

## The Spiritual Memoir Worship Series

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Four complete worship services exploring spiritual memoir stories in the Bible, while reflecting on the Holy found in our ordinary stories.



Each worship service in the series is designed to stand on its own. They may be used in a series or at four different times. They are appropriate for summer worship or at other ordinary times.

The Spiritual Memoir Worship Series follows similar themes as the Prayer Bench Small Group Study, *StoryTellers*. It would work well to run the study and the series at the same time, with the study following worship. But they are not so tied to one another that it is also possible to host the small group study and develop it further through the worship series. You might also introduce the theme of Spiritual Memoir in worship and follow up by offering the Small Group Study.

Both the Worship Series and the Small Group Study are designed for lay or clergy leadership.

### The Spiritual Memoir Worship Series

The first Worship Service is free. You can purchase the complete Spiritual Memoir Worship Series at the Prayer Bench Shop for \$15. The package contains a WORD version of the four services. You download, print and use.



### The StoryTellers Small Group Study

Learn more about this Small Group Study in the [Prayer Bench Shop](#). Each of the four sessions include suggestions for a gathering, opening, check-in, easily downloadable audio recording presenting the theme, suggestions for storytelling using prompts such as old photos, family recipes, quilts, letters or diaries and other precious possessions, and a closing blessing. This Small Group Study is included in Leader and Congregation Subscriber packages or available for \$29 in the Prayer Bench Shop.

Visit the [Spiritual Memoir webpage](#) to listen to Spiritual Memoir audio recordings and read stories on the blog.

## Worship #1 Honouring the Sacred in Our Lives Surely God is in This

### INVITATION TO GATHER

ONE: In the beginning there is a Story  
TWO: **told around campfires in the desert**  
ONE: shared around tables when bread was broken.  
TWO: **written on pieces of soft leather**  
ONE: then in pages bound together in a book.  
TWO: (*Holding a Bible.*) These are our sacred stories.

*Open and place Bible near the campfire.*

ONE: Our spiritual journey is made of stories.  
TWO: **a flickering of the Divine here**  
ONE: a spark of hope there  
TWO: **a flame of insight**  
ONE: a kindling of faith.  
TWO: **These are our spiritual memoirs.**

*Light a candle and place by the Bible.*

ONE: Here in this place,  
TWO: **gathered around this light,**  
ONE: we are honouring the sacred in our lives.  
TWO: **Story is the fire in our midst.**

### SONG

“Storymaking God” by Jan Berry

In the stories that surprise us,  
when we find the words to tell,  
in the meaning that delights us,  
with their liberating spell;  
in the dawn of hope awaking,  
in the wisdom that we find,  
God-with-us in storymaking,  
speak the words that free our mind.

### PRAYER

Here in this place, honest in community, and hearts open to truth, we pause to reflect on the week that has been. Let us hold in gratitude the people ... the times ... the experiences...that sustained us and turned us toward all that is good and true and beautiful. (*silence*) Let us also speak of those times when we were less than proud of ourselves, or when we fell short of our own hopes for wholeness, or when we turned aside from good that we could have done. (*silence*) Let us know that we

### PREPARATION

This is a basic outline. Adapt as you need for your setting or tradition.

You may wish to have a campfire in the centre of your worship space. You may be able to borrow one that Scouts, or Girl Guides use or create one with wood and streamers. It is a focus for the Gathering and the theme conversation.

You will need three pillar or taper candles for the prayers, and a taper, birthday candle or tea light for each one to light and take home.

You may also want to prepare take home cards with prompts for spiritual memoir reflection and sharing. See A Time of Storytelling below.

### INVITATION TO GATHER

May be used with two voices or lead responsively by Leader and All.

### THE SONG: Storymaking God

This song is suggested for use in the four Worship Services prepared for this series. This is the first verse. It is sung to the familiar tune: Abbot's Leigh. (VU #260, God Who Gives to Life its Goodness)

You can buy a PDF download from the Iona Community for a very reasonable price. It includes several other prayers/resources. See - <https://www.ionabooks.com/daily-life-pl10148.html>

It is also found in *Bare Feet and Buttercups* by Ruth Burgess. p.233

## SPIRITUAL MEMOIR WORSHIP SERVICE #1

can bring truth to this moment and rise again. We face into a new week, renewed, restored and blessed. Thanks be. Amen.

### THEME CONVERSATION

*If few or no children, the worship leader might stand by the campfire for this time of breaking open of the theme. With children, sit around the campfire and have a conversation about camping experiences. You might want to share a story of a time around a campfire that was meaningful for you, and then gather stories from others.*

Whenever I see a campfire I think of the story of how the bible began. I imagine it like this. It is night. The sky is full of stars. The people journeyed together through the day. At night, everyone is sitting in a circle around the campfire. Their hearts are ready for a story. Perhaps one of the children says, "Tell us about the time Jacob slept on a stone for his pillow." As the ancient story is told, the people around the campfire see themselves. This happens whenever stories are told. That's how the Bible came to be. The Bible is a collection of all the stories told around campfires. These stories from long ago help us remember our stories too. Let's listen to the story about the time Jacob slept on a stone for a pillow.

**READING:** A part of Jacob's Spiritual Memoir  
Genesis 28:10-19

### REFLECTION

In this story, we hear of Jacob's dream. It happens in the ordinary place Jacob finds himself at the end of a long and troubled day. He had tricked his father, and cheated his brother, and he was on the run. In this place of no particular significance, Jacob takes a stone for a pillow, lays down to sleep, and dreams of a mystical ladder that connects him with the Presence of the Holy.

This place of no particular significance is now a thin place where the Holy is close. God is here. Now. God is not far off but right in the midst of all that is Jacob's life.

Jacob wakes. Stretches. So real was the Night Presence that he confirms in the daylight what he saw in his dream: "Surely God is in this place, and I didn't know it."

Jacob's spiritual memoir invites us to wonder about the moments in our lives when we awaken to the Presence of God in the midst of the ordinary. Spiritual memoir begins when we ask, what do I make of this experience? Where is God in this?

**Surely God is in this ...** This is the story of our spiritual memoir.

(1) **Surely!** God is in this.

### THEME CONVERSATION

The theme conversation breaks open the scripture for the service. We recommend using it with all ages, whether children are present or not.

## SPIRITUAL MEMOIR WORSHIP SERVICE #1

Sometimes our spiritual memoir is a shout of praise. Hey God! Think about the places where you felt close to God or most whole within yourself.

For some, it is their garden and in the connection of hands and dirt. And in this place, we shout: **Surely!** God is in this!

For some it is the beach and the rhythm of the tides that brings healing and peace. And in this place, we shout: **Surely!** God is in this!

For some, it is time with family or friends or being with children who are completely in the joy of the moment. And we shout: **Surely!** God is in this!

**Surely!** God is in this! It is a shout, a song of praise, a cry of gratitude. Sometimes our spiritual memoir is spun out of a thin place which, with time, becomes deeply meaningful.

(2) Surely God is in **this?**

Sometimes our spiritual memoir is a murmur. Oh God, why? Perhaps we look back on times of our life, when like Jacob, we've known struggles, made mistakes and just ran away from it all, one way or another.

In the midst of these times we might wonder where God is. Our overwhelmed feelings, our shame, the blur of the passing days, the pain of a life-shock leaves us without a clear sense of Presence. We might hope: Surely God is in **this?** - Yet we wonder. In a quiet moment we might silently scream: Surely God is in **this?** - But we don't know.

Surely God is in **this?** It is a murmur, a plea for hope, a fervent prayer. Sometimes our spiritual memoir is born in an empty space, and only by looking back can we, like Jacob, wake up one morning to a sense that something has changed, and we are not alone.

(3) Surely God **is** in this!

Sometimes our spiritual memoir forms around an insight. Wow! I mean, really? We look back on ordinary events and we see how utterly foundational they are in shaping the values of our life, influencing our path and direction and showing us the Presence of the Holy with us all along.

Jacob's dream was only a dream, until Jacob reflected and woke to its significance. That ladder was only a ladder, but it turned mystical when Jacob realized at daylight that he was Jacob, a climber, and in spite of being a bit of a heel, God had come to meet him where he was.

## SPIRITUAL MEMOIR WORSHIP SERVICE #1

It happens for us too. We are prompted to look back. It might be a significant dream, or an ordinary almost-but-not-quite forgotten moment. We reflect on it and see a new significance.

Surely God **is** in this! It is a wow, an alleluia, an awesome connection. Sometimes our spiritual memoir is an exclamation point. And we see it only when we reflect on our ordinary stories and wonder how they influenced us or recall memories and ask what we learned.

Surely God **is** in this. Our reflection on our ordinary lives is our spiritual memoir and it honours the sacred in all our days.

### A TIME OF STORYTELLING

*Draw attention to the questions on cards or printed in the service bulletin. Invite worshippers to contemplate each of these questions silently.*

**Surely!** God is in this.

(1) Recall a place when you felt close to God or most whole within yourself?

Surely God is in **this?**

(2) Recall a challenging time in your life. As you look back is there a gift you didn't see at the time?

Surely God **is** in this!

(3) Recall a significant dream or insight. What role does it play in your journey with God?

*Read the three questions aloud with 30 seconds to a minute silence in between.*

Questions like this prompt the kind of storytelling that give rise to spiritual memoir. I wonder which of these questions might nudge you today into some storytelling?

You might want to share your spiritual memoir with children or grandchildren.

### KINDLING OUR PRAYERS

*Prepare three tapers to light; congregation will each have a tea light/taper*

*Sung Response: Usually, this song is sung always beginning and ending with the refrain. However, with this sung response, the refrain and a verse are sung each time, ending with the verse so that the prayer can be spoken into the "unfinished silence"... Then the song will be picked up again with the refrain after lighting the candle & holding a time of prayer.*

*Sung Response: A Light is Gleaming, Voice United #82 (Refrain & v.4)*

Honouring the Sacred in Our Lives Worship #1

### A TIME OF STORYTELLING

*Prepare small cards (postcard size on cardstock or print as insert to service bulletin) with the following, so worshippers can take them home.*

**Surely!** God is in this.

Recall a place when you felt close to God or most whole within yourself?

Surely God is in **this?**

Recall a challenging time in your life. As you look back is there a gift you didn't see at the time?

Surely God **is** in this!

Recall a significant dream or insight. What role does it play in your journey with God?

## SPIRITUAL MEMOIR WORSHIP SERVICE #1

Prayers of Gratitude

We light this candle giving thanks for those times when we can sing:

**"Surely! God is in this..."**

*(Candle is lit and we pause for spoken gratitude or silent prayer offerings.)*

*Sung Response: A Light is Gleaming, Voice United #82 (refrain & v.1)*

Prayers for Others & Our World

There are moments that cause us to question, "Surely, God is in **this?**"

We light this candle for the people or places needing assurance that God is present...

*(Candle is lit and we pause for spoken intercessions or silent prayer.)*

*Sung Response: A Light is Gleaming, Voice United #82 (refrain & v.2)*

Prayers for Our Journey

Surely, God **is** in this! We light this candle with our prayer that we may live in the way of Jesus - serving in love, practicing peace and justice, bringing light to others.

*Light candle and then **SPEAK** the words of verse 3.*

*Sung Response A Light is Gleaming, Voice United #82 (refrain only)*

### OFFERING

*Offering Song*

Spirit open my heart  
To the joy and pain of living  
As you love may I love  
In receiving and in giving  
Spirit, open my heart

Write your love upon my heart  
as my law, my goal, my story.  
In each thought, word, and deed,  
may my living bring you glory.

### SONG:

As a Fire is Meant for Burning, *Voices United #578*

*The small candles are passed around for each to take one. The candles are lit while singing the song.*

### OFFERING

We suggest using the second verse and refrain of "Spirit, Open My Heart" as the Offering song for the series. It is found at #79 in More Voices.

Alternatively, "We Give You But Your Own" #542 Voices United.

### ALTERNATE SONGS

In the Quiet Curve of Evening, *Voices United #278*  
Where Two or Three are Gathered,  
*More Voices #14*  
Creator God You Gave Us Life,  
*More Voices #27*

## A BLESSING FOR HONOURING THE SACRED IN OUR LIVES

Here's a light. Take it with you.  
Let it be sacred fire for you in the week ahead.

**We go to live our stories.**

**in shouts of gratitude,  
in longing for hope,  
through murmurs and tears,  
in wonder and with delight,**

Surely God is in this!

**God is in our stories.**

**This light reminds us,**

Of the Sacred  
in our days and in our nights.

Blessed be you.

**And blessed be you.**

**AMEN.**



This worship service is the first in a series of four that explores spiritual memoir stories in the Bible and invites us to listen to our lives and reflect on the meaning of our ordinary stories, discovering the Holy in our lives.

The worship series is part of the Spiritual Memoir Project hosted on the [Prayer Bench website](#). The project is a partnership between [Visions United Church](#) in Moncton, New Brunswick and the Prayer Bench.

The Spiritual Memoir worship series has been developed and written by Shawn Redden, minister with Visions United Church and Janice MacLean, Host of the Prayer Bench.

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