

# Subversive Forgiveness


This week's texts intersect around the theme of forgiveness, unity, and the subversive ways these gentle but powerful forces can restore relationships, heal divisions, and, as the writer of Psalm 133 says, become the foundation for the blessings ordained by God.



**Focus scripture**  
**Genesis 45:1–15**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Psalm 133**

**Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32**  
**Matthew 15: (10–20), 21–28**

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

## Focus scripture: Genesis 45:1–15

Neither Joseph's brothers nor the rulers of Egypt could have anticipated Joseph's response to seeing his brothers who had come to Egypt in hopes of finding relief from the famine gripping the land. Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. Upon realizing that Joseph had risen to a position of power and authority, they were filled with fear and dismay, no doubt anticipating that Joseph would now have his revenge. As one who had learned to navigate the imperial world of Egyptian rule, Joseph knew that utilizing his power for retribution would not only be understood, but expected.

Imperial and patriarchal systems of authority thrive on division, control and exploitation. Joseph himself had spent years in an Egyptian cell, even though the charges against him were false (Genesis 39). It was Joseph's vision that enabled the Egyptian people and now his family to survive the famine, but survival within an imperial system came at a tremendous cost, including the appropriation of land, livelihoods and ultimately freedom (Genesis 47:12–26). In spite of Joseph's considerable power and authority, he never escaped the discrimination of segregated dining where Israelites, including Joseph, were kept from eating in the same place as Egyptians (Genesis 43:32).

Joseph's brothers, along with Egyptian rulers, expected Joseph to live by these imperial norms with retribution being the direct result. However, Joseph, remembering the covenant making, freedom-giving God of his youth, chooses to live by different standards and different values – an alternative way of being. Even though his brother's intention was one of harm to him, rather than have

them thrown into jail as anticipated, Joseph reframes their experience by seeing the God of liberation at work. Refusing to be confined and imprisoned by hatred and bitterness, Joseph sets himself and his brothers free with forgiveness and charity. In time, these counter-norms of forgiveness, healing, and unity will become a threat to Egypt. But for Joseph and his family, its immediate impact is to restore a relationship that had been severely broken.

**Psalm 133** offers the subversive claim that to live in unity with kindred (one another and creation) is to experience the blessings of God.

**Romans 11:1–2a, 32** is Paul's reframing of division, insisting all need God's mercy? God's gifts (of healing) and calling (for unity) are irrevocable.

**Matthew 15 (10–20), 21–28** tells the story of Jesus continuing to subvert the norms of imperial rule by ignoring the superficial trappings of power and wealth, instead guarding against practices that fracture relationships and community. Jesus himself is reminded of the fullness of God's mercy, healing and unity when confronted by a Canaanite woman.

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Forces of domination both foster and rely upon division, resentments, and conformity in order to maintain their status and power. A spirit of forgiveness and charity subverts this power by making possible a unity of care and compassion, setting us free from all that separates us. This subversive spirit of forgiveness and unity runs throughout today's text. What is it that makes forgiveness so subversive? What challenge does it present to those with power and authority?

**Holy one, you  
called this world  
into existence,  
forging a unity of  
life from the very  
beginning. The div-  
isions and broken-  
ness we have cre-  
ated are met by the  
irrevocable power  
of your mercy and  
grace. You show us  
the way of for-  
giveness with the  
gentle blessing of  
your love.**

**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

Arguments are an ordinary occurrence in children's lives. These disagreements may seem insignificant in adult eyes, but children often feel them intensely. Most children feel anxious in the face of conflict. Yet it is through these experiences of disagreement that they learn about living together, about being good friends, and about reconciliation. Their experiences of forgiveness may not always come in the form of words, but relationships that are broken are pieced together through play, handshakes, hugs, or a return to normal interactions.

Even the youngest children in the group will have some idea of the meaning of forgiveness and how important it is. However, adults sometimes might be too quick to insist on a perfunctory "I'm sorry," instead of exploring the more complicated process of forgiveness. The story of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers offers an opportunity to help children recognize the power of love in the experience of true reconciliation, in which feelings are heard and forgiveness is extended.

Pray that children will find a role model in Joseph and receive insights into the presence of God's love in the process of offering and receiving forgiveness.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 45:1–15, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 83).
- ❑ 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 6), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 6), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring song "Behold, I Make All Things New" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #4 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).
- ❑ Bring some items in need of repair, such as a toy needing new batteries or a shirt with a missing button.

### Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[A Surprise Visit](#)."
- ❑ **Bible research group:** copies of resource sheet "[Joseph's Story](#)," a drum
- ❑ **Game group:** resource sheet "[Activities](#)" (p. 109)

### Respond

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

- ❑ **Story zone:** used magazines, construction paper, instructions from resource sheet "[Story Gallery Project-2](#)" (p. 111)
- ❑ **Cooperative zone:** nothing additional required.
- ❑ **Craft zone:** construction paper, copies of hand shapes (from resource sheet "[Patterns](#)," p. 108), craft foam, dowels, permanent markers
- ❑ **Prayer zone:** newspapers, sheets of paper
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Puzzle Pieces](#)" copied onto cardstock

### Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song, "As We Go Now" (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).



## Scripture

Genesis 45:1–15

# Subversive Forgiveness

**FOCUS** To explore how God's love can help us, like Joseph, give and receive forgiveness

## 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 "Behold, I Make All Things New" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #4 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

**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 children the items that are broken or in need of repair and invite them to suggest ways someone might fix these items. Talk together about experiences group members have had when they or someone else fixed or mended something. Explain that in this week's story we will hear about how broken relationships between some people were mended.

## 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. Recall the stories of Rebekah and Isaac, 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. Recall last week's story about Joseph, his special coat from his father Jacob, which annoyed his older brothers, and how the brothers sold Joseph to some travellers going to Egypt. This week's story begins with Joseph's life in Egypt as a slave.

### The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[A Surprise Visit](#)" to present the story based on **Genesis 45:1–15**.

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

- **What emotions can you imagine in the story?**
- **Why do you think Joseph was able to forgive his brothers?**
- **Where do you see God at work in the story of Joseph?**

Read again **Genesis 45:15**.

- **What do you think the brothers talked about?**
- **When Joseph finally saw his father Jacob again what do you think they said to each other?**

## 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.)*

**Bible research group** *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to review in more depth the events leading to this week's story. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Joseph's Story](#)," based on events recorded in **Genesis 39–45**, and invite volunteers to read the parts and beat the drum. Encourage the whole group to say the response together and explain that the cue for this will be the sound of the drum.

**Game group** *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to explore relationships. When Joseph and his brothers weren't getting along it was as if their relationships were

in a tangle. Follow the instructions for the game "Human Tangle" on the resource sheet "[Activities](#)" (p. 109). Discuss together how reconciliation can help to untangle the brokenness of our relationships.

**Reporting** Invite the research group to present their reading and invite the game group to share their comments in the discussion after the game.

## The Bible story and us

Sometimes it can be hard to forgive someone or to ask for forgiveness.

### ■ When is it hard to say "I'm sorry"?

God can help us to be reconciled with our family members and friends.

### ■ What can happen when we are able to say "I'm sorry"?

## Respond

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

- ❑ **Story zone: Story gallery** *(Option: ongoing project)* Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers brought the broken pieces of their relationships back together. Follow the instructions for this week on the resource sheet "[Story Gallery Project-2](#)" (p. 111) for making the magazine picture mosaics.

- ❑ **Cooperative zone: Body shapes** When we reconcile and work together to mend relationships we can experience God's presence. Invite the group to work together to form the shape of a peace sign, and other shapes that symbolize forgiveness and reconciliation. Invite children to try and form this shape, explaining the meaning of the word "collaboration." What other shapes can the group create together which illustrate the themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and working together?



- ❑ **Craft zone: Hands of peace** God's love was present when Joseph reached out to his brothers. Distribute several copies of the hand shape from the resource sheet "[Patterns](#)" (p. 108) to each child. Invite children to decorate these shapes and glue them onto folded pieces of construction paper. Talk together with the children about who might be the recipients of these cards and help them decide what to print



on their hand shapes. Older children can cut hand shapes from craft foam and use permanent markers to decorate these with patterns, symbols, and words that speak of forgiveness and reconciliation; tape these to dowels and "plant" in the church garden or elsewhere on the church grounds.

- ❑ **Prayer zone: Flying prayers** *(for older children)* The story of Joseph and his brothers is a reminder that reconciliation is always possible. Invite children to write prayers expressing their hopes and dreams for their home, community, and the world on pieces of paper. Fold these into paper plane shapes. "Fly" the prayers around the room and then gather together to read them aloud.
- ❑ **Quiet zone: Puzzle** *(for younger children)* Joseph was able to welcome his brothers and forgive them, making the family whole again. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Puzzle Pieces](#)" and invite children to colour the picture and cut the pieces apart. As they put their puzzles back together, have them think about what they might do to help bring wholeness in their daily lives.

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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 We Go Now” (pp. 6–7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 6; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6).

**Pray** Lead the children in the following prayer, inviting them to repeat each line after you:

When we are able to forgive,  
when we are able to get along together,  
God is in us and with us.  
May we always live in God’s love. Amen.

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

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## Reflect

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With kinds of reactions did the children have to this story of Joseph and his brothers? In what ways could you follow up on these feelings?



# A Surprise Visit

based on Genesis 45:1–15

If several children have not heard the first part of Joseph's story from the previous session, spend more time on it in the beginning of this story.

When the traders who had bought Joseph from his brothers arrived in Egypt, they sold Joseph to an officer of Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Joseph did well, but the officer's wife tricked Joseph and he ended up in jail. While he was there, he helped some prisoners understand their dreams. When Pharaoh had dreams he couldn't understand, one of the prisoners who was now free remembered how Joseph had helped him. Pharaoh sent for Joseph and told him his dreams. God was with Joseph and helped him explain them to Pharaoh.

"Your dreams mean that there will be seven years when there will be plenty of food. Then there will be seven years when no food will be grown." Pharaoh was impressed with Joseph and put him in charge of planning for the seven years without food.

During the seven years when there was lots of food, Joseph stored the extra grain so it would be ready when the years without food came.

At the end of the years with lots of food, a terrible famine came over all the land, even in Canaan where Joseph's family lived. Only in Egypt did

the people have food to eat, because Joseph had helped them. People from other places came to Egypt to buy food. They had to meet with Joseph first to get permission.

One day Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food. When they were brought to Joseph, they didn't know who he was. They only knew that this person in front of them had the power to say that they could buy grain or not.

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, he didn't tell them who he was. He wondered if they were sorry about what they had done to him. As Joseph talked with his brothers, he realized that they had changed. But he still didn't tell them who he was. However, they were allowed to buy grain to take back to Canaan.

The next time Joseph's brothers came to Egypt, Joseph sent everyone out of the room so he was alone with his brothers. When they were alone, Joseph said, "I am Joseph, your brother. Tell me about my father. Is he well?"

His brothers stared at Joseph. What will he do to us? they wondered. Will he refuse to give us more grain? Will he punish us?

"Do not be afraid," said Joseph. "You treated me badly, but God has watched over me in Egypt. Everything has worked out."

With joy, Joseph and his brothers kissed and hugged each other.

"Go back to Canaan," Joseph told them. "Bring my father and all your families to live here in Egypt. You will have plenty of food and a place to live and fields for your flocks of animals."





# Joseph's Story

based on selections from Genesis 39—45

**One:** Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's army. (*drum beat*)

**All:** But God was with Joseph and blessed him.

**Two:** How?

**One:** Joseph worked hard and Potiphar was pleased with him. Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his whole household, and eventually over everything he owned. But then Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph and Joseph was thrown into prison. (*drum beat*)

**All:** But God was with Joseph and blessed him.

**Three:** How?

**One:** Joseph worked hard and was trustworthy. The jailer was pleased with him and put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. In prison Joseph interpreted the dreams of some of the prisoners. When the pharaoh heard that Joseph could interpret dreams, he sent for him.

**Pharaoh:** I dreamed I was standing on the bank of the Nile River. I saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river. They began feeding on the grass. Next, seven skinny, bony cows came up out of the river. The skinny cows ate the fat ones, but it made no difference for they were just as skinny as they were before. I also dreamed that I saw seven heads of grain growing on one stalk. The heads were full and ripe. Then seven other heads of grain came up. They were thin and scorched. These heads of grain swallowed the full ones. What does this mean?

**Joseph:** Your Majesty, both of your dreams mean the same thing. God has shown you what is

going to happen. For seven years Egypt will have more than enough grain, but that will be followed by seven years when there won't be enough. The good years of plenty will be forgotten, and everywhere people will be starving. The famine will be so bad that no one will remember that once there had been more than enough. (*drum beat*)

**All:** But God was with Joseph and blessed him.

**Four:** How?

**One:** The pharaoh made Joseph governor over Egypt. He put him in charge, placed the royal seal on his finger, dressed him in fine linen robes, and placed a gold chain around his neck. During the seven years of plenty, Joseph went all around the country, helping cities store their extra grain. Then the famine came. (*drum beat*)

**All:** But God was with Joseph and blessed him.

**Five:** How?

**One:** Egypt was the only country that had food. People from all over came to Egypt to buy grain so they wouldn't starve. One day Joseph's brothers came to Egypt. When they were brought to Joseph, they did not recognize him. However, they knew that this man had the power to give them food or not. They bowed before him. Joseph recognized them and began to test them to see if they had changed their ways or not. Finally, the time came for Joseph to confront his brothers. (*drum beat*)

**All:** But God was with Joseph and blessed him.

**Six:** How?

**One:** And that is where we pick up the story for today.



# Puzzle Pieces



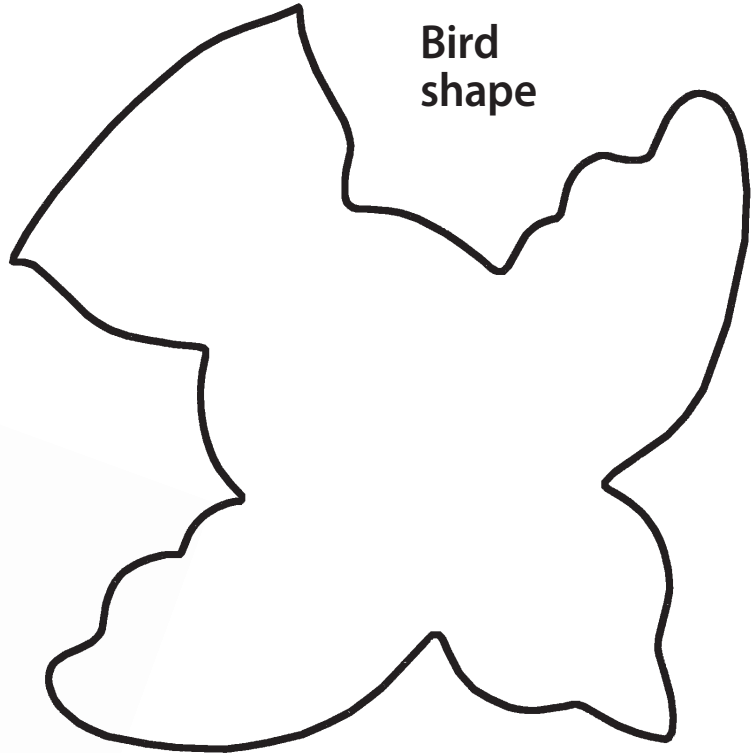


# Patterns

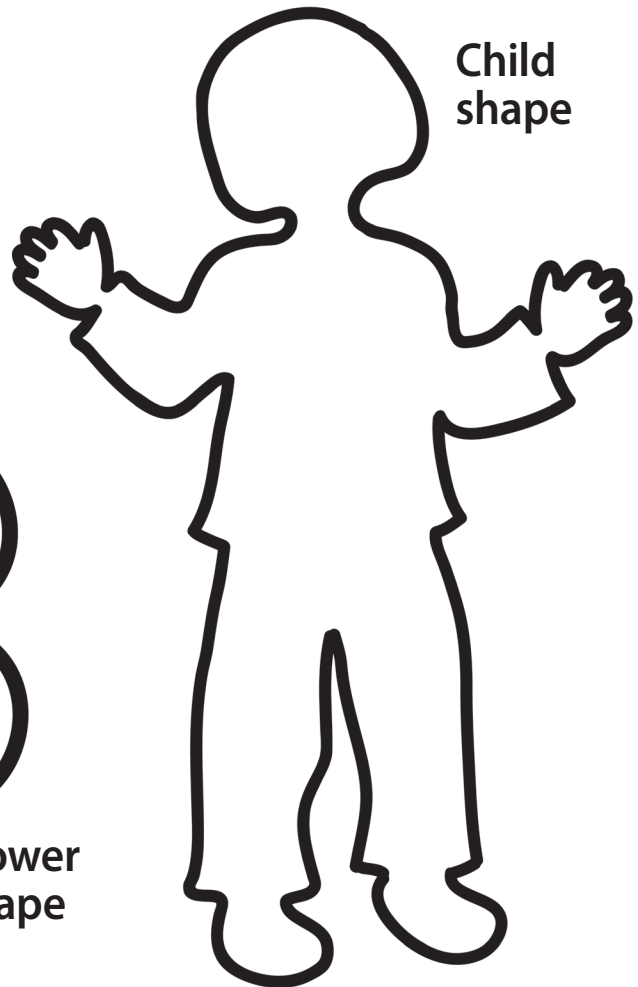
Hand shape



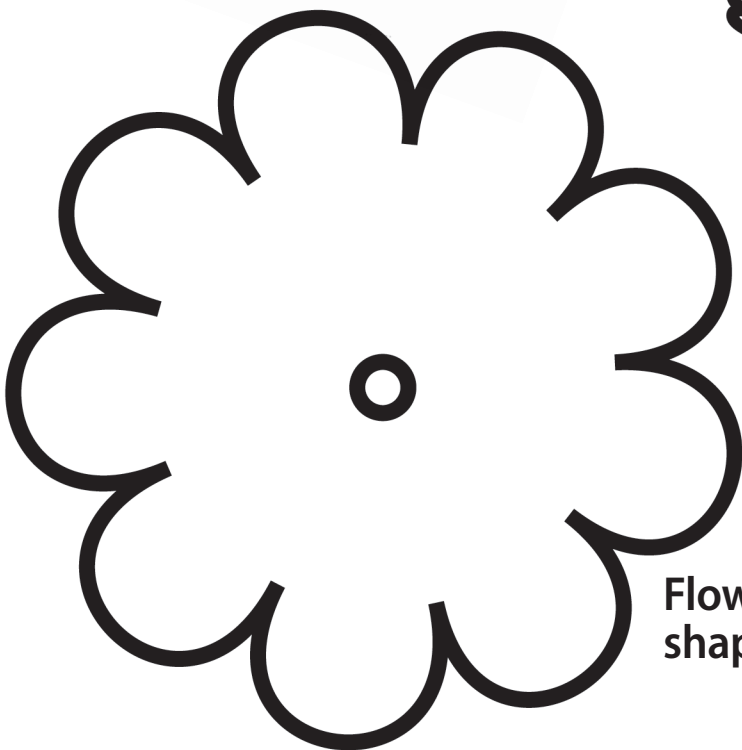
Bird shape



Child shape



Flower shape



# Activities

## Inside-Outside Squares

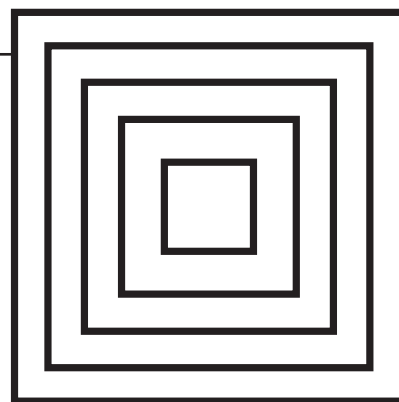
**The point of the game:** to reach the middle square. Once there are three people in that square, they are the joint winners.

### Preparation:

Use masking tape to make a series of five concentric squares on the floor.

### Instructions:

1. Gather around the outside of the squares marked on the floor.
2. Begin with three or four instructions for the children to step in only. For example, "Step into one square if you are wearing red."
3. Later, instructions can be given with both "step in and step out" parts. For example, "Step ahead one square if you have blue eyes; but step back a square or out if you have brown eyes."
4. When a child reaches the middle square, he or she stays there. The game ends when three children have reached the middle square.



## Spot the Leader

One person is chosen as It and leaves the room. Another player is selected as the leader. The group is to watch the leader as unobtrusively as possible and do what the leader does. For example, the leader might start tapping a foot. Everyone in the group does the same thing. It is called back into the room and must try to spot the leader. Each time the leader begins a different movement the group must follow. Play stops when the correct leader is identified. The leader becomes It and a new leader is chosen.

## Human Tangle

This activity works with five or more people. Recruit others to join you for this activity if you need more participants.

1. Stand in a circle and have children join hands with two different people. Do not take the hands of someone on either side of you or take both hands of the same person.
2. Notice the tangle that has been created. Explain that this tangle is like what happens when we do and say things that hurt community.
3. Invite the children to name loving actions and words that help mend and build community, such as saying sorry or playing with someone again after having a disagreement.
4. When a loving action or word is named, invite that child to choose a move that will help untangle the group, such as carefully stepping over or ducking under someone's arm. The child choosing the move doesn't have to be the one to perform the move.
5. Explain that the children can't drop hands but they can loosen their grip and rotate in order to do some twisting in a situation.

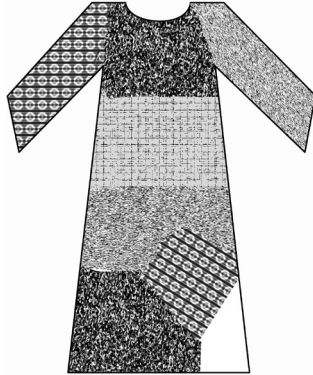


# Story Gallery Project-2

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.

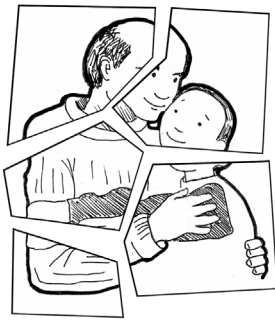


## August 23: Courage words

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.

