

Tune In to God's Presence

1 KINGS 19; LUKE 1:26–38

GOAL

Adults identify the human reality of fear while discovering ways to tune in to God's presence.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

May your presence be my guide, O God, as I seek to name my fears and not turn away. Amen.

THIS SESSION

It is human nature to fear. Our bodies are internally wired for and attuned to threats, dangers, and risks. Fear may surprise us when we encounter instability or loss of direction, or when difficult memories are triggered. Some willingly step into fear-filled situations, lining up for thrill rides or bungee jumping off high bridges. The adrenaline rush that accompanies these activities entices the adventurous spirit.

Fear is a self-protective response; it can also be self-limiting if we let it keep us from entertaining new ideas, trying new experiences, or broadening our perspective. Our challenge is knowing when to heed the warning signs of fear and when to press past fear to embrace growth opportunities.

The biblical answer is to tune in with the heart. Listen to God's guidance. Listen for God's presence. We listen for the still small voice that calls us in the cacophony of fear; tune in to what's around us and notice our physical senses, our breathing, our sense of safety, our understanding of the situation, and God's assurance and strength.

THE BIBLE STORY

Elijah fled in fear after his life was threatened. After a day's journey, he sat down and asked God to let him die. His emotions got the best of him. An angel fed him and he rested, after which he found strength to continue traveling. After forty days, Elijah met God on a mountain and confessed his loneliness and fear. God told him to stand on the mountain and watch for God to pass by. Elijah complied, looking for God in the wind, in an earthquake, and in fire. Finally, Elijah discerned God's presence in sheer silence. It was the last place Elijah thought to look for God.

The angel Gabriel visits Mary in Luke 1:26–38. The angel's message overflows with details that would raise fear in most of us: you will conceive; you will bear a son; he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Yet Mary tunes in to Gabriel's message: The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid. She is perplexed. She ponders. She poses questions. Hers is a response of curiosity rather than fear as she leans into the presence and promise of God.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Viewing the Infographic Poster" (p. 5): Obtain the *Do Not Fear* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 3 Set).
- "Community of Taizé" (p. 6): Search YouTube for other Taizé songs that you find meaningful and consider playing them as participants gather.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and allow time for gathering activities (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the summary of the practice found in the Unit Overview on page 4 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay, which begins on page 45 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the essay during the course of the next four sessions.

OPENING LITANY

For the opening litany, as you read the following lines, invite participants 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.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEOS

Show the “*Do Not Fear Overview*” video and the “*Do Not Fear Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you introduce the practice.

VIEWING THE INFOGRAPHIC POSTER

Display the *Do Not Fear* infographic poster if you have it and allow adults to spend a few minutes making comments on it. If you have viewed it previously, provide some orienting comments yourself.

NOT BEING AFRAID

Direct participants to the Cole Arthur Riley quotation on pages 4–5 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have a volunteer read aloud the paragraph as others follow along. Invite participants to discuss their impressions and reflections on the quotation. Continue discussion with these questions:

- ➔ What could we learn from *manufactured* fear—such as on a roller coaster or water slide—that might help us deal with *real* fear?
- ➔ What does it mean for followers of Jesus to practice not being afraid?

TUNING IN

Direct participants to “Tune In to God’s Presence” on page 6 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the first paragraph. Use the reflection questions on page 7 for group discussion.

Following discussion, explain that the *Adult Reflection Guide* is designed to serve as a devotional and study guide for you to use throughout the week. You may use the journal prompt on page 7 this week to think about how you tune in to God.

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

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- Internet-connected device

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- Do Not Fear* infographic poster (optional)

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

Bibles

A SNACK AND A NAP

Refer participants to “A Snack and a Nap” on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the first paragraph next to the Scripture quotation. Invite volunteers to read 1 Kings 19:1–10 in parts: narrator, Jezebel, Elijah, angel, and God. Reflect on the verses using these questions:

- ➔ What clues in the text indicate Elijah’s fear?
- ➔ How did a snack and a nap equip Elijah to face God?
- ➔ In what ways can taking care of your body be a way of tuning in to God’s presence?

Read aloud 1 Kings 19:11–12 printed on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Compare how Elijah expected to meet God with the way Elijah finally heard God. Continue discussion with these questions:

- ➔ What allowed Elijah to tune in to God’s presence?
- ➔ When have you expected (or hoped) to encounter God but were later surprised to meet God elsewhere?
- ➔ What helped you tune in to God’s presence?

Bibles

MARY’S CURIOSITY

Invite volunteers to read the parts of narrator, Mary, and Gabriel in Luke 1:26–38. Challenge participants to use one word that describes Mary’s feelings in this scene. Have them identify what Gabriel says to Mary that speaks to her feelings.

Have participants read “Curiosity and Call” on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Use these questions for discussion:

- ➔ What effect can curiosity have on how one approaches fear?
- ➔ Have you ever wondered, like Mary, “How can this be?”
- ➔ How can we listen, like Mary, full of curiosity and open to whatever amazing work God is inviting us into?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

Internet-connected device

COMMUNITY OF TAIZÉ

Refer participants to “The Community of Taizé, France” on page 10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud or summarize the description of the Taizé community. Explain that the brothers commit to a practice of silence, prayer, and song to attune themselves to God.

Invite participants to experience one of the meditative songs from the Taizé community. Have them sit in a comfortable and prayerful position as you show the YouTube video “Bless the Lord My Soul Taize HD with Onscreen Lyrics” (bit.ly/FMBlessTaize, 3:51). Discuss participants’ thoughts and impressions of the music and their experience in listening. In what ways does music allow you to tune in to God?

STEPPING AWAY OR STEPPING IN

Form two groups. Assign one group to read “Desert Mothers and Fathers” on page 11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. The other group reads

“Service” on page 11. Within the groups, have participants name examples of living into their assigned practice and be able to explain how these practices can assist in tuning in to God. Discuss experiences participants may have had with their focus practice.

Gather the whole group to talk about what the separate groups discussed. Invite participants to identify which practices they prefer for tuning in to God. What effect does stepping away for simplicity and solitude or engaging in service have on their relationship with God?

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

LISTENING TO THE BUSTLE/PAYING ATTENTION

Refer participants to “Practicing the Practice” on page 12 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that these pages suggest a variety of practices that can be used to tune in to God. Have participants quickly read through the suggestions for practices that appeal to them. Invite them to tell which practices they might try. Encourage them to incorporate at least one practice in their daily rhythm in the coming week.

Have a volunteer read aloud the descriptions of “Listen in the Bustle” and “Pay Attention.” Discuss how one or both of these practices may be used while worshipping with your congregation. Challenge participants to notice the presence of God in each person with whom they are worshipping. Invite them to take time during worship to notice the beauty of the space. They may pay attention to elements in the space that help them tune in to God.

Encourage them to be intentional about using these practices to tune in to God when they next attend worship.

GROUNDING YOURSELF

Explain that, in grounding oneself, there can be an awareness of one’s senses and surroundings as tools for spiritual listening. Invite participants to sit quietly and comfortably while noticing their breathing. Lead them in a grounding exercise as described in “Practicing the Practice” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Slowly read aloud each prompt for paying attention in “Ground Yourself in the Physical World.” Pause between each statement, giving participants time to notice each sense. Conclude with a prayer thanking God for our senses and surroundings.

Discuss the participants’ experiences with this grounding activity. Identify situations in which they can try this exercise in their daily living.

FOLLOWING JESUS

PSALM 46

If time allows, have participants take turns reading aloud, line-by-line, the paragraphs in “Following Jesus” on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

Explain that each session in this practice concludes with a psalm and a prayer. Refer participants to “Psalm 46” on page 14. Form two groups and have them read the psalm antiphonally.

CLOSING PRAYER

As leader, read aloud the closing prayer from the graphic box on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.