

1

Listen for God

ISAIAH 9:6–7; 35:1–2a, 5–6, 10; 40:3–5;
JOHN 1:1–5



GOAL

Children practice listening for and discerning God’s words by using the words of hope from the prophet Isaiah and John.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Holy God, sometimes I too am afraid. Help me to hear your word and to follow your will. Amen.

THIS SESSION

When we are afraid, we often don’t pay attention or listen well. Listening for God, especially in times when we feel afraid, may require learning to listen differently and acknowledging that God speaks to people in a variety of ways. We may feel or hear God ourselves, and we may find that God speaks to us through Scripture or prophets, pastors, and other messengers who care for us and seek to serve God.

THE BIBLE STORY

Three messages from the prophet Isaiah of the Hebrew Scriptures (Isaiah 9:6–7; 35:1–2a, 5–6, 10; 40:3–5) and one from a Gospel writer (John 1:1–5) are often used during the church season of Advent. Each of these messages is a promise of hope from God to God’s people. In the case of Isaiah, when these messages were first heard, God’s people were suffering. They were afraid of what would become of them. Later John’s message of hope was at a time after Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection, to remind the new believers—who were, and would be, persecuted for their faith—that God was bigger than their fears. These passages remind us each time they are heard, and particularly during Advent, that there is good news to be heard.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children are often well-practiced with asking for help when they are feeling afraid. They are accustomed to asking trusted adults to help in most cases. They want their parents or caregivers to walk them to a new place and to stay nearby when they are trying new things. Although they are learning independence, they still need to know how to find adults who will help. Listening for God and relying on God’s presence when afraid may be a new practice, but one that will be a foundation for a life of faith.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Nature Views and Guided Prayer” (p. 11): Determine a location for a nature walk if location and weather permit. If weather or location do not permit being outdoors, find a place where the children can look outside through doorways or windows. Recruit adult helpers, as needed.
- “Pretzels” (p. 12): Go to bit.ly/FMPretzels, obtain ingredients, and familiarize yourself with the recipe and its timing. Recruit a helper to assist in the kitchen with preheating oven, baking, and cleanup. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.



GETTING STARTED

SIMON SAYS



Greet the children as they arrive. Engage them in conversation about their week, wondering who or what they listened to during the week. When everyone has arrived, invite them to a game of Simon Says with you. Use the following directions for the game, if necessary:

- I will give you instructions to follow.
- If I say “Simon says” before the instruction, then you are to follow that instruction.
- If I don’t say “Simon says,” you shouldn’t follow that instruction.
- If you get it wrong, then you need to sit out for three instructions. Then you can join in again.

Play the game, inviting volunteers to lead the game as well. After several rounds, have the children sit down—by saying “Simon says sit down,” of course! Ask the children what they needed to do to play the game well and not get an instruction wrong. Suggest, if necessary, that it is important to listen carefully. Tell the children that listening to God and God’s messages can help us out in our lives. Explain that today they will be exploring what God says when we may be afraid.

I WILL NOT FEAR

For the opening litany, invite the children to respond with the following lines—“How can this be?” and “I will not fear”—as shown below after each of your lines as you lead the litany. The children will use these two lines in each session of this unit.

When God’s people were afraid, God had a message for them.

How can this be?

God is always with you like a light in the dark.

I will not fear.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

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- Newsprint, marker
 - Colored construction paper
 - Glue sticks
 - Markers

LISTENING FOR GOD



Tell the children that they are going to think about how they listen to God with their heart. Make two columns on a sheet of newsprint and write the children’s suggestions in the appropriate columns, titled: “When it’s helpful to hear God” and “Ways we can listen to God.” Wonder together what might be different times that might be helpful to hear God and what might be different ways that we can listen to God. If the children need some prompting, some ideas for when it’s helpful to hear God might be when they are afraid or worried, needing help, and making a decision. This might lead to specific examples that you can include as well. Some ideas for ways we can listen to God might be through Scripture, prayer, trusted friends and adults, and worship.

Invite each child to choose a piece of construction paper and make a large heart shape by tearing the paper. Explain that tearing the paper means that the hearts don't have to be perfect. They can have wonky edges and lopsided sides and still be a heart. Then have the children tear several smaller pieces from one or more colors of construction paper that will fit inside the heart they made. Suggest that they tear from the same papers instead of starting on new sheets unless a color they want hasn't been used yet.

Have the children choose as many of the suggestions from the newsprint, or ideas of their own; write each one on a separate piece of construction paper they have torn; and glue it inside of their heart. Assure them that it is all right if the smaller pieces overlap a bit or stick out over the edges of their heart shape. Encourage the children to take their hearts home and display them in a place that they will see them daily so they can remember to listen to God with their heart.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

WORDS OF GOOD NEWS



Tell the children that they are going to hear four passages from the Bible, three from the prophet (or messenger of God) Isaiah and one from John, one of the Gospels written about Jesus after he had died, he had been resurrected, and new believers were forming worshiping communities. Explain that all four of these Scripture passages were shared with God's people when they were sad and afraid. Comment that there may be words or ideas that the children might not understand. Encourage them to ask questions after each passage is read. Tell the children that two of the passages use *imagery*—words to paint a picture—about darkness and light. Explain that darkness is often used in the Bible to suggest times of being sad or afraid, and God's light provides comfort and new possibilities.

Invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud each of the Bible passages cut apart from Resource Pages 1 and 2. Ask if anyone has any questions or wonders what a word or idea means after each passage is read. After all four passages are read aloud, ask the children what all of the passages have in common. If necessary, suggest that they all share good news of a time when God's people will be happy. Explain that these passages are often read at the season of Advent, the time in the church year when we are looking forward to and preparing for the birth of Jesus. Wonder together why these Bible passages might be read at this time of year.

Form small groups (no more than four) or work together as one group. Give each group one of the Scripture passages, or have the whole group choose one passage. Invite the children to create a short skit of a situation where a person or group of people are sad, afraid, or having a difficult time; they are told the good news that God has to share through their Bible passage; how they might respond to that news. Enjoy each group's skit and invite the children to applaud after each skit.

Bible passages cut apart from
Resource Pages 1 and 2



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

- Internet-connected device

JOAN OF ARC

T C

Tell the children that they are going to watch a video about a French girl who listened to God and was brave when facing fearful and difficult circumstances. Show the YouTube video “Joan of Arc for Kids—Bedtime History” (bit.ly/FMJoanOfArc, 4:42). After watching the clip, engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✿ What did God tell Joan to do?
- ✿ Why do you think Joan listened to God?
- ✿ How do you think she knew it was God talking to her?
- ✿ Do you think Joan was afraid? Why or why not?
- ✿ Do you think God talks to you? If so, in what ways?
- ✿ What might God be saying to you?

- Bible or Isaiah 35 card cut apart from Resource Page 2 from “Words of Good News” (p. 9)

- Paper
- Colored pencils

LECTIO DIVINA

A QC

Tell the children that there is an ancient practice, called *lectio divina*, that is still used by many people today to focus on a Bible passage, as they seek to understand God’s message for them in that passage at that moment. Explain that the words *lectio divina* mean “divine reading” and that they are going to try a modified version of it. Explain that you will read one of the Scripture passages that they heard today.

Use the following directions to guide the children through the modified *lectio divina*:

- Invite the children to close their eyes and listen as you read aloud Isaiah 35:1–2a, 5–6, 10 from a Bible or the Bible passage card cut apart from Resource Page 2 from “Words of Good News” (p. 9).
- When you have finished reading, ask them to notice if a particular word or a phrase jumped out at them or held their attention while you were reading. Don’t have the children share their words or phrases yet, but tell them to roll that word or phrase around in their mind, to see it as words or pictures.
- Read aloud the passage again. If you have another leader or helper available, have them read it aloud.
- Ask the children to raise their hands, without speaking, if the word or phrase that stuck out for them was the same. Have them raise hands if it changed. Tell them that either way—the same or changed—is all right. Suggest that, if it changed, they should focus on the new word or phrase.
- Provide paper and colored pencils. Invite the children to write and illustrate their word or phrase and/or draw pictures of it as you read aloud the passage one last time.
- Have a few minutes of silence as children write or draw. Then invite them to look at their papers and consider this word or phrase that jumped out at them and stuck with them, or changed and was a new word or phrase. Ask the children to wonder silently why they think this word or phrase might be important to them right now in their lives. Pose several questions such as:

- ✦ Does this word or phrase make you happy or sad?
- ✦ How might it comfort you?
- ✦ Is there a recent time that it would have been helpful to know or hear this?
- ✦ What do you think God is saying to you at this particular time with these words?

Invite anyone who would like to share their word or phrase and how they think it is helpful to them to do so. Thank the children for being open to God’s Spirit speaking to them. Tell the children that they can use this practice with their family or even by themselves.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

NATURE VIEWS AND GUIDED PRAYER



Adult helpers, as needed


Tell the children that they are going to spend some time with nature to explore how God is seen, heard, and felt through God’s creation. If location and weather permit, take the children outdoors. If location and/or weather do not make this possible, gather the children in front of an open doorway or window where they can see outdoors. Encourage the children, in whatever place they are, to observe quietly how God may be speaking to them through nature, particularly in what ways they feel God’s presence or comfort.

After a period of time, return to your space. Invite the children to share what they observed. Wonder together how seeing, hearing, and feeling God in nature might be a way of helping them when they are afraid, worried, and experiencing difficulties.

Have the children spread out in your space so they have some personal space. Invite them to stand, sit, or lie down so that they are most comfortable. Tell them that you will lead them in a guided time of prayer. Invite the children to follow your instructions as you lead the following prayer:

- Dear God, we begin with our breath. As we breathe in (*inhale slowly and exhale slowly*) and breathe out, we thank you for the breath you have given us (*inhale slowly and exhale slowly*) that keeps us alive and that calms us when we are afraid (*inhale slowly and exhale slowly*).
- With our eyes closed, we remember a piece of your creation we have seen or heard. We see it in our mind’s eye or we hear it in our mind’s ear. We imagine you creating this item with care, for you love your creation.
- Now we see ourselves, created with loving care by God (*wrap your arms around yourself or cross your arms over your chest*). We are known. Our joys and our concerns are known by God. Our happy times and our difficult times are known by God.
- God says to us, “I am with you. When you see or hear that item I created, in fact any part of my creation, know that I am here with you. I am in your mind’s eye and your mind’s ear. I am your arms wrapped around you. I love you.”
- Thank you, God. We all say, “Thank you, God.” (**Thank you, God.**) Amen.

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- Adult helper
 - Kitchen access and oven
 - Ingredients and recipe from [bit.ly /FMPretzels](https://bit.ly/FMPretzels)
 - Mixing bowls, cups, and spoons
 - Stand mixer
 - Baking sheets
 - Parchment paper
 - Permanent markers
 - Paper plates

 Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

PRETZELS

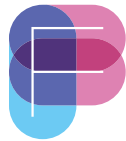
F T X

Take the children to the kitchen and tell them that they are going to make pretzels as a reminder prayer, a way of telling God our fears and difficulties and a way of listening to God's comfort and presence. Have the children wash their hands and then take turns adding and mixing ingredients and making their pretzel shapes.

While the pretzel preparations are happening, share the legend of the history of the pretzel, explaining that, while no one knows for sure who made the first pretzels, many tell the story of a monk in northern Italy, southern France, or southern Germany who made little twisted dough treats for the children after they learned their prayers. Comment that this was over 1400 years ago, in the early 600s. Explain that the twisted arms of the pretzel look like arms crossed over one's chest, which was a common prayer position used at that time.

After preparing the pretzels and placing them on baking sheets covered in parchment paper with the children's names by their pretzels, return to your space. Have your adult helper assist with baking, cleanup, removing the pretzels from the oven, and delivering them to your space.

Invite the children to eat their warm pretzels. Encourage them to remember the story of the pretzel and when they see their twisted shape to know that they can pray to God, to share their fears and concerns, to listen for God's words of comfort, and feel God's presence.



FOLLOWING JESUS

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- Internet-connected device
 - Scarves or fabric pieces (optional)

DON'T BE AFRAID

M T

Show the YouTube video "Don't Be Afraid" (bit.ly/FMDontBeAfraid, 3:13), inviting the children to sing along as they become familiar with the words and tune. The three simple lines of the song are repeated a number of times.

This song is sung in the closing of each session of this unit. As the children become more familiar with the words and tune, try some variations such as: sing it a cappella, add motions, dance with scarves or fabric pieces, or use www.signingsavvy.com to look up American Sign Language signs for key words.

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 (CEB)

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.
.....

⁶A child is born to us, a son is given to us,
and authority will be on his shoulders.

He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷There will be vast authority and endless peace
for David's throne and for his kingdom,
establishing and sustaining it
with justice and righteousness
now and forever.

Isaiah 40:3-5 (CEB)

³A voice is crying out:

“Clear the LORD's way in the desert!

Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!
⁴Every valley will be raised up,
and every mountain and hill will be flattened.

Uneven ground will become level,
and rough terrain a valley plain.

⁵The LORD's glory will appear,
and all humanity will see it together;
the LORD's mouth has commanded it.”



Isaiah 35:1-2a, 5-6, 10 (CEB)

¹The desert and the dry land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus.

²They will burst into bloom,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

.....

⁵Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
and the ears of the deaf will be cleared.

⁶Then the lame will leap like the deer,
and the tongue of the speechless will sing.
Waters will spring up in the desert,
and streams in the wilderness.

.....

¹⁰The LORD's ransomed ones will return and enter Zion
with singing,
with everlasting joy upon their heads.
Happiness and joy will overwhelm them;
grief and groaning will flee away.

John 1:1-5 (CEB)

¹In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

²The Word was with God in the beginning.

³Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being

⁴through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

