

1

Listen for God

MATTHEW 1:18–24



GOAL

Young children recognize the importance of listening for God through the story of Joseph's encounter with the angel and explore different ways they can listen for God.

- 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, you know that sometimes I am a good listener, and sometimes I am not. Help me to be a better listener so that I can know you and serve you more completely. Amen.

THIS SESSION

For most people, hearing is one of the five operational senses in which we get information about the world around us. Hearing is passive. It is simply the act of perceiving sound by the ear. Listening, however, is active and a way that forms connections and requires paying attention. In the same way, we can listen for God through connections that are formed with the world around us and faithful followers. We also need to pay attention so that we can listen for God and to what we are hearing as we listen. The fact that God has messages for us is amazing. God wants to connect with us and let us know that we are not alone, whether it is through God's words in Scripture, through the words and/or actions of others, or through God's actions in the world.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Matthew 1:18–24, an angel, a messenger from God, appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel gives Joseph what must feel like an unreasonable request at first: to remain with Mary and care for Mary's baby even though he is not the father. Joseph, however, does not stop listening. He does not get angry. He listens. He pays attention. He hears how precious and holy the child is. He understands the importance of this baby. Joseph is no longer afraid to take Mary as his wife and raise the baby Jesus together.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Young children are very concrete learners; listening for God is an abstract concept. Introducing and using faith language builds their vocabulary as they grow into those concepts. Help them understand that listening for God requires listening skills, like those they are developing at this age including paying attention. God may be heard in a variety of ways such as hearing words of Scripture, listening to the voice of faithful followers, and noticing God working in the world around us.

Be sensitive to those who have a hearing impairment or may know people who are hearing impaired. The language of hearing is so concrete, and young children will need help to understand that listening for God is also through the heart and mind.

SESSION PREPARATION

No special preparation is needed for this session.



GETTING STARTED

- Music player and lively music or internet-connected device

FREEZE DANCE



Play lively music as the children arrive. Greet them and invite them to dance along with the music. Encourage them to wiggle, spin, and jump around safely in your space. Be sure to dance along with them as they are more likely to dance if they see adults dancing with them.

Play a game of Freeze Dance. Explain that you will stop the music every so often and the children need to listen carefully for when that happens so that they can stop dancing immediately and freeze in place. Play and stop the music at random intervals. Praise the children for listening and paying attention when they stop dancing and freeze.

When everyone has had a chance to play the game for a few rounds, gather the children, thanking them for their good listening skills. Tell them that today they are going to hear a story about someone who listened to a messenger from God, and they are going to practice some listening skills and paying attention so they can be good God listeners too.

I WILL NOT FEAR

For the opening litany, invite children to respond with **How can this be?** after you read the first line, and **I will not fear** after you read the second line. The children will use these two lines in each session of this unit.

Teach the American Sign Language signs for *no* and *fear* using the sign for *no* as they say, “I will not,” and the sign for *fear* as they say, “fear.”

- No—Move hands palms down from the center, right on top of left, outward and apart. (This can also be shown as hands in the “o” shape and moving apart.)
- Fear—Move both hands, fingers spread apart and palms toward chest, from sides to center and right hand higher than left hand.

Like Joseph, God calls you to do the right thing.

How can this be?

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

I will not fear.



For videos of these signs, go to www.signingsavvy.com and enter the word “no” (using the sign for “no more”) and “fear.”



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

SIMON SAYS



Invite the children to play 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 they will try listening to what God says instead of listening for what Simon says.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

ACT IT OUT



Resource Page 1

Have children find a space in the room where they hear you but can also have some space from other children. Tell them that, as they listen to you read the story, they will get to act out the story. Explain that, when they hear an action that Joseph does, they should pretend to do the same action silently. Practice with a few examples such as: Joseph drank a cup of coffee, Joseph put on his shoes, and Joseph pet his dog.

Read aloud the adapted Bible story from Matthew 1:18–24 on Resource Page 1, pausing in the indicated places for children to do their actions. If there is interest, read aloud the story a second time. Then gather the children and engage them in conversation using the following questions:

- Who visited Joseph?
- Why was Joseph afraid?
- What did God want Joseph to do?
- Why was it important for Joseph to listen to the angel?
- When have you been afraid?
- Who helps you when you are afraid?

Comment that there are different ways to listen for God. Joseph heard a message from God through an angel in a dream. Suggest that we can listen for God through Bible stories and through people who care for us.

FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

SAMUEL LISTENS



Internet-connected device

Tell the children that there are many stories in the Bible about people who listened for God’s message to them. Comment that Bible stories are a good place to listen for God through these stories because God has messages for us too. Explain that the children will hear the story of a young boy named Samuel who paid attention and heard a message from God. Encourage the children to pay attention and see if they notice who helps Samuel hear God’s message.

Show the YouTube video “Samuel—God’s Story” (bit.ly/FMSamuelGodsStory, 4:18), stopping at 1:23.

- Has God ever had a message for you?
- If you were listening for God’s message right now, what do you think God would say?

- ✦ Sometimes God has messages for people and speaks to them through words they hear or feel in their hearts and minds. Sometimes God speaks in other ways. Who helped Samuel hear God’s message to him?
- ✦ Who might help you hear God’s message to you?
- ✦ When are times that you would like to hear God’s message to you?
- ✦ What would you like to hear from God?

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- Copies of Resource Page 2
 - Crayons

HIDDEN PICTURES

A QC

Distribute copies of Resource Page 2 and ask the children what the picture is about. Encourage them to tell you about Joseph listening for God’s message to him. Invite them to find the ten ears in the picture and circle them, and then color the picture. As the children are coloring, wonder together what different ways there are to listen for God.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

BE BRAVE

AM

Gather the children in a circle. Tell them that the Bible has many messages from God that were given to people long ago but are also for us today. One of the messages God gave was when God’s people were afraid and facing a difficult situation.

Invite the children to repeat your words and actions as you lead them in God’s message for them:

- Be brave—Make strong arms.
- Don’t be afraid—Move pointer finger of one hand back and forth.
- God is with you—Cross hands over heart.
- Wherever you go—Use pointer finger to point outward in many directions.

Then invite the children to take turns naming something that they or others might be afraid of. Suggestions might be the dark, thunderstorms, snakes, and so forth. After each child gives their suggestion, lead the group in the words and actions of God’s message for them. After everyone has had a turn, tell the children that they can use these words and actions when they need to hear God’s message when they might be afraid.

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- Internet-connected device

GOD’S MESSAGE IN SONG

M AM T

Tell the children that they are going to hear a song that has an important message from God to them. Comment that the words that repeat over and over are words we can read in the Bible, which is one way of listening for God. Explain the words to the refrain:

- Fear not—God is telling us we don’t need to be afraid.
- For I have redeemed you—God has saved us.
- I’ve called you by name, you are mine—God knows us by name and we are God’s.

Practice saying those three lines several times so the children are familiar with them. Encourage the children to sing along when the refrain

in sung. Suggest that they can shout out the words “Fear NOT,” emphasizing the word *NOT*, as well as dance and move during the refrain.

Show the YouTube video “Fear Not—Ellie Holcomb—Official Lyric Video” (bit.ly/FMFearNot, 3:00). Encourage the children to remember this song, and especially the words to the refrain—practice them again!—whenever they need to hear this message to them from God.



FOLLOWING JESUS

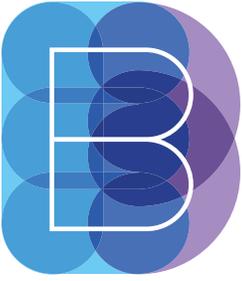
A LISTENING PRAYER



Invite the children to stand in a circle and hold hands with their neighbors. Tell children that, as you pray, they need to listen carefully for the word *listen*. Explain that every time you say the word *listen*, they should gently squeeze the hands they are holding. Have children practice squeezing each other’s hand a couple of times.

Offer the following prayer:

Dear God, help us listen (*squeeze*) for you. We want to listen (*squeeze*) to you when you talk to us. We promise to try and listen (*squeeze*) for you when you have messages for us or just want to let us know you are with us. Thank you for being a God who will listen (*squeeze*) to us. Amen.



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON MATTHEW 1:18–24

Joseph and Mary were two people who were going to get married. They probably spent a lot of time together. Perhaps Joseph went on walks with Mary (*pause*), climbed trees with Mary (*pause*), and maybe even Joseph danced with Mary (*pause*). They loved each other.

One day, Joseph learned that Mary was going to have a baby. That was very surprising to Joseph (*pause*). He was sad about this news (*pause*). When he came home, he realized he was angry (*pause*) because in Joseph's and Mary's time, this meant that he couldn't marry Mary. He stomped around his room (*pause*).

That night, Joseph got ready for bed. He changed into his pajamas (*pause*), he brushed his teeth (*pause*), and he said his nighttime prayers (*pause*). Then Joseph laid down in his bed and went to sleep (*pause*).

While he was sleeping, a messenger from God, an angel, appeared to him in his dream. Joseph was surprised (*pause*) and afraid (*pause*). Sometimes angels can be scary when we do not expect them to appear. The angel said, "Don't be afraid!" That probably made Joseph feel better. Joseph listened for God's message (*pause*). The angel said that God had given Mary the baby, the baby would be a son, and they should name him Jesus. This probably made Joseph take a deep breath (*pause*). He was going to be a father to a son. The angel told Joseph that the baby also would be called *Emmanuel*, which means "God with us." Now Joseph was probably really surprised and took two deep breaths (*pause*). He was going to be a father to God's son!

The next morning, Joseph woke up and ran to Mary (*pause*). Joseph gave Mary a big hug (*pause*). Joseph told Mary everything: how he listened to the angel, that their baby would be a son, and that they would name him Jesus. Joseph loved Mary. He loved the baby that was growing inside of her. He was very excited (*pause*) and probably a little bit afraid (*pause*) but mostly happy that he listened to God and would do what God asked him to do.

Find 10  s!



