LADDER

Around many campfires you can often hear campers sing, "We are climbing Jacob's ladder. . . . Every rung goes higher, higher." Perhaps you have sung that song as well. But what does it mean? What was going on that night?

The most important event that night was what God said to Jacob in Genesis 28:13-15. But the event itself had great significance in three ways.

First of all, the meeting between God and Jacob happened in a *dream*. From what we know of Jacob's story, his waking hours must have been filled with loneliness, fear, and guilt. The dream brought a change to Jacob's life. It was a word of good news that caught Jacob off guard. This good news dream brought the promise of a new future with God.

Secondly, this good news dream showed that heaven has to do with earth. Heaven's connection was described as a *ramp*, not a "ladder."

On this ramp that connected heaven to earth (not the other way around as the old song goes), *angels* were present. They are messengers of God who acted according to God's will. They brought the message that the promises of God were at work in the world and in Jacob himself. The angels signify that the old world of fear and terror is being overcome by God's action for our sake and not by our climbing.

God comes to us where he is not expected. That appears to be the real issue of this text. "Is there a coming of God who transforms human reality? These together—dream, ramp, angels—answer 'yes.' These visible features introduce a new reality into the life of Jacob."

Source: Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 243-244.

the promise in this way: The Lord says, "                     (Your name) , know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go." Include a picture or symbol that is related to the promise. It could be something connected with your Baptism, the image of a road you are walking on, an arm around a shoulder, or two people walking side by side. Share your poster with your class.

### Activity 2

Write a letter to someone with whom you have some conflict or bad feelings. Explain how you feel and the reasons you see for the conflict or anger. Tell him or her what you feel would have to change in order for the relationship to be improved. Share your hopes and dreams for the relationship, even if they seem unrealistic right now.

### Activity 3

Plan a family devotion. Select a Bible reading, a song, read a Psalm together, and close with a prayer. Think about family relationships.