

Dreaming Big

Genesis 37 is the beginning of the story of how the people of Israel end up as slaves in Egypt, before the Exodus and their journey into the Promised Land. This story is not one of noble deeds; indeed, it is the opposite. Here is a story of family jealousy and deceit (again). The narrative is remembered in today's psalm as the writer highlights the hardship that Joseph endured before he became the salvation of the people of Israel.

Focus scripture: Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Jacob has twelve sons, they will become the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is the story of Joseph, Jacob's son with his beloved wife, Rachel. It begins with family jealousy, something we might well imagine as we have gotten to know Jacob and his family in previous weeks.

Joseph gives "an ill report" of his brothers to their father. In response, Jacob doesn't defend or stand up for his other sons, rather he shows even more favouritism toward Joseph by giving him a special coat, one with long sleeves (not multi-coloured as a certain musical has it) in a style that suggests royalty. Tensions build further when Joseph tells his brothers about his dreams, in which he sees the whole family bowing down to him. Joseph is seen as an upstart, and his dreams are considered imaginings and not the divine messages they would later be revealed to be.

Joseph's brothers are working as shepherds in an isolated part of Canaan, and Jacob sends Joseph to check on them. With no one around to monitor or witness their actions, the brothers give into their anger and envy and plan to kill Joseph. Reuben argues against murder, and suggests that Joseph be left in "a pit," a hole dug by shepherds to capture rainwater. The others agree and strip Joseph's coat off him before tossing him into the pit. Reuben's intent was to

come back and rescue Joseph, but before this can happen Joseph is sold to passing traders and taken to Egypt as a slave. Through this strange salvation, Joseph is now in the place where he will become a saviour to the people of Israel.

Psalm 105:1–6, 16–22, 45b proclaims that it was God who sent Joseph to Egypt and gave him the gift of interpreting dreams.

As Joseph is rescued, so are the disciples in **Matthew 14:22–33**. Caught in a storm out on the lake, they experience a strange salvation. They are in fear for their lives when, suddenly, they see Jesus walking across the water toward them. Jesus is amazingly comfortable with the churning water, which, for the Hebrew people, was a symbol of chaos.

In **Romans 10:5–15**, Paul reminds us once again that God's saving love is for everyone, and all who hold the word of God in their hearts and proclaim it from their lips are saved. He recalls Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

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God's persistent presence and goodness to Abraham's descendants continues, despite their behaviour – they continue to show themselves to be so much less than perfect. Once again, we see God use the most unlikely of people to bring about salvation.



Focus scripture

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Additional scriptures

Psalm 105:1–6, 16–22, 45b

Romans 10:5–15

Matthew 14:22–33



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

Liberating God, we raise our voice with thanksgiving and praise for the presence of your spirit that is continually at work among saints and sinners, bringing into being the hope of your love and justice for all creation. 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 in this age group enjoy both telling stories and hearing stories told. Their stories are often deeply personal and children can create meaning from almost any story and apply it to their own lives. The story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 37 is filled with emotions to which most children will relate. Many will understand the feeling of jealousy by Joseph's brothers, since fairness and equality are important to most children in this age group. Most will have had experiences of nastiness and can identify the harm that comes when people act on strong feelings in hurtful ways.

Childhood is an important time to teach children spiritual practices that will form their connection with God. This week offers the opportunity to try the practice of "Examen" as one of the Respond options.

Joseph's story has some difficult chapters within it. The brothers' jealousy leads them to commit acts of violence against Joseph and to deceive their father, Jacob. These scenes are told but, rather than focusing on the violence and deception, the focus is on God's presence that is with Joseph the whole time. Pray that the children will engage with Joseph's story on a variety of levels and will be able to relate it to their own world.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 75).
- ❑ 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 Special Gift](#)."
- ❑ **Drama group:** no additional materials needed.
- ❑ **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:** coat shapes cut from cardstock, scraps of fabric, glitter or sequins, sheet of poster board, instructions from resource sheet "[Story Gallery Project-2](#)" (p. 111)
- ❑ **Drama zone:** no additional materials needed.
- ❑ **Prayer zone:** copies of section "[End-of-the-day prayers](#)" (bottom of p. 79)
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Dream Catcher](#)," small paper plates, yarn, beads, feathers
- ❑ **Art zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Puzzle Plaque](#)," card stock, old jigsaw puzzle pieces, narrow ribbon

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song, "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



Dreaming Big

Scripture

Genesis 37:1–4,
12–28

FOCUS To ponder Joseph's story and what it teaches us about God

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

Show the gift that you have received from someone special and talk with the children about how you felt when you received this gift. Invite the children to talk about gifts they have received. Ask:

- What gift did you receive?
- Who gave you the gift?
- What did it feel like to receive the gift?

Explain that in this week's story, someone receives a special gift from his parents. Listen to how he and others felt about the gift.

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 who married Isaac, their twin boys named Jacob and Esau, how Jacob tricked his brother Esau into trading something very important, Jacob running away from home to Haran, where he married Leah and Rachel, and Jacob's wrestle with the stranger and being reunited with his brother. Jacob had twelve children. This week we will hear a story about Joseph and his eleven brothers.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[A Special Gift](#)" to present the story based on **Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28**.

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

- Why were the brothers so upset with Joseph?
- How do you think Joseph felt when he realized he was being sold as a slave?
- What could help Joseph remember that God was still with him?

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 dramatize this week's Bible story. Invite a volunteer to read each of the following verses from Genesis 37 and pause for the rest of the group to create a "freeze-frame" picture with their bodies of the scene: verses 3–4; verses 5–8; verses 13–14; verses 23–24; verse 28.

Prayer group This group will have the opportunity to explore God's presence with Joseph and with us in scary times. Name some fears Joseph might have had as he was taken to Egypt. Invite children to think of people in our world today who are facing hard or scary times. Have children

write words or phrases about these situations on pieces of paper and place them in the worship space next to the candle, as prayers to God. Say, "God is in this place" as each note is added.

Reporting Invite the drama group to share several of the freeze-frame poses and invite the poster group to share the comments added to the poster.

The Bible story and us

Joseph sometimes annoyed his brothers by showing off.

■ What do you sometimes feel like doing when someone is bragging or showing off?

The brothers decided to teach Joseph a lesson by throwing him into a pit.

■ When others are mean to you, what helps you to remember that God loves you?

Respond

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

❑ **Story zone: Story gallery** *(Option: ongoing project)* Joseph's special coat reminded him of his father's love. Follow the instructions for this week on the resource sheet "Story Gallery Project-2" (p. 111) for making the fabric collages.

❑ **Drama zone: Skits** Invite children to practice looking at various points of view. Brainstorm a list of situations that could lead to arguments between family members. Form small groups and ask each group to select one situation and create a skit. Provide time for groups to create their skits and then act these situations out for each other. After each skit invite the rest of the group to name the problem, talk about how God's way might influence the situation, and then offer ideas to resolve the situation.

❑ **Prayer zone: The practice of Examen** One way to remember that God is with us is to take time at the end of each day to think about what happened and where we felt God's presence. Distribute copies of the section "End-of-the-day prayers" (bottom of p. 79) and follow the directions to practice this kind of prayer. Encourage children to do this at home with their families.

❑ **Craft zone: Dream catchers** Joseph's dreams helped him to know that God had special plans for him and would always be with him. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Dream Catcher" and supplies and help children to make their own dream catchers.

❑ **Art zone: Plaques** *(for older children)* Joseph's story helps to remind us that even when we are puzzled and worried, God is our assurance. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Puzzle Plaque" and supplies. Follow the directions for making a reminder of God's presence and God's way.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song the song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 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 happens,
God is always with us.

Blessing Offer the following blessing to each child:
"(Name), remember that God is always with you."

Reflect

With what parts of Joseph's story did the children seem to resonate? In what ways did this part of Joseph's story connect with their own experiences?

End-of-the-day prayers

1. Light a candle and sit quietly, thinking about all the things that happened during the day.
2. Answer these two questions: When was I happiest today? When was I saddest?
3. Give thanks for the happy times, when you felt God's love.
4. Ask God for help during sad times and courage to show God's love to others.





A Special Gift

based on Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Speak in a haughty tone when
you tell how the brothers
feel about
Joseph.

Jacob had twelve sons. Yes, twelve sons, and one daughter. But the son who was special to him was Joseph. Jacob liked Joseph so much more than the other sons that he gave Joseph a beautiful coat with long flowing sleeves. The other sons did not have a coat like this, and they were jealous. A coat with sleeves was worn by men who didn't work in the fields. When they saw Joseph in his special coat, they got angry. Why didn't Joseph have to work in the fields? Why didn't their father give them special gifts?

But it wasn't just the special coat. Joseph also told on them when they did something wrong. And Joseph told his brothers that someday they would bow down to him and obey his commands.

One day his brothers were in the fields with the flocks and Jacob called Joseph to him. "Go to your brothers," he told Joseph, "and see that everything is all right with them and the flocks."

Joseph, wearing his special coat, set off. He got to Shechem and a man saw him walking in the fields. "What are you looking for?" asked the man. "My brothers and their flocks," answered Joseph.

"I heard them say they were going to Dothan," the man told Joseph. Indeed, Joseph found them at Dothan.

The brothers saw Joseph coming. "What does he want?" they grumbled. "Him in his fancy coat. Let's kill him and throw him into one of the deep holes. We will say that a wild animal killed him." This is how much they hated Joseph. When Reuben, the oldest brother, heard what they were saying, he said, "We won't kill him. We can put him in a deep hole, but we will not kill him."

When Joseph came near, they took the special coat from him and threw him into a deep hole with no water.

Not long after that, they saw a group of traders on their way to Egypt with things to sell to the Egyptians. Judah said, "Let's not leave Joseph in the deep hole. He is our brother after all. We can sell him to these traders."

This is what the brothers did. They sold Joseph as a slave for 20 pieces of silver and he was taken as a slave to Egypt.



Dream Catcher

The Ojibwa Nation believe that hanging a dream catcher near your bed will help you to have good dreams since the bad dreams cannot come through the holes in the web of the dream catcher. In the 1960s and 1970s, other Native American tribes started using dream catchers as well as a symbol of their unity.

Joseph's dreams helped him to know that God had special plans for him and would always be with him. Our dreams can show us the good things God has in mind for us as well. Make a simple dream catcher to hang near your bed.

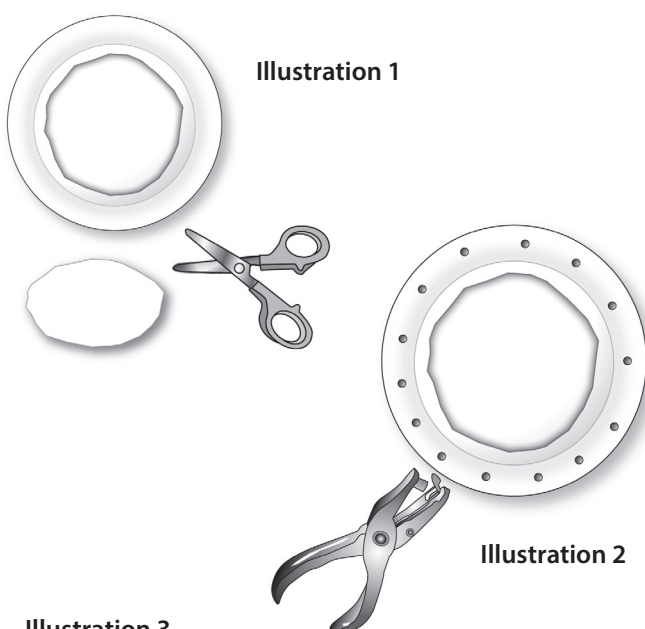


Illustration 3

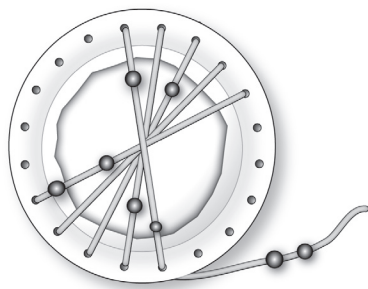
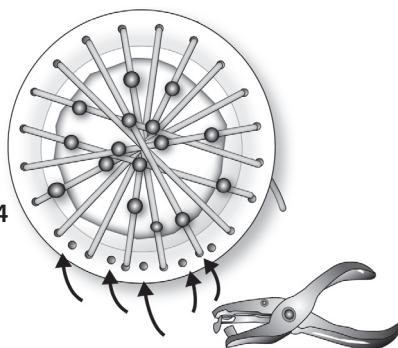
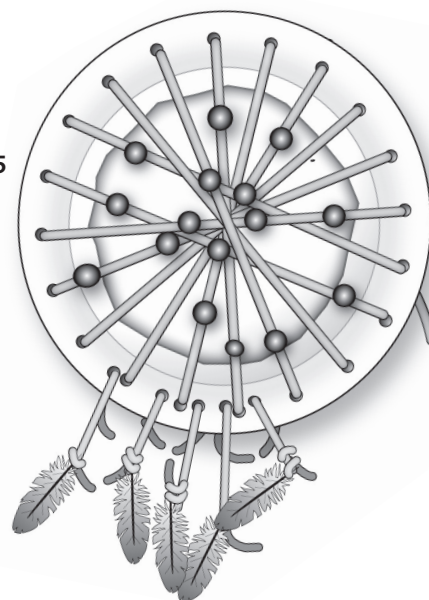


Illustration 4



1. Cut out the centre of a small paper plate leaving the rim. (illus. 1)
2. Use a hole punch to make holes around the rim of the plate. Spacing will determine how difficult this project is. Make fewer holes for younger children and more holes for older children. (illus. 2)
3. Invite children to string yarn back and forth from one side of the rim to the other to create a web-like design. You might need to assist the children in stringing the first two holes to establish the pattern.
4. Add a few beads to the yarn before stringing it through some of the holes. (illus. 3)
5. Tie a knot to secure the yarn when children reach the last hole.
6. Punch five holes at the bottom of the dream catcher. Add lengths of yarn to each hole. Tie feathers to each piece of yarn. (illus. 4 and 5)
7. Punch two holes at the top of the dream catcher. Add a yarn hanger.

Illustration 5





Puzzle Plaque

When you look at an individual jigsaw puzzle piece, you only see a small part of the picture. It is hard to imagine where it fits in the puzzle. When we look at a situation, we only see part of it too. One of the ways we can get a bigger view of the situation is to look at it through God's way.

Materials

- ❑ white card stock/heavy paper, cut into 8 cm / 3 in squares
- ❑ coloured card stock/heavy paper, cut into 14 cm / 5½ in squares
- ❑ old jigsaw puzzle pieces
- ❑ narrow ribbon
- ❑ glue
- ❑ markers

Instructions

1. Choose a saying for your puzzle plaque. It must fit on the white square. You might want to write it lightly in pencil first or try it on a piece of paper. Then write it with a marker.
2. Glue the white square to the coloured square. Try it at different angles to see what you like best.
3. Glue puzzle pieces around the edge of the plaque.
4. Glue a ribbon hanger to the back of the plaque.

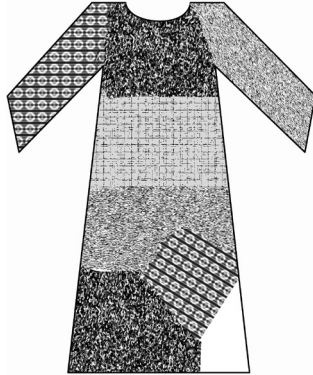


Story Gallery Project-2

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.

August 9: Fabric collage

Joseph’s special coat reminded him of the love of his father, Jacob (*Genesis* 37). Invite children to make fabric collages as reminders of this part of the story. Have them cut scraps from many different colours of fabric and collage these onto cardboard coat shapes by covering the cardboard with a layer of white glue and then pressing the fabric scraps onto the cardboard. Add glitter or star sequins if desired. Make an arrangement of the “coats” on a sheet of poster board, adding a title and scripture reference.

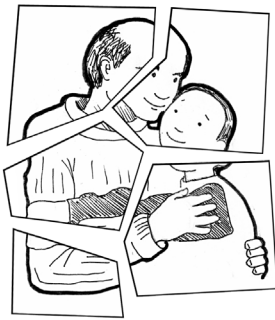


August 23: Courage words

Through the courage and love of women, Moses was kept safe (*Exodus* 1). Invite children to create “baskets of courage words” as reminders of God’s loving care. Draw a large basket shape on brown construction paper and have children work together to add lattice-work lines to make it resemble a woven basket. Cut this out and attach it to a sheet of poster board by taping around the bottom and sides, leaving the top open. Then help children to write inspiring words on strips of paper (such as “God’s love never fails” or “God is always with us” or “Friends are signs of God’s love”). Place these strips in the “basket” and add a title and scripture reference to the board.

August 16: Picture mosaic

Taking steps toward forgiveness brought the broken pieces of Joseph’s relationship with his brothers back together again (*Genesis* 45). Invite children to look through magazines and find pictures that represent for them the theme of forgiveness. Have them remove their pictures from the magazines and then cut into large pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle. Then have them glue the pieces onto a sheet of construction paper to re-form the picture, leaving small spaces between each piece. Make a display of the images, adding a title and scripture reference.



August 30: Flame names

Moses heard God’s voice call him by name, calling him to be part of God’s plan for the Hebrew people (*Exodus* 3). Talk together as a group about how God calls us all to be part of God’s way of love. Distribute orange, yellow, and red construction paper and help the children to cut these into flame shapes. Have them each write their name on one of the shapes. Then talk together about others who might also be called by God, such as family members, friends, people in church, helpers at school or in the community. Add these names to other flame shapes and then work together to glue the “flame names” onto a sheet of poster board to form the shape of a bush. Add a title and scripture reference.

