

# Listen to God

## 1 KINGS 19:7-13A

3

### GOAL

Youth realize God's continued presence in all things and practice creating space to listen to God.

- 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

In Scripture, in nature, in the voices of youth—God, I listen for you.

For your wisdom, your guidance, your comfort—God, I listen to you.

## THIS SESSION

In the Hebrew language, God's very name, *YHWH*, lacks vowels and is therefore unpronounceable. In many ways, it is more of a breath than a word. God is in the air that fills our lungs, the movement shaking the trees, and the breeze that carries the waves to shore. Our omnipresent God moves through, in, and with all things as God guides, inspires, and directs creation.

Even the most faithful Christians, however, often miss God's continued guidance. We expect God to be in the obvious places like worship, Scripture, or the awe-inspiring miracles of nature, but we miss God's presence in the mundane. When we cultivate the practice of listening for God's voice, we open ourselves to God's guidance, inspiration, and direction in all things.

## THE BIBLE STORY

Elijah is a prophet of God who fled to the desert when King Ahab and his wife Jezebel began to persecute Elijah because of his religious beliefs and teachings. While Elijah was in the desert, an angel came to encourage him and nourish him. First Kings 19:7-13a begins with the angel returning to Elijah for the second time. The passage continues as Elijah explains his woes to the angel before being encouraged to listen for God.

Elijah expects to witness God in places that seem obvious to him: a whirlwind, an earthquake, a fire. Yet God reveals God's presence in a gentle whisper, or the sound of a thin silence. Elijah's story reminds readers that, while we might expect our powerful God to emerge in loud, vivid ways, God continues to speak to us in unexpected, seemingly mundane ways. We must remember to pay attention, to create space, and to listen.

## CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

The idea of listening for God in their daily lives may be new to youth. Traditionally, Christians spend time in worship and devotionals learning about God rather than developing a conversation with God. Youth will connect with the opportunity to discern personal ways they can create space for God's presence and how they can learn to hear God's voice in their own lives. Through this practice, youth may feel liberated and inspired to be in relationship with God in a new way.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- "Call and Response" (p. 20): Post the "Call and Response" newspaper from session 1 (p. 6).

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Ways We Listen to God" (p. 20): Post two sheets of newspaper. Label one sheet "Ways God Speaks to Us" and the other "Ways We Listen to God."

# GETTING STARTED

- ☐ “Call and Response” newsprint

## CALL AND RESPONSE

QC

Lead youth in the following prayer or invite a volunteer to lead:

Draw near to God

**and God will draw near to us.**

When we listen to God, we recognize God’s voice in many ways.

**Let us keep company with Jesus.**



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

## PAYING ATTENTION

G AM

Gather in a circle. Explain that you will be playing a game. One person will leave the room while the rest of the group picks a leader. The leader will move however they want, and the rest of the group will mirror the movements of the leader. They will also repeat whatever the leader says. The person outside of the room will return and guess who the leader is. They will be limited to three guesses.

Begin the game by selecting a person to leave the room. Facilitate the game according to the above instructions. After a few rounds of the game, use the following statements to prompt reflection:

- ➔ What was difficult about the game?
- ➔ What was easy about the game?
- ➔ How did you choose who to listen to and pay attention to?

- ☐ Prepared sheets of newsprint
- ☐ Markers

## WAYS WE LISTEN TO GOD

C CT

Direct youth to the two sheets of newsprint that have been prepared. Invite a volunteer to write responses on the sheet labeled “Ways We Listen to God.” Invite youth to call out ways they and people all over the world listen to God. Have a different volunteer prepare to write responses on the other sheet, “Ways God Speaks to Us.” Discuss:

- ➔ What on the lists feels familiar and comfortable to you?
- ➔ What on the lists feels unexpected to you?
- ➔ What questions do the answers on the lists raise for you?
- ➔ How do the answers on the “Ways God Speaks to Us” sheet connect with those on the “Ways We Listen to God” sheet?

## BODY PRAYER

AM

As you speak each line, touch the italicized body part with your hand and invite youth to do the same. As they do, invite youth to respond with “Our [*body part*] listen to you, O God.”

Let our *eyes* be open to your presence in our world.

***Our eyes listen to you, O God.***

Let our *ears* seek to hear your wisdom.

***Our ears listen to you, O God.***

Let our *hearts* empathize with all who suffer in your creation.

***Our hearts listen to you, O God.***

Let our *brains* problem-solve ways to love our neighbors and creation.

*Our brains listen to you, O God.*

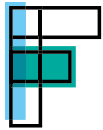
Let our *feet* be ready to go where you lead us.

*Our feet listen to you, O God.*

Let our *hands* be willing to respond to what we witness and to act accordingly.

*Our hands listen to you, O God.*

Amen.



## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

### LECTIO DIVINA

QC

Distribute a copy of Resource Page 1 and a pen to each participant. Ask if any youth are familiar with *lectio divina*. Invite them to explain what they know about the practice. Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph at the top of Resource Page 1. Guide youth through the practice using the Resource Page.

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
  - Pens

### READING IN PAIRS

AT C

Invite youth to form pairs. Instruct youth to discuss with their partner a time when they really wanted to hear God speak to them. Allow three minutes for discussion. If necessary, use the following questions to prompt youth:

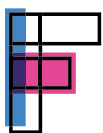
- ➔ What happened?
- ➔ What were you hoping to hear from God?
- ➔ How was your longing for God's presence resolved?

Provide each pair with a Bible. Invite the pairs to choose one person to be Person A and the other to be Person B. Explain that Person A will read 1 Kings 19:7–13a and Person B will then summarize the passage.

After all pairs have read and summarized the passage, prompt the youth to discuss with their partner a time they think God spoke to them in an unexpected way. If necessary, use the following questions to prompt youth:

- ➔ What happened?
- ➔ How did you know it was God?
- ➔ What did you feel after God spoke to you?

- 
- Bibles



## FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

### CENTERING PRAYER

T C

Explain to youth that they are about to watch a video describing the Christian practice of centering prayer. Although this practice has been in use since the fourth century, it was repopularized in the 1960s and 1970s.

Show the video “The Benefits of Centering Prayer” ([bit.ly/FMCentering](https://bit.ly/FMCentering), 2:38). Use the following questions to wonder together:

- 
- Internet-connected device
  - Copies of Resource Page 2

- ➔ How are people connecting with God in centering prayer?
- ➔ What are some of the benefits of centering prayer you heard people list?

Distribute copies of Resource Page 2 and read through the instructions for practicing centering prayer. Encourage youth to take the page home and try it during the week.

- 
- Newsprint
  - Markers

## JOYS AND CONCERNS

C CT

Invite youth to describe how your congregation acknowledges joys and concerns during the worship service. Ask youth to discuss why they think the congregation does this. Affirm that when we listen to one another's struggles and celebrations, we engage in holy listening that includes God in the conversation.

Invite youth to list their joys and concerns out loud. Have a volunteer write these joys and concerns on a sheet of newsprint. After everyone who is comfortable sharing has contributed, invite the group to summarize what they heard. Ask youth what themes emerged among this list.

Pray for the group or invite volunteers from the group to contribute to a brief prayer.



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

### QUIET AND ATTENTIVE

QC C

If possible, undertake this activity outside or in a large fellowship area in your church. Invite youth to form two fists with their hands, then close their eyes, and begin to inhale deeply through their nose and exhale from their mouths. Instruct them to focus on the sound of each inhale and exhale. Then, invite them to focus on whatever sound they hear that is farthest away from them. Next, direct them to think about the loudest sound they hear, then switch to focus on the softest and quietest sound they can hear.

Instruct youth to raise a finger for each different sound they hear. Discourage youth from intentionally creating sounds of their own. Encourage them to focus instead on what naturally emerges. Invite youth to open their eyes once all their fingers are raised and to sit quietly for others to finish.

After the activity, ask youth to share the different sounds they heard and consider how these sounds are part of God's creation.

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- Battery-operated candle (optional)

### PRAYER AND MEDITATION

QC

Invite youth to sit in a circle facing each other. Explain that you will be doing a form of Christian meditation as you sit together for the next seven minutes. During this time, encourage youth to clear their minds of all thoughts and focus on the silence and stillness of God's presence. Encourage youth to think of a *sacred word*, or a word they can use to remind them of their intentions if their minds wander during the prayer. Some examples are "Jesus," "Let Go," "Peace," or "Be Still." Let youth know that you will begin and end the prayer with a reading of 1 Kings 19:11a: "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of YHWH, for YHWH is about to pass by."

Dim the lights and encourage youth to sit comfortably in their chairs. If you choose to, light a candle in the center of the circle. Read 1 Kings 19:11a. After three–five minutes of silence, read 1 Kings 19:11a again. If time permits, process the practice by inviting participants to share what this experience was like for them and what they gained from the experience.

## WRITING TO LISTEN



Distribute paper, pens, and colored pencils to youth. Instruct them to use the pen to write anything and everything that comes to their mind on the sheet of paper. The most important thing is that they should keep writing even if what they are writing does not connect or make sense. Invite youth to consider one of the following prompts to begin:

- What do you think God wants you to know?
- How do you listen to God?
- What makes it hard to listen to God? What makes it easy?

- 
- Paper
  - Pens
  - Colored pencils

After about five minutes, direct youth to finish whatever they are currently writing. Invite them to read over what they have written and use a colored pencil to circle, underline, or highlight where they see the wisdom of God emerge from the free flow of what they've written.

Encourage youth to read aloud what they marked with the colored pencil.

## THE LABYRINTH

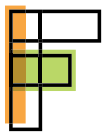


If your church has a labyrinth on the grounds, take a trip to this space with the group. If not or if time does not permit a trip, distribute copies of Resource Page 3 to youth.

Explain that a labyrinth is a meandering path. In the Christian tradition, labyrinths often represent wholeness. For centuries, they have been used by Christian practitioners as a way to listen to God. Labyrinths are different from mazes; a labyrinth has only one direction. If you continue to walk, you will eventually find the center and then find your way out again.

Invite youth to either walk mindfully through the labyrinth, or to trace their fingers mindfully along the labyrinth on the Resource Page.

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- Copies of Resource Page 3



## FOLLOWING JESUS

## LISTENING TO GOD



Gather in a circle. Invite participants to go around the circle and take turns sharing one way they commit to intentionally listen to God in the upcoming week. After all youth have shared, pray:

O God, we listen for and to you  
for guidance, restoration, comfort, and peace.  
Thank you for the many ways  
you reveal your presence and wisdom to us.  
Amen.

## Lectio Divina

*Lectio divina*, Latin for “divine reading,” is a spiritual practice that uses reading, meditation, and prayer to enter into a conversation with Scripture. In this conversation, the reader listens for the ways God emerges and guides the conversation. While the practice originated in the Catholic Church with four steps, it is now an ecumenical practice. People of many different Christian denominations participate in varying forms of *lectio divina*. Many of these practitioners use the following five steps (although any biblical text may be used):

1

**Reading (*Lectio*):** Read 1 Kings 19:7–13a slowly and carefully.

2

**Meditation (*Meditatio*):** Think deeply about which words or phrases stick out to you. Underline these in the text. Circle the one you are drawn to most.

3

**Prayer (*Oratio*):** Engage in conversation with God by using the space at the bottom of this page to journal about the word or phrase you circled.

4

**Contemplation (*Contemplatio*):** Sit in silence for three minutes. With each inhale, think about what you invite into your life in response to the Scripture passage. With each exhale, think about what you want to send out into the world.

5

**Action:** Consider how you are invited to respond to what you’ve read. Fold this paper in thirds and write “A Reminder to” followed by actions you can do in response to the conversation you had with God.

# centering prayer

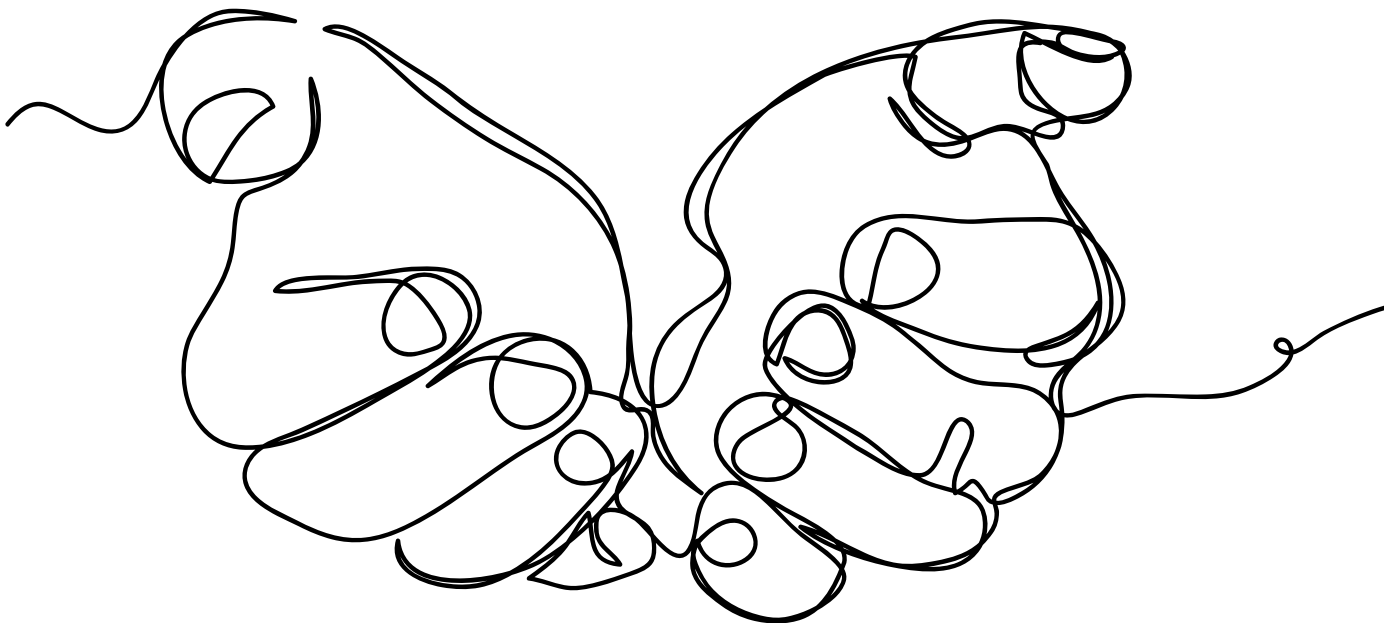
Practice Centering Prayer for a minimum of 20 minutes, twice each day, with the intention of deepening your relationship with God.

1 Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

2 Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

3 When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

4 At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.<sup>1</sup>



1. "Centering Prayer," Contemplative Outreach, [www.contemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer-method/](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer-method/).

