

# A Love that Makes Neighbours

This week's stories unite around the theme of courageous love; love that transforms strangers into friends in life – and world-altering ways. At the centre of this week's readings is the model of Rebekah, who will become Isaac's wife, and her example of offering water to a stranger who thirsts.



## Focus scripture: Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67

Rebekah lives in the town of Nahor, where she goes to the well in an everyday act of drawing water. Here she finds a man who thirsts. She displays no fear of bringing water to someone she has never met, but simply welcomes the stranger. The consequences of this act of kindness are life-changing because the stranger who has taken water from Rebekah is really the servant of Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah. The servant sees this act of welcome as a sign that she will marry Isaac. Rebekah's act of generosity becomes the servant's key to knowing her true character, which sets her on the path to partnership with Isaac as a wife and a guide for her descendants and the story of the Hebrew scriptures.

**Psalm 45:10–17** retells Rebekah's story, saying, "I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations" (v. 17). A simple and humble act of kindness such as Rebekah's thus echoes through history in unforeseen ways. Her story of service and courage to help a stranger still resounds. Hospitality, even in its simplest forms, has the capacity to transform a community and our individual lives in beautiful and unforeseeable ways.

You have to work hard, and constantly, to have this kind of effortless display of hospitality that we see in Rebekah and so many other biblical figures. If you substitute the word "love" for "law" in **Romans 7:15–25a**, then the passage reads as one in which Paul is struggling to love. "I delight in the law of God in my inmost self," he writes, "but I see in my members another law at war in the law of my mind" (7:22–23). Regardless of his

desire to love, Paul feels like he cannot do so. He longs to listen to his inner being, which prioritizes love.


Similarly, in **Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30**, Jesus accuses the crowd of not receiving him with acceptance and love. Instead, he sees that people have made assumptions out of fear based on his appearance. The trend of apathy and turning away from love and hospitality continues today, as people rush past scenes of suffering in cities and towns, on the news, and in their own hearts. The key, says Jesus, is to turn to God for the assurance to make decisions out of compassion. The yoke of God is the yoke of courage, compassion, and hospitality that transcends fear and boundaries.

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Each of these readings builds on the theme of hospitality – its transformative nature, its beauty, the difficulty we have expressing it, and finally its complete attachment to the teachings of God and the living out of a life of true faith. The action Rebekah takes is both simple and transformative – and it is also a hard one to open ourselves to make, as Paul points out. Yet, a truly loving life of faith demands this exact kind of courageous openness to others. How can we open our lives – our churches, our communities, our own hearts – to this kind of radical compassion, courage and trust? How have we built spontaneous love and compassion, and how can we continue to develop this spiritual muscle of hospitality?

**Focus scripture**  
**Genesis 24:34–38,**  
**42–49, 58–67**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Psalm 45:10–17 or**  
**Song of Solomon**  
**2:8–13**  
**Romans 7:15–25a**  
**Matthew 11:16–19,**  
**25–30**

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

**God of love and kindness, we thank you for your model of courageous love. We pray that you will help us to make the stranger our friend, each and every day of our lives, turning our lives outward in an ever-expanding sense of connection and 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

Children approach making choices in many different ways. Some are fortunate to grow up among adults who frequently ask, “What do you think?” when it comes to making decisions. Asking this question encourages input from the children and it communicates that they have skills to make good and wise choices. Encouraging children of every age to speak their thoughts is a way that adults can also nurture their faith.

This week’s story and session invites children to recognize, perhaps for the first time, God’s presence within and around,

helping them to make choices. Although older children are starting to make the shift from concrete to abstract thinking, seeing signs of God’s presence may require some help. We can encourage them to consider what they know of God’s loving nature and to understand that when they see those characteristics in the world they are seeing a sign of God’s presence. God’s love becomes real when the children feel love from those who talk about God. Pray that the children may see signs of God’s presence in themselves, in each other, and in the world and know that God is with them in their choices and decision making.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 35).
- ❑ 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](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring song “Come, Holy Spirit” (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ❑ Bring copy of resource sheet “[Activities](#)” (p. 109) and review instructions for the “Spot the Leader” game.

### Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet “[Deep Down Decisions](#).”
- ❑ **Poster group:** poster *Camel Trek*
- ❑ **Drama group:** simple biblical costumes

### Respond

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

- ❑ **Story zone:** modelling clay, tray, strip of paper, instructions from resource sheet “[Story Gallery Project–1](#)” (p. 110)
- ❑ **Cooperative zone:** strips of card stock
- ❑ **Music zone:** recording and lyrics for song “In God We Live and Move” (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9)
- ❑ **Craft zone:** construction paper, copies of resource sheet “[Making Choices](#)”; follow the instructions for preparing the materials.
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of resource sheet “[Promise Squares](#),” art supplies, self-adhesive stickers

### 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).



July 5, 2020

# A Love that Makes Neighbours

## Scripture

Genesis 24:34–38,  
42–49, 58–67

**FOCUS** To be affirmed of God's presence during times of decision making

## 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 "Come, Holy Spirit" (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 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

Review the instructions for the game "Spot the Leader" on the resource sheet "[Activities](#)" (on p. 109). Then ask:

- What signs helped you to spot the leader?
- What are some signs that tell you school is starting?
- What signs tell you that someone has been baking?
- What signs tell you how a friend is feeling?

## Engage

Explain that this week's Bible story helps us learn about signs of God's presence in the world.

### 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. Explain that this book has lots of stories about people who lived long ago. We sometimes call these people our faith ancestors because they help teach us about living in God's way. In this week's story some people have important choices to make. Let's listen for who or what helps them make their choices.

### The Bible story

Explain that in Bible times it was the custom for

fathers to choose wives or husbands for their children. In this week's story a servant is sent to find a wife for Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah. Use the resource sheet "[Deep Down Decisions](#)" to present the story based on **Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67**.

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

- What big choice did Rebekah have to make?
- What were the signs for Eliezer that Rebekah was the right wife for Isaac?
- Who or what helped Eliezer, Rebekah's family, and Rebekah make choices?

## 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.)*

### Activity group: Choices game *(for younger children)*

God is deep down and all around, helping us to make choices. Follow the directions for the game “Heads or Tails” (p. 39). Afterwards talk together about the differences between making choices by flipping a coin, and making a choice without using the coin. Ask:

#### ■ What helped you make your choices without using a coin?

**Drama group** *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to act out the story about Eliezer and Rebekah. Provide simple costumes. Read again the story on the resource sheet “Deep

Down Decisions,” pausing after each paragraph for children to dramatize one or more activities in that section of the story.

**Reporting** Invite the activity group to share what it was like to make choices without the coin, and invite the drama group to act out the ending of this week’s story.

## The Bible story and us

Eliezer saw signs from God as he made decisions in his search for a partner for Isaac.

#### ■ Who or what helps you when you have to make choices or decisions about something?

Rebekah experienced a sense of God’s presence as she made the decision to marry Isaac. God is also always with us, helping us to make the right choices and decisions.

#### ■ Where could we look for signs of God’s presence and help in our everyday lives?

## Respond

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

- ❑ **Story zone: Story gallery** *(Option: ongoing project)* Like Rebekah we can also know deep down how to live in God’s way. Follow the instructions for this week on the resource sheet “Story Gallery Project-1” (p. 110) for making clay sculptures that symbolize making choices and decisions.



- ❑ **Cooperative zone: Signs** Rebekah’s caring welcome was a sign of God’s presence to Eliezer. Distribute strips of card stock and invite children to print “Look for signs of God’s presence!” on their strips and use markers to decorate around the edges. Help them find places in the learning space and around the church building to post their signs, encouraging people to see God’s presence in the world today.



- ❑ **Music zone: Song actions** *(for younger children)* The people in this week’s story recognized God’s presence deep down, helping them make



loving choices. Teach the children the song “In God We Live and Move” (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9). Work together with the group to come up with simple actions for this chant. Invite the children to name some of the choices they make during their days. Sing the song after each choice is named.

- ❑ **Craft zone: Doorways of choice** Eliezer, Rebekah’s family, and Rebekah needed to make choices that would help them live in loving ways. Distribute doorway shapes from the resource sheet “Making Choices” and follow the instructions to help children explore how they make choices.
- ❑ **Quiet zone: Promise cards** *(for older children)* Abraham assures Eliezer that God will be with him in the search for a wife for Isaac. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Promise Squares” and follow the instructions to make the cards. Help them find the Bible verses and choose words to add to their cards.

## Bless

**Gather** around the worship area and light the candle again.

**Sing or listen to**, 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).

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

God is always with us,  
under our feet and over our heads,  
deep in our bones and all around,  
helping us to choose loving ways.

**Blessing** Offer the following blessing: "(Name), God is with you as you make choices."

## Reflect

What kinds of choices did the children talk about? In what ways were they able to express their growing awareness of God's presence within? How might their wisdom guide you in the decisions you face?

## Heads or Tails

1. Give each child a coin to flip.
2. Gather in a circle and read one of the choices from the list below.
3. Have children flip their coins. If their coin lands on heads, they move to the side of the room with the sign "A – heads" posted. If their coin lands on tails, they move to the side of the room with the sign "B – tails" posted.
4. Once everyone has arrived at a sign, read the choice again. This time have the children make their choice based on their deep down thoughts and feelings.
5. Gather in a circle and repeat with the next choice from the list.

### Choices:

1. Your friend's little sister wants to come into your club house with you. Do you (a) tell her the club house is only for big kids or (b) invite her to come into the club house for a visit?
2. It is your turn to walk the family dog, but you are busy reading a book. Do you (a) put the book down and walk the dog or (b) keep reading the book, knowing someone else will eventually walk the dog?
3. Your father has come to pick you up from a play date with a friend. Do you (a) thank the friend and get into the car with your father or (b) help pick up the toys before going home?
4. You are having trouble remembering how to spell a word in your spelling test. Do you (a) look at your neighbour's test paper for clues or (b) make a guess and hope for the best?
5. Your aunt mails you a card with money in it for your birthday. Do you (a) send her a thank you card and tell her how you plan to use the money or (b) forget who gave you the money and use it to buy a toy you've been wanting?





# Deep Down Decisions

based on Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67

Read this story several times until  
you are so familiar with it that  
you can tell it as your  
own story.

**E**liezer (*Ehl-ee-EE-zuhr*) was Abraham's most trusted servant. He had worked for Abraham for many, many years. When Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac was old enough to get married, Abraham asked Eliezer to help him find a partner for Isaac.

Abraham explained that he wanted Isaac to have a partner who would love God and follow in God's ways. Abraham didn't think Isaac could find this kind of partner where they were living, so he sent Eliezer back to the country where Abraham and Sarah used to live. So Eliezer set out on a long journey back to a city called Nahor.

Just outside the city, Eliezer stopped near a well where the women of the city would often come to fetch water. A woman named Rebekah was there and she welcomed Eliezer and his travelling companions and gave them all some cold water to drink. Then Rebekah did an amazing thing. She filled buckets with water and gave the water to their camels. It was hard work, but Rebekah served the animals water until they were no longer thirsty. Eliezer could see Rebekah was a welcoming and loving person.

Deep down, Eliezer knew that Rebekah's welcoming ways were a sign she lived in God's ways. Eliezer asked to speak with Rebekah's family. He wanted to ask Rebekah's parents if she could travel back to Canaan with him and be Isaac's partner.

Eliezer told Rebekah's family the trip to Canaan would be long and hard. He said they might never see Rebekah again. But Eliezer also told Rebekah's family about Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. He told them how much they loved God.

Deep down, Rebekah's family knew that she should go with Eliezer and become Isaac's partner. But they wanted Rebekah to choose for herself. They called Rebekah from her tent. They told her about Isaac and his family. They explained that Isaac was looking for a partner who would love God and live in God's ways with him. They asked Rebekah, "Do you want to go with Eliezer and become Isaac's partner?"

Deep down, Rebekah knew she should go with Eliezer and become Isaac's partner. The trip to Canaan was long and it was hard. After weeks of riding on a camel across the hot desert, Rebekah was starting to doubt that she had made the right choice.

Then Eliezer said, "Look ahead. See those tents? That is where Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac live. We will be there by the end of the day." Those were happy words for Rebekah. She was looking forward to meeting Isaac and being settled. Deep down Rebekah was looking forward to living out the choice she had made.



# Making Choices

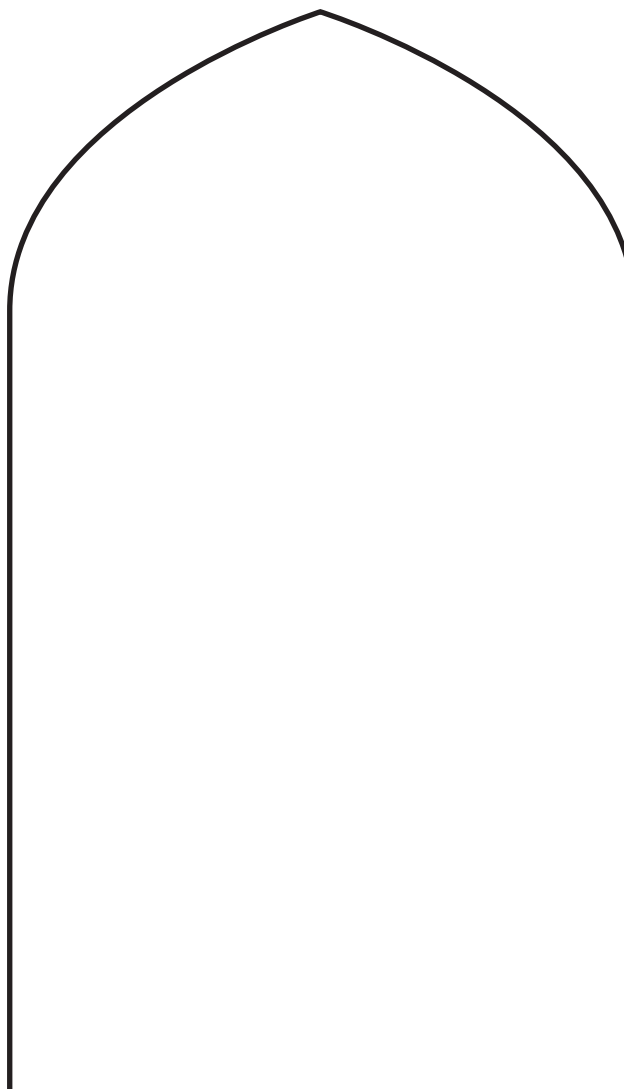
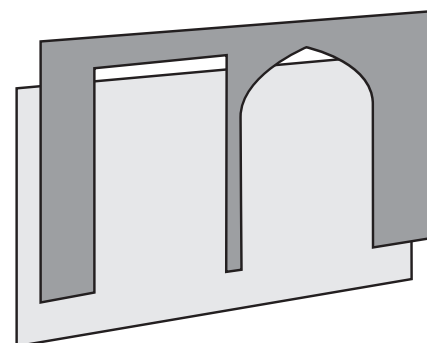
## Before the session:

1. Enlarge the doorway patterns below and cut out.
2. Trace one of each doorway pattern, side by side, on sheets of coloured construction paper, making the bottom of the doorways flush with the bottom of the paper.

## During the session:

1. Have the children cut out the insides of the patterns and glue their doorway shapes onto sheets of white paper.

2. Invite children to think of a choice they have had to make in the past and draw the situation inside one of their doorway shapes.
3. Have them think of a choice they are facing right now and draw the situation inside the other doorway shape.
4. Talk together about who or what helps them make their choices.
5. Have them draw or write words about the helpers around the outsides of the doorways.





# Promise Squares

## Instructions

- ☐ Cut out the card and decorate flaps as desired.
- ☐ Turn card over.
- ☐ Fold all the flaps back to cover the square.
- ☐ Look up the verses opposite and choose a promise to write in the blank square under the flaps.

## Some promises in the Bible

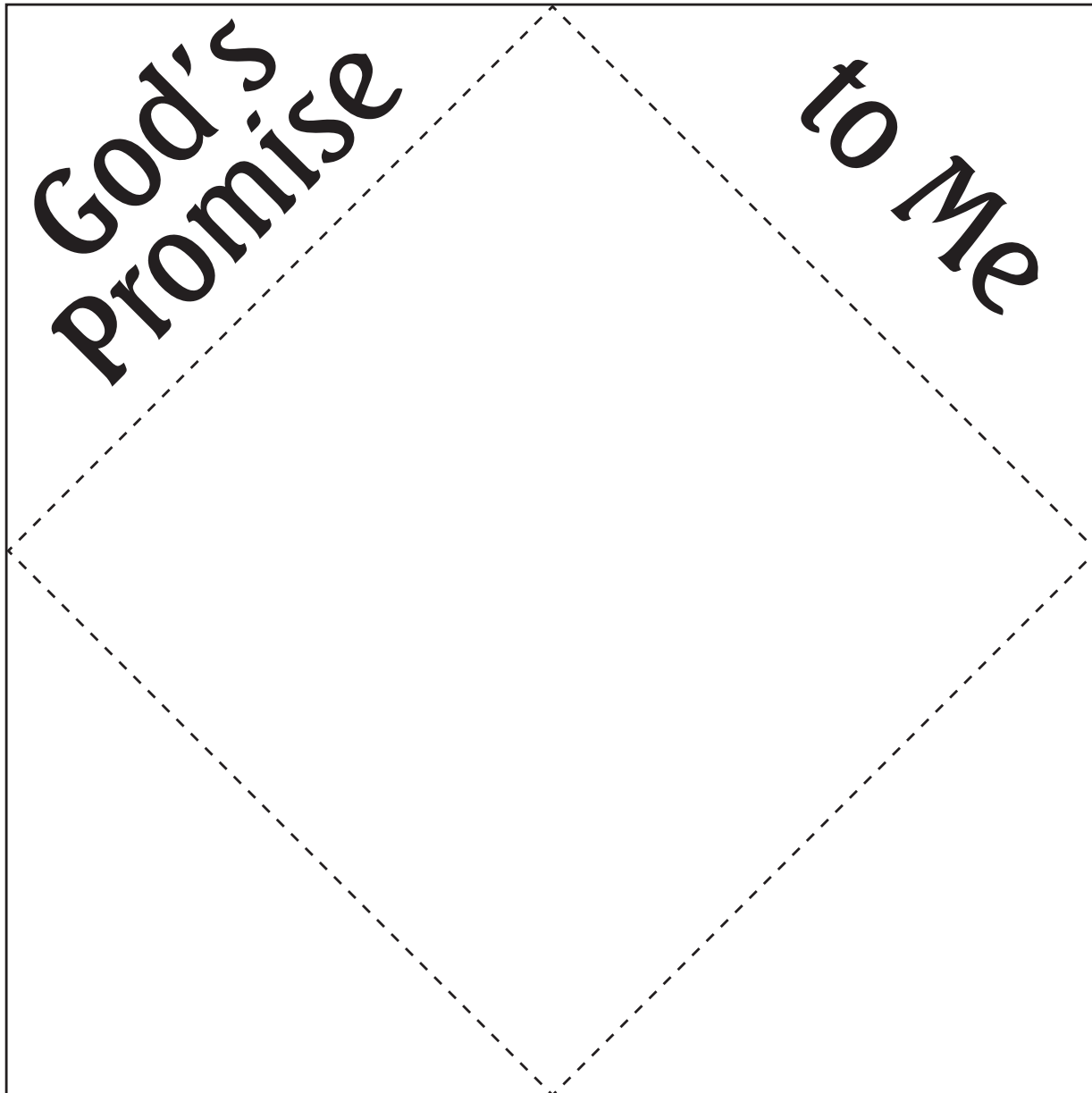
A promise that God is with us in hard times (*Isaiah 43:2*)

A promise of guidance (*Proverbs 3:6*)

A promise of a helper (*John 14:26*)

A promise of peace (*John 14:27*)

A promise about forgiveness (*1 John 1:9*)





# Activities

## Inside-Outside Squares

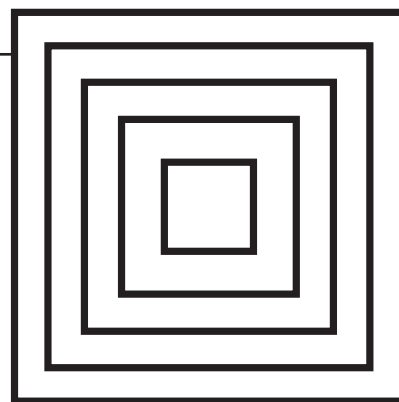
**The point of the game:** to reach the middle square. Once there are three people in that square, they are the joint winners.

### 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-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.

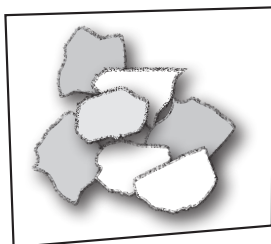
## July 5: Clay shapes

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.



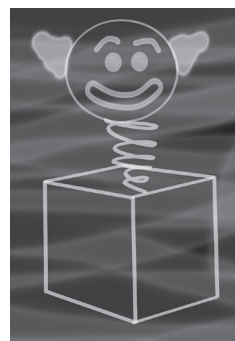
## July 19: Rock sculpture

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.

