



# Faith Adventures Youth Resource

*Embedded in Faith Adventures: Children Together, this youth resource is intergenerational in nature and designed to foster God-connection in church, home and beyond.*

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link:  
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Faith-Adventures-How-To-FAYR.pdf>

## Genesis 28: 10-19 – Jacob's Ladder

Theme: The story of an encounter with God

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### Introduction: What would be helpful to know before we begin?

Our story today focusses on rocks and dreams of ladders. Balancing rocks has become a 'well-being' activity over recent years but the practice of building cairns (arranging rocks into a stack or pile) has been going on for much longer. Cairns have been used to create navigational aids, as memorials to people and events, and even burial sites. They are often found at the top of mountains or hills.

In our story today, we hear about Jacob. Jacob is travelling to find a wife – having tricked his father into giving him a blessing that was due to his older brother Esau; stealing his birthright and inheritance from him. We learn that Jacob travelled until after the sun had already set, and stopped at a place where he used a stone for a pillow. It might not seem very comfortable to use a rock as a place to rest your head – but maybe it can be, with the right rock!

While Jacob was asleep, he dreamt he saw a ladder – at the place at the top of the ladder he saw God. Angels were climbing up and down the ladder – between heaven and earth.

This is an Old Testament understanding of God where God can seem distant and apart and uses angels and prophets to communicate with the people. Jesus coming to earth changed that view and made God more accessible to people.

In the morning, Jacob used his 'pillow stone' as a pillar and renamed the place where it was from Luz to Bethel (which means House of God). A house of God is an earthly, physical place (such as



a church or temple) that is seen as the dwelling place of God. God cannot really be contained in a physical building or location but we earth-bound humans often need something solid and physical to remind us of the presence of God, heaven, and spirit.

In the translation we are recommending, it states that Jacob was afraid and goes on to describe the place where he is as 'holy'. Other translations use different words but it is worth being aware of any members of your group who might be having bad dreams or nightmares and reassure them accordingly.

## Together

Let's start our time with God and each other well

If used in a mixed-age group, then young people can support younger ones in using the gathering prayer in Faith Adventures: Children Together. If used in a youth group, you could use this opening prayer or encourage young people to open the session with a prayer of their own.

*All mighty God,*

*Be with us as we learn more about you through stories and people in the Bible.*

*Help us to walk in your way and follow your path.*

*Be with us as we make decisions that affect our lives, and the lives of those around us.*

*Amen*

### In-person and Alternative game

See this week's Faith Adventures : Children Together for suitable games for this theme.

### Hopscotch Game – (FAYR Adaptation)

You could adapt the hopscotch game found in the FACT material by adding in quiz questions. After rolling the dice, teams must correctly answer a general knowledge question before being able to move forward. Answer correctly and the team moves forward, and they get to roll again. Answer incorrectly and the team does not move, their turn ends and play passes to the opposite team. You could get teams to write the questions for opposing teams.

## Experience

Research different versions of this reading on <https://www.biblegateway.com/>  
Recommended versions to try are NRSV, Easy-to-read, The Message, NIRV

**Watch:** [https://youtu.be/\\_XGXXjoxWks?si=bkeJsPtDilp0Hoin](https://youtu.be/_XGXXjoxWks?si=bkeJsPtDilp0Hoin) (Leeland and Rita Springer)

**Discuss:** This song is the Springer's own interpretation of the story in the passage. What do you think Jacob's ladder might look like and what might it feel like to see it? What might you hear or experience?



If you look at the Bible passage, Jacob himself does not climb the ladder. What do you think the ladder signifies? Would you have wanted to climb it? What do the Springers say about the ladder?

They repeatedly sing “I don’t wanna come back down” – what do you think they are trying to say here? Do you think God wants us to climb a ladder to heaven or to stay on earth?

## Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week’s Bible passage together

### A new way to explore the theme

You may wish to use the explore section from this week’s Faith Adventures: Children Together to guide your exploration of the theme this week.

### Modern parables

This section includes references to TV programmes, films, books, TED talks, TikTok etc aimed at this age group that will have been widely seen, or where a clip is available to use as a stimulus for discussion. You may also enjoy the picture book recommended for Faith Adventures: Children Together and explore the relevance of the story to the theme of the session in more depth – young people and adults are often well tuned in to the deeper meanings in materials aimed at younger people and the authors are often very aware of the adults reading the books to or with younger ones.

“We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder” is a song that has been often performed by American rock singer Bruce Springsteen (and others).

<https://youtu.be/le35rmdy5qY?si=YPZD9gjxp17CyBAP>

Springsteen’s version is a cover version of a song by Folk/Protest singer Pete Seeger.

[https://youtu.be/H7hkD\\_ebqu4?si=Hf20rkIBYRb63iZm](https://youtu.be/H7hkD_ebqu4?si=Hf20rkIBYRb63iZm)

Seeger’s version is based on a hymn sung by slaves in America in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

<https://youtu.be/EW6z-fffJeg?si=yH6K0ZznloAgZkIO>

The original lyrics are:

We are (we are)  
Climbing (climbing)  
Jacob's ladder  
We are (we are)  
Climbing (climbing)  
Jacob's ladder  
Soldier (soldier)  
of the cross

Ev'ry rung (round) goes higher higher (x2) / soldier of the cross  
Sinner do you love my Jesus (x2) / soldier of the cross  
If you love Him why not serve Him (x2) / soldier of the cross  
Do you think I'd make a soldier (x2) / soldier of the cross  
Faithful prayer will make a soldier (x2) / soldier of the cross

You might notice that, in Seeger’s version, he has changed the last line of the verse to “Brothers, sisters, all.” Why do you think he did that?

Why might slaves see this song as inspirational? Which version do you prefer?

## Talking together: Going deeper

- What, if anything, do you already know about Jacob's story from before or after this event?
- What is the difference between a 'God' dream and a 'you' dream? How can you tell when it is God talking to you?
- What do you think God was saying to Jacob through this dream?
- How do you think the concept of Jacob's ladder works? Do we climb it? Does God climb down?
- The reading suggests that that one place is the gateway to Heaven. Do you think there is only one place where heaven feels close?
- I wonder what makes a place holy?
- Why do you think Jacob anointed the stone to make it sacred/special? Is there anything we might do to mark things as sacred/special?

## Conversation starters

- Have you ever experienced being in a place where you felt particularly close to God's presence? (These are sometimes called 'thin places'.)
- Do you know of anywhere that is a famous 'thin place', where heaven feels particularly close?
- Have you ever had a 'God' dream, where you believe God was speaking to you or giving you a message of some sort? Were you awake or asleep?

# Express

How do we respond to what we've discussed and express our faith personally?

## Praying together

**Prayer** Respond to the theme by writing or saying a short prayer. Alternatively use the creative prayer from Faith Adventures: Children Together for this session, or use the prayer activity below.

Alternatively light a candle and play some music while you listen and talk to God together.

## Creative Prayer – Prayer Cairns (stone towers)

In the Bible, people often set up stones as reminders of the things that God had done for them. Sometimes they used one very large stone as a landmark as Jacob did, other times they stacked smaller stones up to form a cairn, a kind of tower. They were reminders of how God had helped his people in the past to give them courage to see how God would help them today. Today people build cairns as way markers and guides.

Smooth pebbles work best and the flatter the better. Find somewhere flat to build your tower - hard floor or ground is best as carpet makes it wobble. Slowly build your tower. As you pick up each stone, think of something that God has done for you or think about where you need God's help. Try building quietly so you can reflect and pray as you build. Think about how God is there for you in the difficult times and remember that God is always with you.





## Spoken prayer

This can be used with the creative prayer activity or alternatively place one large stone in the centre of your group.

God of creation,  
 as we lay these stones (*this stone*) before you,  
 we offer you the prayers of our hearts.  
 Help us always  
 to trust your love,  
 to serve your purpose  
 and to praise your name,  
 Knowing that you are always with us  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
 Amen.

*The Daily Office Revised (Adapted)*

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## Responding together

This is an opportunity for a social justice challenge, some research, craftivism, or a craft or STEM activity. You may have a specific activity chosen but free choice is also an option. Here are some suggestions for this week's theme. See Faith Adventures: Children Together for a craft and a STEM activity which may also be appropriate. Choose whatever will work best for your group.

## Investigating House of God

The name Bethel means 'House of God'. Jacob changed the place name from Luz to Bethel to remember his dream and that that place felt like the gateway to heaven.

Can you find out why your church, or the churches in your neighbourhood, have the names they have? Are they just named because of where they are (e.g. Kingston URC) or do they have another name (e.g. Cornerstone or Beacon URC), or maybe they're named for a Saint. Can you find out something about the history of the church building? When was it built and why? Is there a foundation stone? And what is a foundation stone, for that matter?

## A fun Jacob's Ladder

This activity is just for fun – maybe something to do while you're talking about some of the discussion questions this week. It is often called Cat's Cradle, but is also referred to as Jacob's Ladder. <https://youtu.be/oXV1rX-PvR0?si=NUMOE2S9n2yES2ul>

## Challenge

Discipleship doesn't stop when you walk out of the church door – it is a part of everyday life. Take a challenge with you and try to make it part of your week.

You may think of your own suggestion of what you as an individual or a group might do in the coming week in response to what you have explored today? If not here are some suggestions:

- Use one of the "conversation starter" questions or the question below to talk with someone of a different generation or from a different setting and share your questions, thoughts, insights together. **What has been your most memorable dream?**



- Find a smooth rock or pebble and decorate it to say “God is here”, then find a place in your local neighbourhood where you can leave it for people to find.
- Research something suggested by JPIT, [Resources \(jpit.uk\)](https://resources.jpit.uk) Commitment for Life [cforl.co.uk](https://cforl.co.uk)

Thank you for exploring the story of **Jacob's ladder** passage with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing [children.youth@urc.org.uk](mailto:children.youth@urc.org.uk) or by sharing it on [https://bit.ly/FACT\\_FB](https://bit.ly/FACT_FB)

