



**SPIRITUAL TRAINING**  
*in family life*



**HARDSHIP & STRUGGLE**

# PRESENTATION OF THE BODY & SOUL ITINERARY

On the occasion of this Olympic year, the Jesuits invite you to explore the spiritual dimension of playing sports and the relationship with the body, through the strains that are experienced in sports activities as well as in the spiritual life (strength & fragility, competition & team spirit...).

The "Body & Soul" itinerary offers spiritual training as a family experience. In each booklet, you will find a guided prayer, a time of sharing, a presentation by a Jesuit to explore the theme in greater depth, and testimonies from athletes. Each family is invited to come together for a time of listening, sharing, and praying.



1. GAMES & DISCIPLINE
2. BODY & SOUL
3. STRENGTH & FRAGILITY
4. HARDSHIP & STRUGGLE
5. DEFEAT & VICTORY
6. COMPETITION & TEAM SPIRIT

Here we are at the fourth stage, "Hardship and Struggle", ready to share this family time!

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# FAMILY MEDITATION



## MEDITATION BY ÉCOLE DE PROVENCE

École de Provence is a Catholic school under Jesuit guidance. Its aim is to bring out the best in everyone. It consists of an elementary school, a middle school and a high school. Theater, oratory, workshops, the arts, sports and culture are at the heart of its project: to enable students to look at others with respect, to gain confidence, and to develop their critical and reflective faculties. The school respects each individual's faith. It also encourages a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. To this end, the Pastoral Ministry offers liturgical and sacramental courses and encourages an open-minded education. The school, at the heart of the international Jesuit network, has forged numerous partnerships. Openness is a priority, so that students can play an active role in this globalized world. The ultimate goal is for all students to become "men and women for others", citizens of the world aware of the major issues of tomorrow.

## LET'S BUILD MOMENTUM

*Here we are, at the heart of the race, at the heart of the game: we've already come a long way, there's no turning back. The finish line still seems a long way off: everything still awaits us! Maybe you feel a side stitch or a cramp. You can't help it but if it happens, it's because you have put a lot of effort into it. There's still some distance to go, so how do you find a second breath? It's time for a battle!*

*Are there any aspects of our lives that slow us down? What are our challenges? Our hardships? Our wounds? Let's run following in the footsteps of the patriarch Jacob, who fought hand to hand through the night with a dislocated hip. Let's run without forgetting our goal: God's blessing!*

## OPENING PRAYER

### Putting ourselves in the presence of God

We settle in together, in silence. We pay attention to our body position. Each of us can close our eyes and sense for a moment how we feel physically.

We mark ourselves with the sign of the cross: **In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### Asking for grace

We ask God to learn to make room for him in our lives, and for the grace of strength in the challenges we face in order to overcome our fears and anxieties.



## MEDITATE WITH THE BIBLE

### Introduction to the reading

The text we are about to read introduces Jacob, one of the two sons of Isaac, son of Abraham. Jacob struggles with a mysterious adversary on the night before his reunion with his brother Esau. As a young man, Jacob had stolen the blessing promised to his elder brother. He then had to flee his parents' house in fear that his angry brother would kill him.

It's nighttime. Jacob is now alone, on a road by the stream of Yabboq. The next day, he is about to meet Esau, his enemy brother, which terrifies him: will Esau seek revenge? Will he have to fight his older brother? In this trying moment, an unexpected battle unfolds. Jacob wrestles with "someone" who turns out to be God himself. Strange... God loves Jacob and Jacob loves God. So why are they fighting? Let's pay attention to what Jacob asks, and see how this mysterious fight ends in the middle of the night.

### From the book of Genesis (Gn 32, 23-30)

*The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone.*

*And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."*

## A few ideas for reflection

- > **The encounter with God.** Jacob is terrified by his reunion with Esau. *A mysterious struggle begins during the night, against whom or with whom? Meeting God in truth is a powerful experience, forcing us to confront ourselves in a way that never leaves us unscathed. Am I ready for such an encounter?*
- > **God's blessing.** Jacob, wounded on the hip, recognizes the power of his adversary and guesses his identity. So he holds on and asks for a blessing. *Am I capable of such audacity?*

## Personal meditation

Let's read the passage from the Bible again, and let the Word resonate within us. I let myself be approached by God, who wants to reach me, by being attentive to what's happening in my heart.

## INTERCESSION

Touched by Jacob's valour, his courage renewed by God's blessing, we pray for those who are afraid, lost or suffering, in the torment of war or the darkness of hospitals. We also entrust our challenges and vulnerabilities to your grace, Lord. Convert our weaknesses into a source of blessing.

## OUR FATHER

To conclude this time of prayer, in the words of Jesus, we say together *Our Father, who art in heaven...*

## CONCLUSION

Lord, you who are good and all-powerful, remove from us everything that holds us back, so that without any restraint of mind or body, we may be free to do your will. **We mark ourselves with the sign of the cross. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen**

# MOVING FORWARD WITH A JESUIT

“I will not let you go  
unless you bless me” (Gn 32,27)



## PRESENTATION

My name is Brook Stacey. I'm the youngest of two boys and I grew up in Toronto, Canada. After studying geology, which was marked by an encounter with a Catholic missionary movement, spiritual guidance from a Jesuit, and walking the Way of Saint James, I joined the Society of Jesus in 2013. There I developed a passion for teaching, athletic training, and helping people living in exile. Currently, I'm studying counseling and psychotherapy in Toronto while officiating as a deacon. At 33, I'm preparing for my ordination to the priesthood in June 2024.

## IN SHORT!

In Paris, I taught boxing to refugees (at JRS, Jesuit Refugee Service). Despite the participants' worries, we created a safe environment. I've always drawn parallels between martial arts and discernment. Life, like combat sports, demands perseverance, courage, and a willingness to address conflict head-on, in order to find joy in the journey itself. I offer here a reflection on the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel, exploring the perspectives it offers for our own spiritual journey.

In the grand scheme of human experience, the story of Jacob's struggle with the divine figure in the book of Genesis is a profound metaphor for the trials we face in our own lives. It is not just a historical event, but a timeless tale that resonates with the very essence of our spiritual and personal struggles.

As we delve deeper into this story, we discover the significance of the transformation of Jacob's name into Israel, meaning "he who wrestles with the divine". This is not just a historical detail, but a revelation about the essence of the people of Israel and, by extension, of Abraham's descendants. We too are part of this great story of struggle with the divine.

The struggle, as illustrated by Jacob, becomes a sacred act, a reflection of our life and spiritual struggle. It's not just a physical battle, but a symbolic representation of the struggle with life's ultimate questions. How do we navigate the storms of life? How do we respond to our own suffering and that of others? It's these profound questions that make spiritual struggle a path to holiness, a virtue that expresses our perseverance and refusal to give up.

At the very heart of this struggle, we find in Jacob a relentless perseverance, a refusal to give up until he has been blessed. This tenacity, this reluctance to give up the fight, becomes the mark of those who want to follow God. This same principle is embodied in our families, where we sometimes have to persist and struggle to obtain the blessings we seek. Jacob, who emerges wounded from the fight, teaches us that in our own lives, there may be times when we emerge wounded from our battles, carrying those scars with us. Yet these scars become a testament to our resilience, a reminder that we have faced challenges and refused to be defeated. In time, as these wounds heal, we become wounded healers, people able to reach into the depths of others' suffering and offer comfort because we, too, have experienced the wound.

The story of Jacob's struggle thus takes on a profound resonance. It is no longer just a story from ancient times, but a living allegory of our own spiritual and family journey. Difficulties within our families are no



longer isolated incidents, but can become opportunities for growth, understanding and deepening bonds. Scars can become symbols of victory, testimonies to our faithfulness and perseverance, unwilling to be broken.

In our family, we can now see hardship as an opportunity for transformation, a collaborative effort where each member contributes in his or her own way to the collective strength, and a journey where the path is as crucial as the destination. Enriched by these reflections, let us watch this tapestry woven with threads of resilience, courage and determination take shape. May God enable us to move forward together, sharing the bodily and spiritual struggles of everything that makes up each of our lives.

*May our families be places of love, mutual understanding and support, where every trial can become a springboard to a stronger, more connected and rich spiritual life.*



## A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE



### INTRODUCING THE WITNESS

Sarah is 43 years old and the mother of 3 children aged 16, 12 and 7. She lives in the La Plaine neighbourhood of Saint-Denis (93). She works in professional automobile insurance, and has started a career change to become a sports and nutrition coach. She practices strength training and fitness.

### TESTIMONY

“ Sarah, you went through a painful personal ordeal with your divorce. How did you manage to get through it?

*I was married, had my first two children and everything was fine. But for my third child, the pregnancy was very complicated and our relationship went downhill too. Once I'd given birth, we ended up parting ways and getting divorced. That's when my world fell apart. I said: "But it's not possible, what's this desert? Why is it so hard? How do other people manage? Why can't I cope?" I think I've never prayed so much in my life, and I've never done so much sport in my life. **Sport and faith are about endurance: you can't give up, and when you fall down, you have to get back up, every time.** You've got to keep your breath, you can't give everything at once, but you've got to expect a lot. You can't be afraid to be ambitious in your sporting and spiritual life. Linking the two is a strength for me, because I know that while I will see visible results in sport, **in faith I live it within myself and it gives me courage** and the urge to keep going every time. You say a prayer, you ask for something and you end up receiving it, you say to yourself: "But listen, I've got what I wished for, I'm going to ask again, to keep on praying, because I still wish for more." And every day you ask, you receive. In fact, you say to yourself, "I'm never going to stop praying: every time I pray, I receive, why am I going to stop? I'll keep going." When you cross the desert, sooner or later you find water. That's how I got through it.*

## ANOTHER SMALL STEP



### FAMILY TIME TOGETHER

If we can, let's take the time to do a physical activity together as a family: go for a run, ride a bike, play soccer...

When we get home, we can have a snack together and reflect on these questions:

- > *How did I feel before the sports session? How do I feel now?*
- > *Do I feel like I've gained something during this time? What?*
- > *Were there any difficult parts? Did I overcome them? How did I do it?*

### AND NOW ...

The fourth stage is now behind us... Little by little, we're entering the home stretch. Let's not give up!

Each one of us experiences struggles and difficulties in our own lives. Let's not run away from them, let's take them seriously, but not lock ourselves into them either, and believe that God can see us through. Perhaps we'll even come out of them with his blessing...

Let's move on to the fifth and decisive step, where the game is played:  
**Defeat and Victory!**



This itinerary is put together by the **Family Ministry of the French speaking Jesuit Province of Western Europe (EOF)** in partnership with Prie en Chemin, **4 Jesuit schools** (Saint-Louis de Gonzague, Sainte-Marie La Grand'Grange, Provence, Saint-Marc), a **Christian Brothers school** (La Salle-Saint Denis), the church of **Saint-Paul de la Plaine** and the **diocese of Saint-Denis**.

*The Family Ministry, EOF Province brings together many initiatives offered by Jesuits for families: summer vacation sessions, weekends and online retreats, simple and creative proposals "to be experienced at home" ... All in a joyful spirit united in Christ!*



### Contact information

[familles@jesuites.com](mailto:familles@jesuites.com)

[jesuites.com/familles](https://jesuites.com/familles)

42 rue de Grenelle - 75007 Paris

