

Tune In to God's Presence

1

2 KINGS 6:8-17; LUKE 1:26-38



GOAL

Youth practice slowing down and listening for God's presence and guidance.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Holy God, may I seek you with my eyes, my ears, and my heart, discerning your guidance and following your will. Amen.

THIS SESSION

In Scripture, we find varieties of ways of listening to God. Often in our prayers, we share with God our needs and concerns, but we do not always allow space for God's response. The reason is obvious: God does not always speak to us in ways that are simple to hear or understand. Listening for God is especially difficult when we are afraid because fear activates our adrenaline system. We are stirred to move and act. Listening usually requires stillness and calm. Youth practice naming their fears, listening to each other, and listening for God's response.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Luke 1:26-38, Mary gets a surprising visit by the angel Gabriel who tells Mary not to be afraid. Gabriel informs her that she will have a child. She questions how this is possible. The angel responds, telling her that anything is possible with God. Mary learns of a surprise pregnancy for her cousin Elizabeth who is supposedly too old to bear a child. In 2 Kings 6:8-17, the Israelites anticipate an attack by the Arameans who have considerably more fighters. One of the attendants shares his fear with Elisha who prays that God will open the eyes of the attendant. When the attendant tunes in to God, he sees the many chariots and horses on the Israelite side that he did not see previously. Listening and looking for God allows those who are afraid to find confidence that God is at work in their world and their lives.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Youth are used to being active and moving quickly. Listening requires slowing down and being open to the ways God may speak to us. Discerning and following where the Holy Spirit leads requires patience, vulnerability, and acceptance. This is one of those spiritual practices that requires practice! Be patient and gracious with youth as they experiment with listening to God's word. Throughout this practice, encourage youth to intentionally take time to *tune in to God's presence* in their lives.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Graffiti Sheets" (p. 6): Write questions on poster board and display.
- Depending on the options you choose:
 - "Human Puppets" (p. 7): Obtain angel and Mary costumes (optional).
 - "Angel Army" (p. 7): Obtain one blindfold and action figure for every two youth.
 - "Local Saints" (p. 8): Invite leaders from your church to visit and talk with youth. Prepare a sheet of newsprint with the four questions from p. 8.
 - "Listening Jar" (p. 9): Obtain one jar per person.

GETTING STARTED

- Poster board
- Markers

 Write these questions on poster board and display them.

- If you could hear God, what would God say to you?
- If we could hear God, what would God say to our church?
- If we could hear God, what would God say to our community?

GRAFFITI SHEETS

C AM

Give each youth a marker and encourage them to write answers on the posters. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Gather participants and discuss ways that they intentionally listen for God.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

I WILL NOT FEAR

QC

For the opening litany, as you read the following lines, invite youth to respond “How can this be?” and “I will not fear.”

Like Mary, God calls you to do good things.

How can this be?

God calls you by name and you are God’s own.

I will not fear.

Amen.

- Paper and pens

FINDING THE STATION

M AT

Form pairs. Distribute paper and pens. Ask each pair to identify a social media music station that they like and write it on the paper. If they cannot agree on one station or if they do not listen often, they may make up a station that they would both enjoy. Have youth list favorite songs, podcasts, and interviews that the station plays.

On the back of the paper, challenge youth to design a station that God might produce and title it. Choose songs, interviews, and podcasts for the station. The programming should be relevant and interesting for a wide audience.

Invite youth to share the name and programming for their *God* station. Affirm their contributions and creativity. Discuss the amount of time they spend listening to their preferred stations each day and how long they spend listening for God each day. Explain that we will explore how we tune in to God’s presence.

- Timer

 **Teaching Tip:** If your group is large, form an inner circle and an outer circle. When the timer goes off, the outer circle rotates to the right.

CIRCLE TALK

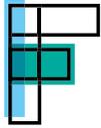
C

Pair youth and have them sit facing each other so there are two rows of facing chairs. Explain that you will pose a question, and they will have one minute to discuss the answer with their partner. This is not a game but an opportunity to listen to each other. When the timer goes off, each person moves one space to the right. If there is no chair, the person moves to an empty chair at the end of the row. Select from these questions:

-  Who do you listen to the most in your life?
-  When you talk with someone, how do you know they are listening?
-  When you know that someone is really listening to you, how does it feel?
-  Do you ever listen for God to talk to you? Why or why not?

- ➔ When have you felt like God was talking directly to you?
- ➔ What scares you?
- ➔ When you feel afraid, how do you cope?

Invite each person to share one interesting thing they discovered. Explain that we will talk about fears and about how it feels to listen to God.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

HUMAN PUPPETS

D C

Invite volunteers for the roles of Mary and Gabriel and have them put on costumes (optional). Explain that, in their roles, they are puppets. Puppet masters will listen to the story and be responsible for moving their puppets' arms, hands, legs, feet, and head to enact it. Have Mary and Gabriel select volunteers for their puppet masters.

Read Luke 1:26–38, pausing to allow the puppet masters to move Mary and Gabriel with the Bible story. Use these questions for discussion:

- ➔ How do you think Mary felt when she saw the angel?
- ➔ What did the angel say to Mary to help Mary feel better?
- ➔ Mary questioned the angel in this passage. When do you ask God questions?
- ➔ When you feel afraid, what can be said to help you to feel better?
- ➔ How could you listen for God when you feel afraid?

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- Bible
 - Angel and Mary costumes (optional)

ANGEL ARMY

CT G

Form pairs. Once pairs form, the group splits so that one person from each pair is in a smaller group. One small group receives blindfolds and moves to one side of the room. Have them turn their backs to the room and put on their blindfolds. To the other small group, give each person one action figure, which they will hide in the room. After all figures are hidden, tell the blindfolded group to turn around toward the center of the room.

The blindfolded group listens for their partner, who will direct them verbally to find an action figure. Those giving instructions should stay on the side of the room, out of the way. They should take care to direct their partners to find the action figure without getting hurt. When an action figure is found, the finder removes their blindfold, locates their partner, and the two sit down. Continue until each pair locates an action figure. If time permits, repeat the exercise with partners trading places.

Discuss whether it was easier to be the hider or the finder. Why? Read 2 Kings 6:8–17. Invite explanations about the seeking and finding displayed in the passage. Explain that some people believe the chariots and horses that the attendant saw were angels. Invite discussion of this. Then ask:

- ➔ When you are afraid, what difference could it make to know that there are angels all around you?
- ➔ How can you be aware of the angels that are God's army present for you?

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- Bibles
 - Action figures, one for every two people
 - Blindfolds



Teaching Tip: If your group has fewer than four youth, have each person start off blindfolded. Adult leaders give verbal instructions.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

- Prepared newsprint



Invite two or three leaders from your congregation to join your group for conversation. Give them questions in advance. Write the questions on newsprint to display.

LOCAL SAINTS



Welcome visitors and explain that they have been invited to talk about how and when they listen to God. Have youth ask the visitors the questions displayed on newsprint:

- ➔ How do you listen for God?
- ➔ When do you usually hear God?
- ➔ How do you know that you are hearing God and following God?
- ➔ When was a time that you were afraid but you knew God was with you?

Invite youth to ask other questions about listening to God. Encourage them to tell their stories too.

- Internet-connected devices

THE SCIENCE OF MEDITATION



Show the YouTube video “Mindfulness Meditation: How It Works and Why It’s So Popular” (bit.ly/FMMindfulness, 6:56). Invite discussion about initial impressions of the video. Encourage youth to share experiences they have had with meditation.

If youth have smartphones, encourage them to download one of the apps mentioned in the video ([Headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com) or [Calm.com](https://www.calm.com)). Have them click through options on the apps. Discuss whether these seem like apps they could try and what benefits they could imagine for themselves if they begin meditating. Invite them to identify connections they see between prayer and meditation. In what ways could meditating help when they are afraid?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Colored pencils



Teaching Tip: It may be helpful to have the passage read in three different voices. For youth who are too active to sit quietly, invite them to read the passage one of the three times.

LECTIO DIVINA



Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and colored pencils. Explain that an ancient Bible reading practice, called *lectio divina*, means “divine reading.” A person encounters a Scripture passage at least three times and listens attentively for what the passage shows them.

Invite youth to select a favorite colored pencil. They listen while Scripture is read. When they hear a word or phrase that they like, underline it. Read aloud Psalm 139:1–18 for the first time.

After a time of silence, invite youth to choose a different colored pencil, selecting a color that they do not like. As Scripture is read, underline words or phrases that they do not like. Read the passage a second time.

Following a brief silence, have youth illustrate images from the Scripture that they find interesting. Slowly read the Scripture a third time. Encourage youth to either continue to draw images or answer this question using words or pictures:

- ➔ What might God be telling you through this psalm?

Invite youth to discuss their experience of listening to Scripture.

LISTENING JAR

CT QC

Give each youth a jar, four index cards, and a pen. On each card, they write or draw a response to these prompts. Explain that what they have written or drawn will be prayer prompts.

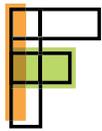
- A question you have for God
- Something that makes you feel anxious or afraid
- A person or situation that is weighing on your heart
- Something that you want to pray for

Invite them to decide if they will pray about what is on their index card or if another person will pray for them. To reflect on a card they wrote, fold it and put it in their own jar. If they prefer that someone else pray for what is on the card, fold the card and put it in the basket at the center of the room.

After placing the cards that they will keep into their jars, count the cards they will place in the basket before placing them. When all basket cards are collected, youth take out as many index cards as they put in. Place their new cards into their jars. Do not look at them.

Invite them to take their jars home and draw out one index card per day for prayer. They may set aside five minutes a day to read a card and spend a few minutes of silence to listen to God. If they feel that they receive insights from God during their time of silence and prayer, they may write these on the card.

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- Jars, one per person
 - Index cards, four per person
 - Pens
 - Basket



FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING PRAYER

QC

Distribute markers. Have youth move around the room and look at the poster boards they wrote on when they arrived (see p. 6). Draw a star next to any statements that they feel are especially important for them, their church, or their community to hear. Collect markers and invite youth to pray with you.

Say this or a similar prayer:

Holy God, help us to slow down and to hear you when you speak to us. Help us to listen with our eyes, our ears, and our hearts. Help us to hear when you say to us . . . (*insert statements from the posters that have the most stars*). Amen.

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- Markers
 - Poster boards from “Graffiti Sheets” (p. 6)

Psalm 139:1–18

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

○ LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
○ LORD, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and night wraps itself around me,”
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, ○ God!

How vast is the sum of them!

I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.