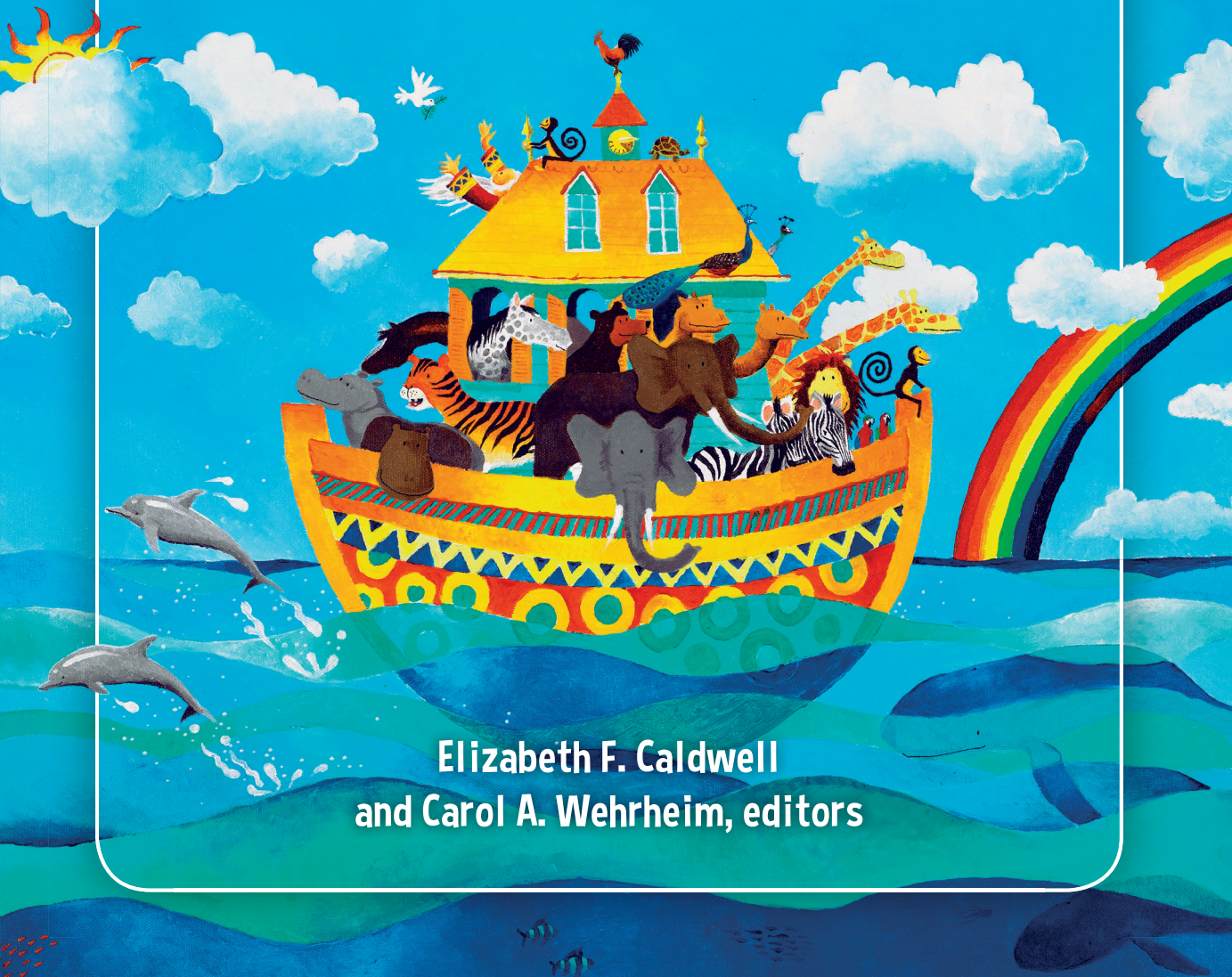


Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible



Elizabeth F. Caldwell
and Carol A. Wehrheim, editors




Presented to

From

Occasion

Date



**Growing
in
God's Love**
A Story Bible

Elizabeth F. Caldwell
and Carol A. Wehrheim, editors

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Carol Wehrheim

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Lib Caldwell

We are grateful for the support and wise help of our editor at Westminster John Knox Press, David Dobson, and art director, Allison Taylor. Our prayer is that this Bible storybook will be the introduction for many children to a book that becomes a lifelong companion of spiritual nurture and nourishment, and one that they will delight in sharing with the children in their lives as well.

Carol Wehrheim and Lib Caldwell

Introduction

Perhaps you are reading this because you want to share a Bible storybook with a child you know. You may have grown up with one of your own, cherishing the stories and illustrations, wondering about all the things you read about a culture so very far away from your own. Maybe you didn't grow up with a Bible storybook, but you want to learn more about stories from the Bible as you introduce them to your child.

The Bible is less a book of answers than it is an invitation to wrestle with stories and meanings. Engaging a child's imagination by inviting her to ask questions of a story helps her realize it has meaning for her life today. When a child is invited to pause and hear a story and think about how the story is speaking to his life, then he grows up knowing the Bible will be there throughout his life. He learns that the Bible is not an answer book that he will outgrow, but one that he will grow into as he matures.

Reading this Bible storybook is an invitation to you and your child or children to engage in a spiritual practice. As a parent, you look at your phone or your watch and wonder about the time this practice will require and how and when it can fit in to the schedule of a busy family. This practice of reading and wondering about Bible stories requires letting go of *chronos* (clock) time and moving into *kairos* (right or opportune) time. So put aside the attention to the minutes required and move into a space that is God's time. Investing in a child's spiritual formation is an opportunity to grow in faith with your child as, together, you read, hear, imagine, ask questions about, and consider the invitation the story is offering.

The stories included in this Bible storybook have been selected for several reasons. Many are ones that are available in curriculum taught with children in church schools. When you look at the table of contents, you will see that the stories are grouped in sections that address a variety of themes in the Bible. This will help you think about a story that might be appropriate for a particular time in the life of your child. Stories have also been selected because they may help a child with issues that she or he faces in life: at school or at home or in the neighborhood. We all can use help with wisdom from the Bible in learning how to live together as peacemakers, learning how to live with those who are different from us, learning how to love as Jesus did.

These stories reflect the recent thinking and writing from contemporary biblical scholars, so you will see some new interpretations of familiar stories. As you read these stories, you will hear issues that are timeless, ones our children need help facing. Also, the stories have been written and illustrated in a way that we hope will be accessible for differently abled children. The stories use inclusive language for God. It is our hope that children will grow up with names for God that are not limiting but that invite them to

engage in their growth in the life of faith by dwelling in the mystery of God who is healer, spirit, shepherd, friend, mother, caregiver, peacemaker, father—all of these things and many more.

Finally, pause with the illustrations. You will see a variety of art. It is our hope that this will help children hear and see the stories in new ways and not be locked into viewing biblical characters in only one way. As with the stories, the illustrations invite wondering, reflection, and conversation.

Take time with these stories. Pause, read, hear, and imagine. Each story ends with three questions: Hear, See, and Act. These invite children to engage the story with their own imaginations and to think about the meaning it has for their lives. Enjoy this time of listening together for the ways that God continues to speak through the Bible and through our lives.

Old Testament



Introduction to the Old Testament

The Old Testament is like a library of books, with exciting stories, poetry, and wise sayings. There are also some sad stories and many stories that help us remember God's love and care. From the first stories of creation in Genesis to the prophets at the end of this section of the Bible, the stories are about God and God's people. God is present from beginning to end. In Genesis and Exodus, we hear the stories of the first people God called as God's people. These two books along with Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy make up the Torah. These are books of instruction about living in God's way. Then come thirteen books of stories about God's people. You'll read about Samuel, David, Ruth, Esther, Elijah, Elisha, and many more. Psalms are poetry, and they help us know how to talk to God. The last seventeen books of the Old Testament are words that God gave to the people God called to be prophets.

The Old Testament is also Jewish Scripture, read by Jews and Christians today. The stories were the stories that Jesus learned as a child. They are the stories in the background as he taught and healed. In these stories you meet strong women and men, such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Rachel. But many more strong and faithful people will step in and out of this parade of biblical characters. Listen for surprises in the stories, and learn how God acts in the world, then and even today.



Beginning with Creation and God's Promises

Every culture has a story about how it began. For Christians, this story is told in the first book of the Bible. Genesis starts with two stories of creation. Chapters 1 and 2 in Genesis invite us to think about how God is connected with creation, from the smallest insect to the largest elephant, from the teeniest lichen to the giant redwood tree, even with us. God is the focus of these stories. They do not give us a scientific explanation of how the world came into being, but they do help us understand God's presence in all creation then and now. As you hear these stories, notice the role God plays and the role that humans play in these stories of beginnings.

After the world and all that was in it was created, the writers of the next books told stories about how God made God's self known to the humans whom God had created. Like all people everywhere, they were trying to figure out how to live with one another. Sometimes they were good at it, but often they made mistakes. God wanted them to remember how to live with kindness and care toward one another and toward the earth and all living things. God made promises to them and God wanted them to remember these promises.

An important way that God connects or relates to people—us—is through covenants. A covenant is a promise between God and God's people. God promises to be God, and the people promise to follow in God's ways. In the Old Testament, God's people were the Hebrews. Later, they were called Israelites.

Read about the promises God made to Noah, to Abraham and Sarah, and to the prophet Jeremiah. God's promises then and now help us remember that God is always with us, at the beginning of our lives, in the middle, and at the end.

How God Made Everything

Based on Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Long ago, before telescopes and microscopes, before scientists discovered everything they know today, people told stories about the beginning of the world. This is the story about the beginning of the world that the people of God told. They thought everything God made was beautiful.

At first, it was really hard to see. Water was everywhere. So God made light, the light you see every morning when you wake up. When God saw the light, God said, “It’s beautiful!”

Then God moved the water around. Some of it, God spread all over the world. Some of it, God put up in the clouds in the sky for rain. God said, “Water’s beautiful, too!”

After that, God put the world’s water in the oceans and lakes and rivers. Then the dry ground you walk on appeared. In the ground, God planted grass and trees and everything that grows outside your window and outside everyone’s windows.



God made the geranium in the little pot on your windowsill too. God said, “Aren’t all these plants beautiful?”

To make sure we all have light, day and night, God made the big sun that you see every day. Then God made the moon and the stars you see when you lie on your back on the ground at night. God said, “Don’t you think they’re beautiful too?”

Finally, God made all the animals everywhere, the fish and the crabs and the whales in the water, and the birds flying up with the clouds in the sky. God made all the animals around us on the ground. Then God made us, people. God said, “Wow! You’re all beautiful.”

Then God spoke to us for the first time. God told us who we are and what we should do. God said, “You’re all my people in the world I made. I made you just enough like me that you too can see how beautiful everything is. Take care of the world. Keep it beautiful. Keep it just as beautiful as I made it.”

Hear: What sound do you hear right now in the world God made?

See: What is your favorite animal? What color is your favorite flower?

Act: What can you do to keep the world as beautiful as God made it?



We Were All Farmers Once

Based on Genesis 2:4b-22

This is another story that God's people told about the beginning of the world. In this story, they wanted to tell us why they were farmers. They wanted to tell us why being farmers kept them alive and why farmers keep everyone alive.

Long ago, God made the very first person who ever lived. God took the best, richest, darkest, thickest soil from the ground. God shaped this soil into someone who looked like you and me. Then God breathed God's own breath into this person. The first person took the first breath ever.

Then, in the same best, richest, darkest, thickest soil that God made the first person from, God planted a big farm. God planted the most beautiful fruit trees and the biggest golden fields of grain. God said to the first farmer, "Be good to the rich soil I made you from. Farm it carefully. Grow the best fields and orchards you can. All your food will come from them, and you'll need food to stay alive."

Pretty soon God thought, *Wait, one farmer can't do all this work alone!* So, from the same best, richest, darkest, thickest soil, God made all the farm animals to help the farmer. God made big oxen to carry loads, sheep and goats to give wool and milk. God even made dogs and cats to keep the farmer company. God decided this was a good time to make all the wild animals, too. So God did.

Pretty soon God thought, *Wait, we need a family! Just one person with all these animals? That will never work!* So God made another person, and then the world had two parents who could start a family and work on their farm together.

Long ago, all families were farmers who grew all the food they ate on their own farms. Today, most families aren't farmers. But here's the thing: all the food your family eats, farmers somewhere have grown for you. Do you know who they are and where their farms are?

Hear: Listen for the sounds your favorite crunchy food makes when you eat it.

See: Look at the different kinds of food in your grocery store. Think about who grew them.

Act: Find out where your food comes from and who grows it. Visit a farm near you and ask what it's like to be a farmer.



When the World Started Over Again

Based on Genesis 6–9

Almost everyone on earth has a story about a time when the world almost ended. Most of these stories are about a huge flood, the hugest flood ever. The people who tell these stories put all their little fears into a story about one great big fear: the end of the world. Here's the Bible story about how the world almost ended and how it began again after a huge and terrible flood.

It rained for days and days. The water rose and rose until it covered everything. Every living thing died—almost. Just one person, Noah, built a boat, a boat so big that there was room for his whole family. Actually, Noah built his boat even bigger than that. He built it so big he could bring a family of every animal along too: dogs and cats, elephants and ants, lions and tigers. Noah even brought spiders and snakes on board. And everyone got along just fine. They were all safe for now.

The big boat floated on the big flood. It seemed like forever for all the families on the boat. Then one day, the sun came out. The clouds disappeared, and the rain stopped. Noah's huge boat came to rest on dry land. Noah opened the windows. When he saw that it was safe, he opened the door. Everyone went bounding out into the new world, running and jumping and scampering in all directions. They found new homes and started new families. They made new lives for themselves.

Then God told them all, "Don't be afraid that the world will end. Don't worry that this will ever happen again. I'm going to make a promise to all of you, to the whole world and to everyone who lives in it. I will keep you safe."

When God made this promise, God was talking to the whole world. God was talking to elephants and ants. God was talking to spiders and snakes. God was talking to pet dogs and pet cats and pet hamsters. God was talking to everyone in Noah's whole family. God was talking to your whole family. God was talking to you.

God said, "Just to remind you of my promise to keep you safe, I'll make the rainbow. When it rains, don't be afraid. Just look for the rainbow."

Hear: What are the sounds you hear when it rains?

See: What colors do you see in the rainbow?

Act: How can you help God make sure that everyone God promised to protect is safe?



Abram and Sarai Find a New Home

Based on Genesis 12:1–4a; 17:1–16

Sometimes families move. They move from one neighborhood to another. They move from one city to another. They even move from one country to another. When families move into one country from another country, we call them immigrants.

That's what Abram and Sarai were: immigrants. They lived in Haran, where their families had always lived. They knew everyone, and everyone knew them. They lived the lives they had always lived, and they did the work their families had always done. They were comfortable in Haran.

Then God came up with a new plan for them.

One day God said to Abram and Sarai, "I want you to move to a new country. I've got a new home for you there. I've got a new life for you. I've got new work for you to do. I want you to live in your new country and work there. Just by living there and doing good, you will make everyone's lives better."

Abram and Sarai must have been worried about moving. It's hard to leave what you know. But they left right away for their new country, the land of Canaan. Like all immigrants, they must have felt strange there at first. They must have felt alone. They must have worried what would happen to them in this new place.

But when they got to their new country, God met them there. God said to them, "I'm going to give you a family. They'll live in this new country and call it their own. They'll make a home for themselves here. Because you're starting a new family in a new land, I'm giving you new names. Abram, you'll now be called Abraham. Sarai, you'll now be called Sarah."

So Abraham and Sarah started all over in their new country, just like many immigrants do today. They had a new place to live. They had new names. They had a new family. And, before too long, they began to feel at home.

Hear: Have you ever heard people who have moved from another country speaking a different language than you do? Do you know the name of their language?

See: Look for those around you who have moved from another country. Ask them where they moved from and what life was like there.

Act: How can you help others feel at home in their new country?





Rivalries

A rivalry between two teams can be fun. But a rivalry between sisters or brothers usually isn't. One of the things that is good to remember about reading stories in the Bible is that these stories are about things we still experience. Families still have things they don't agree on.

Arguments and fights caused by a rivalry between two persons are found in some Old Testament stories. Sometimes it took years for the ones who argued to get back together. And not all stories have a happy ending. When you read about Jacob and Esau, you'll hear a really wild story about what a brother did so he could inherit the wealth of his family. The story about Joseph and his older brothers is a really long story full of all kinds of twists and turns. You'll hear about dreams, hard times and good times, kings and servants. And then there is a sad story about two women who didn't get along, Sarah and Hagar.

But no matter what caused the rivalry, God was with each person. As you read these stories, remember how you feel when you have an argument with someone. Remember what it takes to make up again. Wonder about the people in the story and how they feel, what they experienced, and how God was present with them.

How the Twins Were Born

Based on Genesis 25:19–28

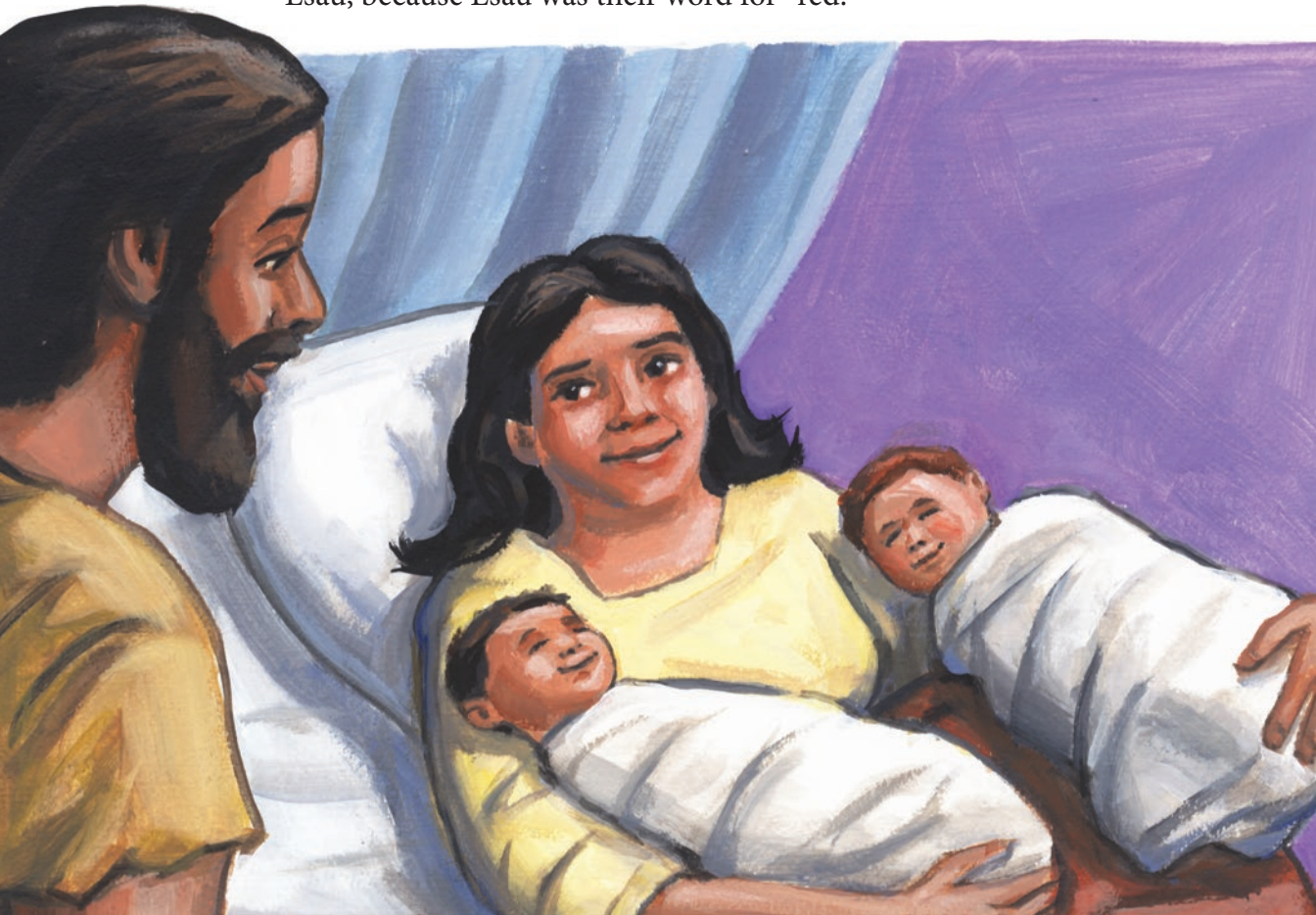
Do you know any twins? Do they look a lot alike or are they quite different? This story is about twins who look very different.

This story starts when Jacob and Esau were zero years old. They weren't even born yet!

Sometimes, before babies are born, they move around inside their mothers. Their mothers can feel them move. Rebekah did.

Rebekah said, "Wow. Things are busy in there. I think I've got two babies, not just one. It feels like they're wrestling with each other inside me right now. I wonder if they'll always wrestle with each other."

Rebekah was right about everything. She was right about the twins and about their wrestling. Esau was born first. He had a lot of red hair, so they called him Esau, because Esau was their word for "red."





Jacob was born second. He stuck out his arm right after Esau was born, like he was still wrestling with Esau. So they called him Jacob, because Jacob was their word for “wrestling.”

Esau and Jacob were a lot alike. They were born at the same time. They played together. They grew up in the same family.

But they were also very different. Esau loved getting outside. He liked the outdoors. He liked hiking. He liked hunting and fishing. He brought fish he caught and animals he hunted home to his father, Isaac. Isaac liked Esau a lot.

Jacob liked staying inside. If they had had books and smart phones, which they didn't, he would've read those all day. He made things at home, and he helped his mother cook. Rebekah liked Jacob a lot.

Just as Rebekah had thought, Esau and Jacob wrestled with each other their whole lives. Just like all brothers and sisters who fight, Esau and Jacob did too.

Once, when they got older, something big happened that made them really, really mad at each other. That's what happens in the next story.

Hear: What do you think Esau and Jacob said to each other when they were growing up?

See: How do you think these twins looked alike? How were they different?

Act: Why do you think brothers and sisters, and friends, sometimes fight with each other?

Esau and Jacob Both Want Their Share

Based on Genesis 27:1–29

What's the maddest you've ever been at your brother or sister or a friend? All sisters and brothers, and even best friends, get mad at each other sometimes. It's not just you. Here's the Bible story of two brothers who got super mad at each other, and what happened when they did.

Esau and Jacob were twins. But when they were born, Esau was born just a little bit before Jacob. In those days, the rules said that the oldest brother got most of his father's money when his father died. When their father, Isaac, was old and blind, he decided to give almost all his money to Esau, just because he was a tiny little bit older. That's what the rules said.

"That's not fair," Jacob said.



His mother, Rebekah, agreed. “That’s not fair,” she said.

So they figured out a plan they thought was more fair, a plan to make sure that Jacob got some of Isaac’s money too. This was their plan: Jacob would pretend to be his brother, Esau.

When his brother, Esau, was out hunting, Jacob dressed up like Esau. He put lamb’s wool on his arms so that he’d feel like his hairy brother. He put on Esau’s clothes so that he would smell like his brother. Then Jacob went to his father, Isaac, who could hardly see anymore. Isaac felt Jacob and smelled him, and he thought Jacob was Esau. So Isaac signed most of his money over to Jacob.

When Esau found out, he was really mad. He said, “Those aren’t the rules!”

Who do you think was right, Esau or Jacob? When brothers and sisters get really mad at each other, they always think it’s the other person’s fault, right? Who do you think was right this time?

Esau was so mad he wanted to kill his brother. Jacob was so scared he ran away from home. They were brothers who grew up together, but now they were far apart. They would not see each other or talk to each other for years and years.



Hear: What do you think Esau and Jacob said to each other when they were both so mad?

See: How do you think Jacob looked when he dressed up like Esau?

Act: What would you do if you were Jacob? What would you do if you were Esau?

When Things Get Really Scary

Based on Genesis 32:22–32

Sometimes, everything gets scary!

After living away from home for many years, Jacob missed his brother, Esau, more and more. Finally, he decided to go home to see Esau again. But Jacob was scared to go home. Esau got wicked mad when Jacob left home with their father Isaac's money. Jacob was afraid his brother would still be mad.

On his way home to see his brother, something even scarier happened. One night, Jacob took his whole family across the last river they had to cross before they got home. Then he sat down in the dark by the river to think.

Nearby in the dark, someone moved. Jacob jumped. Who was it? His brother, Esau? A ghost? A stranger? He couldn't tell in the dark.

Suddenly, a mysterious stranger grabbed Jacob, and Jacob wrestled with him. They wrestled and wrestled into the night. Jacob couldn't see anything. He didn't know what to do.

When he was more afraid than he could ever remember, Jacob heard a voice. He didn't know where it came from. The voice said, "Let go!"

"Help me," Jacob said.

"What's your name?" asked the voice.

"Jacob," he said.

And then the voice surprised Jacob. "I'll give you a new name," the voice said. "Your new name will remind you that God is always with you. No matter what happens. No matter how afraid you get. Even when you can't see and don't know what to do. God will be there. Your name will be Israel."

And then everything disappeared. The voice was silent. The stranger was gone. Jacob sat down by himself in the dark.

When the sun finally rose, Jacob got up and walked away from the river to meet his family. He was limping from wrestling with the stranger, but he had a new name. And his name reminded him that God would be there when everything gets really scary. Even in the dark. Even when he didn't know what to do.

Now he wanted to see his family again more than ever. And he wanted, finally, to meet his brother, Esau. *Now I have the courage*, he thought, *to meet Esau again.*



Hear: What do you think Jacob heard that night?

See: When have you felt scared? Perhaps you couldn't see or you didn't know what to do.

Act: Remember God is with you even when you are scared. What can you do to have courage?

