

Text of a message delivered by Caleb Finlayson for Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 28th December 2025.
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What's Your Dream?

Genesis 28:10-19

Welcome back to not only our final sermon in the “Those Who Dream” series, but also the final sermon of 2025. It seems like just yesterday that we were at the start of this year. But as the saying goes, “the days are long but the years are short!” This has felt particularly true in our family this year, how about you?

I hope for most of you Christmas has been a joyous occasion, even if it is just a reminder to you of the love of a saviour who sees you, knows you and loves you. It is in this brief window, between the start of summer and the end of our holidays here in New Zealand, that we get the chance to reflect.

This practice is pivotal. I often think about it as, if we end one year well, we can start the next even better. This sermon is not about “how to create better New Year’s resolutions.” No, today as we finish our dream series, a whakatauki – a Maori proverb that comes to mind is: “*Ka mua ka muri*”. Meaning, looking back into the past to inform our future. As you look forward to 2026 and all of the unknown that it may bring, would we first stop to look back, to gain understanding of how God might be leading us forward.

A passage that illustrates this well for us is in Genesis 28:10-19. An account of Jacob, having a dream, where God reminds him of past promises, that he would leave that place only to return one day.

Let us read the word of the Lord together:

10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. 11 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12 He had a dream in which

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he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

18 Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. 19 He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Back to the Beginning

This is by no means the beginning of Jacob's journey. Jacob is on the move, he has been sent away from his home, fearing that his brother would kill him for his actions. And in the midst of a chaotic, fear filled, frustrating and uncertain time, Jacob has this powerful interaction with God. A dream.

This dream is not the beginning of a new journey either. This is actually a reminder of a dream that has taken many years to get to where it is now. A few weeks ago, we heard from Joseph, who talked about a promise and a dream taking 22 years to come to pass. Here it has taken roughly 160 years to get from Abraham and God's original dream and promise, to get to a reminder with Jacob, not even the fulfillment of the dream. God really does work on us in the waiting. It really does take longer than we imagine.

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When I reflect on this part of the passage alone, I am reminded that we too are not at the beginning of our journey. Although it may feel like the beginning we have all had many things impact our life and our character. Circumstances that develop and form us into who we are.

Timeline

I did an exercise recently where I was instructed to write down the significant moments that led to me coming to faith. I then was to add to that, what were the significant moments that led to me becoming who I am today. I was a fascinating exercise. As I began to write, I found myself naturally going to the pillar moments:

- First response to Jesus (age 6)
- Baptism (age 15)
- Internship at church and Study at Carey (Age 18).

But then I would find myself jumping back and forth the more I thought about the significant moments:

- my bike accident (age 6)
- Married (age 21)
- Children (age 25)
- Asking what do I do and who am I (age 17)
- Moving to WPBC (age 28)

The list goes on. It was fascinating to see my life on a timeline. Big moments, small moments, things that don't immediately come to mind yet may have deeply formed me in the way in which I live today.

If you haven't done this before I encourage you to take time over summer to do a timeline of your life, faith journey and the things that impact your character and have formed you into who you are now.

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The place we stand today, is not our beginning. We are the sum of decisions and situations that have led to now.

Jacob is adding to the timeline in today's passage.

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18 Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.

Jacob recognises the significance of the dream, the reminder of the promise, a reminder of where he has come from a reminder of his own timeline to date. What does he do?

He takes a stone and sets up a pillar.

Why is that significant? This is Jacob adding to the timeline. Setting up a pillar, an altar or a stone, was the Israelites way of remembering a key moment in time, a sacred site, a covenant or a public testimony of the faithfulness of God.

Moses – when he meets with the Lord on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:4)

Joshua – after crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 4:1-9)

Samuel – Celebrating victory over the Philistines (1 Sam 7:12)

There are so many moments like this that occur in scripture. In the culture of the day they never wanted to forget what God had done.

In our human nature, just like the Israelites did time and time again, we forget. We forget how God has bought us through, how He has shaped us, He has bought blessing and He has formed us in the challenges.

What are the pillars in your life that you need to remember? The moments where God showed up. Maybe the unexpected challenge that you never wished for but God used to build your character.

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One for me was a meeting with parent of my old youth ministry. I remember being terrified of this person because of what they would say, or do, or how they would treat me. One day, they walked in with a A4 lined sheet of paper, line after line, double-sided as to all of the things they thought I had done wrong, was doing wrong as an 18-year-old. But now I reflect on that as a significant pillar that was for me in my ministry. Did I enjoy it? No. Did I want to go through it? No. However that season molded me, it shaped many different aspects of my ministry and was key for my growth. So parent from my early days of ministry, thank you.

Answer the Right Question

There were many pillars and promises that helped Jacob to know where he had come from and where he was heading. It allowed him to stay in line with God's plan.

I encourage all of our young people and leaders with the question "Who do you want to become?" Not "what do you want to do with your life?" Who do you want to become is a statement of identity, instead of a statement of vocation.

It can be a hard questions to answer. One that no doubt develops over time, as you are renewed and transformed by the Spirit of God. It is ongoing. One way that we can inform the answer is by looking back at the pillars of your life and seeing where God is and has been at work. What might He be saying to you in that? How might he leading you to respond to those moments and into 2026?

Modern Day Pillars

How can we begin to live this out in 2026?

Another form of pillars that we observe in scripture is the Old Testament Jewish festivals (e.g. in Leviticus 23) and in the New Testament and the Early Church Calendar. These were significant moments that they would put into their schedule and regular

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practice in order to remember what God had done, but also to set their feet on solid ground going forward.

Today we might call these spiritual disciplines. Including things like Sabbath, Passover, Lent and one that we have just gone through, Advent.

These were ways in which the people of God would create and craft rhythms, putting pillars in their lives to keep them on the straight and narrow, to continually align themselves with God.

As I said earlier, if you finish one year well, you can start the next even better. My team and I spent time reflecting on this year gone, what went well, where are the opportunities, where was God at work? And then we took time to put in the pillars for next year. Our camps, our leaders trainings, our team silent retreats. We know that we need to be planned for us to be on the front foot.

So I ask you the same questions as you reflect on 2025. What went well, what were the opportunities and where did you see God at work?

Take time to look even further back, where are the moments that God has been at work in my whole life? What are those pillar moments and how have they shaped me.

Then look forward 5 years, 10 years, asking who do I want to become?

Rachel and I did this exercise this year. This year gone we were married 10 years. So we decided to reflect and look forward another 10 years asking who do we want to become. This process keeps us on the same page and gives us direction.

So look forward asking “who do you want to become?” Once you have answered that, you can set the pillars in your life that you want to guide you on that journey going forward.

For me, who do I want to become?

I want to become the best man, husband and father I can be. I want to be known as somebody of integrity, faithful in all I do, who puts their family first. I want to leave a legacy that generations of my family to come can look back on and point to Rachel and I

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as the ones who, by the grace and Spirit of God, turned our family around and set us on the best possible path.

So I ask you one last time: in 2026, who do you want to become?

Lets' pray.

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Reflecting on Sunday 21st December 2025: Last week Grant explored how God spoke to the Magi through The Dream That Saved Christmas. How have you felt God speaking to you this Christmas?

These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

1. Jacob's response was "Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it."

Looking at your timeline, how has God been at work in your life, how has He shaped and formed you through all of these events?

2. Who do you want to become/who is God calling you to become in the next 5 years?

Craft a simple statement.

3. What "Pillars" (regular spiritual disciplines/rhythms) do you want to set up in your life going into 2026 that will help you to live that statement out?

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. **Create a Timeline of your own life.** List on your timeline the significant moments of your faith development? What are other significant life moments you can include?
2. **Rule of Life Builder.** As you think about the type of person you want to become in 2026 you may find this tool from Practicing the Way helpful. This interactive tool is designed to help craft a set of habits and rhythms patterned after Jesus – a Rule of Life tailored to you and your community.
<https://www.practicingtheway.org/ruleoflifebuilder>