

**Dreaming in Church**  
**Genesis 28:10-19; Romans 12:1-2; 9-21**  
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Sleeping in church...sometimes you just can't help it! There was one man who sat on the front pew right in front of the pulpit and slept every week. As the scripture was being read, you could watch the man start to get comfortable for his 20-30 minute nap. He would not only doze but take deep breathes and even snore once in a while. Some say he even dreamed since he jerked several times during his 20 minute siesta – letting out a word like “No!” Well the preacher had enough of his dreaming in church. He decided he would embarrass the man into staying awake. After the man fell asleep, the preacher whispered to everyone, “those of you who want to go to heaven stand up.” Everyone, expect the sleeping man, stood up. After they sat down, standing in the pulpit said, “Everyone who wants to go to hell – and then he yelled into the microphone, “Stand up!” The man stood straight up, not knowing what was going on. He looked around and saw that he was the only one standing. Then he said, “Well pastor, I don't know why I am standing but it looks like we both are in it together!”

This morning we are going to talk about dreaming in church. Most people have heard of Jacob's ladder the phrase describing Jacob falling asleep and dreaming of God. It is important to know that Jacob is now 40 years old. He has not only successfully traded his brother, Esau, for his birthright but recently has stolen his brother's blessing with his mother's help. . The blessing is the powerful, prophetic words of his father blessing his future. After Jacob steals this blessing, Esau plans to kill him. Rebekah talks Isaac into sending Jacob to her home town to find a wife but really to escape his brother's wrath.

Jacob escapes as a fugitive. He is all alone. No one goes with him. Ironic isn't it? Jacob has all the blessings and birthright privileges but is all alone. Jacob falls asleep and dreams. He dreams of a ladder (stairway, ramp) that connects earth with heaven. There are angels ascending and descending from earth to heaven. The Lord stood beside him and talked with him. God confirms the promise he made to his grandfather and father, Abraham and Isaac. Essentially God promises to be with Jacob, keep him safe wherever he goes, bring him back to this land and give it to him and his family and make his family so large one cannot count them.

Jacob wakes up from his dream and realized he has seen God. He names the place the house of God and worships God.

This story is about worship. God comes into Jacob's life and he responds to God's grace and love.

I want to suggest five benefits of worship that come from this story of Jacob's dream. Worship is one of the most important aspects of our lives.

A few months ago our church took the US Congregational Survey. In that survey we were asked about our worship experience.

83% of you said you received inspiration through our worship service

77% - joy

73% God's presence

**Presence** – Worship is where we find God. When Jacob had his dream, God stood beside him. God identifies himself as the God of his fathers. The ladder connects earth with heaven. It connects Jacob with heaven. This is where Jacob finds God. Jacob names the place Bethel – meaning the house of God. He says this was the gate of heaven. The entrance to heaven to find God.

The same is true with our meeting God in worship.

**God's Promises confirmed** – Worship is where God confirms his promises to us. God confirms to Jacob that the promises he made with Abraham and Isaac are now being made with him. God connects Jacob with history and the future. Jacob is God's chose to move God's blessings into the future and to communicate those blessings to the people. God promises Jacob land, huge family and blessings beyond his comprehension.

**Our Promises made** – Worship is the place where we make promises to God. Worship is the main way we response to God. It is defined as giving worth and value to God. From what we can tell this is the first time Jacob connects with God. Throughout his whole story we never see Jacobs's faith in God. It is not until now. He commits himself to God – The Lord will be his God. He will be devoted to God. He decides to follow the footsteps of his dad and grandpa. He basically says as God blesses me, I will give back to God 10% of everything I am given. Remember Jacob has nothing right now. He is all alone in life with just the few things he is carrying on his fugitive-journey. However if God does make him rich with family, finances and land, he will give a portion of it back to God.

The smallest Indian reservation in North America belongs to the Mattaponi tribe in eastern Virginia. The reservation consists of only 125 acres. The Mattaponi signed a treaty with the Virginians in 1646. The treaty provided for an annual visit by the tribe to the governor of Virginia to renew their pledge of loyalty. They have kept that practice to this very day. Every year the Mattaponi appears before the governor of Virginia. They bring him gifts of fish and fowl as prescribed by the treaty– and they declare their loyalty. We do something like that when we come to church. We bring our gifts, and we declare our loyalty to the Christ who governs our lives.

**Community Affirmation** – Worship brings us into the community of faith. Notice how God calls this lonely, isolated man back into community. I am God of your father, Abraham and the God of Isaac. He brings Jacob back into the

community. God talks about family and offspring that will be like the dust of the earth and extend to all parts of the world.

**Renews and recreates us** – Worship reshapes us and reorients our lives. Jacob will never live apart from God again. God provides what Jacob needs. He needs to be connected to his family and community. He needs to have his value confirmed by God. He needs God to come near him and stand beside him. His life will never be the same because of God's provisions. He begins a new life with God as his Lord. God calls him to live differently than he has in the past. God actually gives him another name – instead of heel grabber, it is Israel (means something like reliable or successful)

This is exactly what God has done for you and me in Jesus Christ. Jesus is our ladder to heaven. He connects us with God bringing God's presence to us. God confirms biblical promises making them personal to our lives. We also make commitments to Christ about how we will live and serve him. We are renewed as the Lord provides all our needs and affirmed by the community faith.

Catherine the Great once built a Russian Orthodox Church in Nice, in the south of France, so she could worship in the manner to which she was accustomed while visiting there. It occurred to her, as she was planning the project that the church had to be on Russian soil in order for it to be a true place of worship. So, the Empress arranged to have a barge load or so of Russian soil transported to Nice, so the church could be built upon it.

It is neither the dirt on which a church is constructed, nor the solidity of its walls that allows us to say "surely the Lord is in this place." That is the work of the Holy Spirit alone.

The Romans passage broadens the meaning of worship beyond the walls and doors of our sanctuary! Worship is about how we live our lives in response to God's love in Jesus Christ. Present your bodies living sacrifices. This is your spiritual worship. The word that describes worship also means service. It describes a man or woman who experiences God's wonderful love in Jesus Christ. He or she is forgiven, accepted and freed to live life differently and responsively. He serves God with his life. She is motivated in all of life to love God with her actions. When she does this she is worshipping God.

Several years ago I was dealing with a lot of grief, sadness, a loss of direction and depression (just to name a few!). I had a reoccurring dream. I was standing at a gate. It looked like a farm. Beyond the gate and fence was a muddy pen like you would find in a pig pen. Beyond the pig pen was a barn. It was overcast and very dark and gloomy. Most of the dreams I just stood at the gate, looking at the barn. I knew I was supposed to walk through the mud and into the barn. However, I just stood at the gate. There was a sense of fear of the unknown. Finally in one dream I gained the courage to walk through the

muddy pig pen and into the barn, not knowing what was waiting for me. Once I entered the barn everything suddenly turned light – a bright light. That was it and I never had the dream again.

This dream is about my life – my transition and transformation through divorce and finding life again. This process deepened my life relationship with Jesus Christ. I believe worship is the central way we live out our relationship with Jesus Christ through all the ups and downs of life.

Stepping out in faith believing God will walk with us through the mud and unknowns will deepen our worship of God = our life responses to God. Worship is more than what happens in between these walls. It is how we live our lives.