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# Abraham Offers Isaac

*Scripture: Genesis 22:1-19*

**Theme: God provides the sacrifice**

*Jr High (Ages 12-14)*

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Free curriculum for small and rural churches

## Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: "Jacob's Ladder: God Reaches Down When We Run" Imagine Jacob, all worked up, running from his brother Esau and leaving his family behind, trusting only in his own speed. That's how so many of us feel sometimes: tired, scared, or running away from trouble or guilt. But God wasn't done with Jacob, even then. Like a light in the dark, He showed up in a dream, a ladder stretching all the way to heaven! Jacob didn't get answers right away, but he got this: God wants to reach down to us, even when we're fleeing or feeling lost. His promises aren't just for the brave; they're for the ones who turn around and say, "I messed up, but I'm still here." This week, ask God to help you notice when He's offering to climb down for you, maybe in a quiet moment, a friend's encouragement, or even a detour that leads you to Him. Life Application: How can you be someone who reaches down for others when they're running from trouble? (Or when you're running from God yourself?)

## Bible Story

Title: Jacob's Ladder , God Reaches Down

Jacob was tired. Not just sleepy, exhausted. His brother Esau had hunted him down after their father Isaac sent him away to find a wife and a home. Jacob ran, hiding in the desert like a scared little kid, only this time, he was older, wiser... and still trembling inside. After surviving for months, he finally made it to Haran, a city far away, where his uncle Laban's family lived. There, Jacob worked hard, played hard, and, just like any teenager, he got caught up in a few bad decisions. He even cheated his boss (Genesis 29:22, 30), which made Laban furious. But Jacob wasn't going home yet.

One evening, after a long day of labor, he grew restless. He set up his tent near a hot, windy spot by a stream and fell asleep. While he dreamed, something incredible happened: he saw a stairway reaching all the way to heaven, angels going up and down it! A voice boomed from the top, saying, "I am the God of your father, Abraham, and I am with you.

I'll take care of you." Jacob was so scared he woke up, scrambled to his feet, and vowed, "If God protects me, I'll give him a share of everything!" (Genesis 28:16, 19). It was a wild moment, like a kid at a concert, half-stunned, half-grinning, whispering, "Wait... that was real?"

Jacob's experience taught him two hard truths: God wasn't just watching from far away, and He was ready to step in when we needed Him most. The angels' ladder wasn't just a dream, it was a promise that God could reach down to help. But here's the real question: What does it mean for us today? Maybe you've felt like Jacob, running from trouble, hiding from failure, or just trying to survive another day. God's not waiting for us to be perfect; He's waiting to show up in our mess. The ladder isn't just for the past; it's a reminder that everyone can climb it, if we're willing to look up.

Why This Story Matters Now: Jacob's ladder isn't just an old story, it's a sign that God doesn't ignore our struggles. He does reach down. The next time you feel alone or like you're stuck, ask: Is there a ladder I can climb to heaven right now? Maybe it's a prayer. Maybe it's trusting someone else. Maybe it's just admitting you need help. God's promise is the same today: I'll take care of you.

Life Application Challenge: Think about a time you felt God's hand in your life, even if it was small (like a friend's help, a miracle, or just knowing you weren't alone). Write down one way you can thank Him for reaching down this week. And if you're in a tough spot right now? Start there, ask Him. He might just surprise you with a ladder.

## Key Verse

### Genesis 22:8

Genesis 28:15 , "I'll Be Your Shadow" Imagine Jacob, a young guy who ran away from his family after a fight, tired and scared. That night, as he slept under a starry sky, God didn't leave him alone, He promised to walk with him, protect him, and never let him fall. God wasn't just saying, "Good luck!", He was saying, "I'll never let you get lost or hurt. I'll be right there, cheering you on, even when it feels dark." This isn't just a promise, it's a hug from God that says, "You're never alone, even when life feels overwhelming." Why it matters: Jacob's story was messy, but God didn't walk away. Today, God isn't just saying "Trust me", He's saying "I'll hold your hand." That means when you face tough choices (like Jacob did), when you feel alone, or when you mess up, God is there, watching over you like a parent, friend, or guide. How to use it? When you feel like giving up, remember: God isn't just a distant figure, He's the one who'll catch you if you stumble. And that's worth fighting for.

## Activities

### Activity 1:

1. Set Up the Story (2 min):
2. Ask: "How does Jacob feel in Genesis 28:10, 11? He's alone, scared, and running away. But then he sees this amazing vision, a ladder reaching from earth to heaven! What do you think he thinks about?" Write their thoughts on the board.
3. Explain: God's presence is like that ladder, constant, but sometimes we overlook it.
4. Create the "Ladder" (5 min):
5. Give each small group a large sheet of paper. Say: "Today, we'll build this ladder to show how God reaches down to us, even when we're scared or far from home. Let's make it colorful and detailed!"
6. Let them draw 10, 15 steps with stairs, angels (tiny figures or text), and a star at the top for heaven. Add crayons for texture (e.g., rope, angels' wings).
7. Encourage: "Think about a time God 'climbed' down for you, maybe when you were lost, afraid, or needed help. Draw it here!"
8. Discuss & Apply (5, 10 min):
9. Ask: "Why does God's ladder look different from Jacob's? Jacob was running from Esau; God's ladder invites us to trust Him no matter where we are."

10. Share real-life examples:
11. A teen who stayed overnight with a foster family after a tough day.
12. A friend who felt invisible until someone showed up for them.
13. End with: "How can we be 'angels' today, reaching down for someone else? Draw or write a way you'll show God's love this week!"
14. Life Application Tie-In:
15. This activity reinforces that God's presence isn't just a fantasy, it's tangible. By creating a ladder, students see how faith and trust look practical (e.g., showing up for someone, believing in God's promises). The craft becomes a reminder: "No matter how far you fall, God's grace reaches higher than your imagination."

## Activity 2:

1. Explore the Promise (3 min):
2. Ask: "When Jacob wakes up, what does he do? He makes a vow to God, 'If you're real, I'll return to you.' How does that make you feel? Scared? Grateful? Trusting?"
3. Share: Jacob wasn't just praying; he was committing to God's presence forever. Challenge: "What would you say to God if He promised to reach down for you?"
4. Decorate the Jar (5 min):
5. Give each pair a jar and say: "Today, we're making a 'God's Promise Jar', like Jacob's vow, we'll fill it with promises from God's Word that say He's there, even when we can't see Him. Decorate it with a theme, like 'Trust' or 'God's Presence.'"
6. Let them glue printed verses (e.g., "The Lord is my shepherd... He leads me beside still waters" from Psalm 23:1, 2) or write their own in the jar. Use markers to add stars, angels, or a ladder design.
7. Reflect & Share (5, 10 min):
8. Pair up and share: "What's one promise you put in your jar? How does it remind you of Jacob's ladder?"
9. Discuss: "When have you felt God 'reaching down' for you? How was it like a promise fulfilled?"
10. Challenge: "This week, when you're doubting God's presence, open your jar and read one promise aloud. What does it say about His faithfulness?"
11. Life Application Tie-In:
12. This activity connects Jacob's action (a vow) to God's actions (keeping promises). For teens, it's relatable:
13. For anxious students: A jar of promises acts as a "mental safety net" during stress.
14. For skeptics: Writing promises down makes abstract faith tangible.
15. For those who feel invisible: The jar becomes a tool to remind them God sees them (like Jacob's ladder always had angels).
16. Bonus Twist:
17. End by handing out small jars to share with a friend or family member. Say: "Jacob gave God a promise; now pass along a promise from your jar. Let someone else trust God's presence today!"
18. Why These Work for Junior High:
19. Hands-on: Crafts and group work keep energy high.
20. Real questions: Encourages honest talk about fear, doubt, and trust.
21. Low cost: Uses paper, markers, and Bibles, no budget stress.
22. Life connections: Links Sunday school to their lives (friendship, anxiety, faith commitments).

## Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions inspired by Jacob's Ladder, where Jacob, in his exhaustion and longing, climbs a ladder that stretches from earth to heaven, only to meet God face-to-face. These questions

encourage curiosity, empathy, and personal reflection while tying the biblical story to real-life struggles and faith.

- 1. The Longing for Something More

- Imagine Jacob had just arrived at Bethel (the "House of God") after a sleepless night chasing a blessing. He was tired, confused, and desperate. What do you think he was really longing for beyond the physical safety of his family? Did he want security, purpose, connection, or something else? Why might his feelings have been so raw? How can you relate to his emotions, what are you longing for in your own life right now? Do you think God heard that longing in a way Jacob couldn't see?

- (Life Application: Helps students explore their own desires, like Jacob's, and ask: Does God meet longings in ways that feel surprising or hidden?)

- 2. The Ladder as a Bridge (or a Dream)

- The Bible says Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. Some people see this as a symbol of prayer lines, divine communication, or even a bridge between the earthly and heavenly realms. Others might wonder: Why did God show Jacob this dream? Was it a warning? A promise? A way to tell him he wasn't alone? What might you think this ladder symbolizes to you? Could it represent how God sometimes "connects" us to bigger truths we don't yet understand? How do you think dreams or visions can help us feel closer to God, or sometimes confused?

- (Life Application: Encourages students to think creatively about spiritual symbols and how they apply to their own experiences.)

- 3. God's Promise in the Midst of Chaos

- After his dream, Jacob vowed, "If God will indeed be with me, and will keep me in the way I go and give me food to eat and clothes to wear, and if I return in peace to my father's house, then the Lord shall be my God." He didn't ask for wealth or power, he asked for protection, provision, and a safe return. Jacob was also hiding from his brother Esau, who was still angry. How might God's promise in this moment have been different if Jacob had felt safe instead of fleeing? What would Jacob really need to feel God's presence in his life right now? Do you think God's promises are always given in the same way we ask them? Why or why not?

- (Life Application: Challenges students to reflect on how God's promises are often given in unexpected ways, especially in hard circumstances.)

- 4. What Would You Do If You Met God?

- In the story, Jacob didn't just see God, he met Him in that moment. He wrestled with Him, and though God broke the shoulder joint in his hip (a physical sign of His mercy), Jacob was blessed. If you had the chance to meet God face-to-face, like Jacob did, what do you think you'd ask Him? Would you ask for healing, courage, forgiveness, or something else? What would you be most afraid to admit to Him? How might that conversation change your life? (Think: What's a "big" question or worry you've kept to yourself that you'd want to share with God?)

- (Life Application: Helps students confront their fears and encourage honest prayer, making faith more personal.)

- Why These Work:

- Engaging: The questions tie Jacob's emotions to relatable experiences (longing, fear, faith).

- Honest: They avoid oversimplifying the story, allowing students to debate or wonder.

- Life Application: Each question ties to a real-life challenge, whether it's trusting God in hard times, interpreting symbols, or praying boldly.

- Would you like any of these tweaked to fit a specific group dynamic or curriculum focus?

## Prayer Focus

*Prayer Focus: "When God's Hand Reaches Down, Don't Miss It!" [Teacher begins by pausing for reflection, maybe even sharing a quick story about a time God "climbed" into their lives in unexpected ways.] "Lord, Jacob ran from*

*his brother Esau like he'd done everything wrong, but in that night, he built a simple ladder between earth and heaven, and you walked through His open hand. You don't just give answers, you reach. You don't leave us to our own devices, but call us up when we're down. Help us 12, 14-year-olds to keep our eyes on that ladder when life feels like a steep climb. Teach us to trust You when You don't come with a signpost or a clear roadmap, just to believe You're there, even when we can't see Your hand. And when we mess up? Remind us that Your ladder isn't just for the perfect, it's for the ones who stumble, who fall down and have to get back up. Amen." [Pause to let the kids reflect: What's a time God "reached" for them when they were scared or lost?]*

### >> Missions Spotlight

Among the Bedouin peoples of the Middle East, who are descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, the story of Jacob resonates deeply. Missionaries working in the Arabian Peninsula use the patriarch stories as a natural entry point for Gospel conversations.

### -> To the Cross

Jacob saw a ladder connecting heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending. Jesus said, 'You will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man' (John 1:51). Jesus Himself is the ladder, the connection between God and us.