

# 3

# Listen to God

JOHN 10:1-5, 14



## GOAL

Children hear the story of Jesus, the good shepherd, and discover ways they can listen to God's voice.

- 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

Dear God, who listens to your children, hear my prayer for these children. Fill my words and actions with your wisdom and love. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

Praying is often described as “talking to God.” However, it is not just talking *to* but also conversation *with* God. A conversation has both speaking and listening. To be truly in conversation with God, we need to do our part of the listening as well. Scripture, or the Word of God, is often understood as God speaking to us and we *listen* to what God has to say to us. This is a significant way, but not the only way, we listen to God. In addition to the Bible, we can also listen for God in nature, music, sermons, friends, and our conscience.

## THE BIBLE STORY

In John 10, Jesus uses a metaphor to speak about the relationship between him and those who follow him. For his audience, the language about sheep and shepherds makes total sense. Jesus says he is the good shepherd who loves and cares for the sheep. We are the sheep, those who follow the shepherd, who are fed and nurtured and protected by the shepherd. Jesus didn't speak of social media and political parties, peer groups, or worries of our day and culture and all its distractions, but the message is the same. We want to pay attention to Jesus, to his voice. We do that by spending time with the good shepherd, by learning his voice and his words, and by listening carefully for the shepherd's voice among all the other noises around us.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children learn from an early age the importance of listening to and following directions to keep them safe and to learn new things. Listening, however, is not always easy. There are many distractions and many different voices wanting their attention. Helping them to discern the many voices in their spheres and focus in on God's Word and the different ways God speaks to them will help them build a foundation for listening to God as they grow.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- “Journaling Sounds” (p. 26): Gather a variety of items that make sounds, such as a bell, party noisemaker, rattle, phone, drum, harmonica, maracas, whistle, timer, alarm clock, jingle bells, wood blocks, and toy piano. Have at least one item per child. Gather the Spiritual Discipline journals from session 2. Have a few extra notebooks for children who were not present at sessions 1 and 2.
- Depending on the options you choose:
  - “Good Listening Skills” (p. 28): Obtain *Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns to Listen* by Howard Binkow (We Do Listen, 2008) or use the YouTube video “Listening Power Kids 1a Listen Better—Children's Story Telling Read Along—Howard B. Wigglebottom” ([bit.ly/FMHoward](https://bit.ly/FMHoward), 5:15).



## GETTING STARTED

- Variety of items that make sounds, such as a bell, party noisemaker, rattle, phone, drum, harmonica, maracas, whistle, timer, alarm clock, jingle bells, wood blocks, toy piano. Have at least one item per child.
- Spiritual Discipline journals from session 2 and extra notebooks
- Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils

### JOURNALING SOUNDS

NS QC X

Greet the children as they arrive and invite them to examine all the items you have displayed on the table. Give the children their Spiritual Discipline journals and have a notebook for anyone who was not at sessions 1 and 2. Provide coloring supplies. Ask the children to write or draw a picture of one or more of the items and how it is used. When everyone has arrived, invite the children to choose an item and place it next to them. You will use the items in “Making Noise” (below).

### DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

AM

The opening ritual is a responsive litany with one line changing to correspond to the spiritual discipline in each session. The motions help children learn their responses, which are printed in the bold text and remain the same throughout the unit.

Draw near to God

**and God** (*raise both arms to the sky*)

**will draw near to us.** (*bring hands toward heart, crossing them over your heart*)

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

**Let us** (*extend arms forward, palms facing upward*)

**keep company** (*bend elbows and bring together hands in prayer*)

**with Jesus.** (*sign “Jesus” using right middle finger touching the middle of left palm, repeat with left middle finger touching the middle of right palm*)



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Items that make sounds from “Journaling Sounds” (above)



The noise may be jarring for children with auditory sensory sensitivities. Invite them to cover their ears or step outside the space with a helper if necessary.

### MAKING NOISE

NS C

Have the children sit in a circle on the floor and place their item in their lap. Ask everyone to close their eyes. One by one, ask the children to make their item’s sound. Invite the other children to identify what the item is from the sound it makes. Then ask the children to all make their items sound at the same time. While there is lots of noise, in a normal voice say, “Listen to only the sound of my voice and follow my directions.” As the noise continues, have another adult give different, louder, and conflicting directions in between your directions. Give the following directions:

- Stop making your sound.
- Put down your item.
- Open your eyes.
- Stand up.
- Move to a chair and sit down.

When everyone has heard your voice and followed your directions, engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- Which items were easy to identify? Why?
- When all the items were making noise, was it easy or hard to hear (*name an item*)?
- Why do you think it was more difficult to hear a particular item when all the items were making noise?
- Was it easy or hard to hear my voice give directions? Why?
- Why do you think listening is important?
- How do you know which voice to listen to?
- Why do you think listening to the right voice, or voices, is important?

Comment that there are many noises and distractions in our lives, and it is important to develop our listening skills. Wonder together what are the right voices to listen to. Suggest that they are the voices that love and care for us, that help us learn, and that keep us safe. Wonder how we can listen to God's voice.



## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

### THE VOICE OF THE SHEPHERD

C

Bible

Set the scene for the Bible story. Tell the children that Jesus knew many shepherds. They were all over the hillsides. Jesus spent time with them and learned about their work. He saw how they cared about their sheep. He watched them do all the things they did to take good care of their sheep. So Jesus talked about himself as a shepherd and about us, his followers, as his sheep. Read John 10:1–5, 14 aloud to the children or have one or more volunteers take turns reading a verse at a time. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- How are we like the sheep in the story?
- How is Jesus like a good shepherd?
- What do we need to do to hear Jesus' voice?
- What can make it hard for us to hear his voice?



## FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

### LECTIO DIVINA

QC

- Bible
- Index cards
- Spiritual Discipline journals from "Journaling Sounds" (p. 26)
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils

Tell the children that they are going to listen to the Bible story again, not only with their ears, but with the ears of their hearts. Explain that this kind of listening to Scripture is called *lectio divina* and that people through many years have used this way of reading or hearing a Bible passage to listen for God's Word to them at a particular time.

Invite the children to sit in a comfortable position, and tell them that they may close their eyes or keep them open as you read. Ask them to listen

with their ears and with the ears of their hearts. Read John 10:1–5, 14 aloud from a Bible of your choosing. Pause after reading for a moment or two to let the words settle in the children’s hearts and minds. Then ask them what words or phrases jumped out to them. Ask the children to think about their words for a moment and ponder what those words might mean to them at this time.

Ask the children to pay attention to the words they heard as you read the passage again. Ask the children to think about their words again, this time pondering what God might be saying to them through the story and those words.

Invite the children to offer a prayer to God silently, talking with God in their hearts and minds and asking God to guide them as they keep the words God has given them in their hearts in the coming days.

Wonder together about this experience of listening with the ears of one’s heart. Invite the children to write their word or phrase in their Spiritual Discipline journals and on an index card. Assist with writing as needed. Have them share with the group the word or phrase they heard God speak to them through Scripture. For some children, this experience may be comfortable; for others, it may be confusing. Reassure the children that God speaks to us, and we have to get used to listening in a new way. Encourage the children to take whatever word or phrase settled in their heart and mind and see where it might lead. Suggest they put their index card somewhere they will see it each day.

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- *Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns to Listen* by Howard Binkow (*We Do Listen*, 2008) or internet-connected device

## GOOD LISTENING SKILLS



Read aloud *Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns to Listen* by Howard Binkow to the children or show the YouTube video “Listening Power Kids 1a Listen Better—Children’s Story Telling Read Along—Howard B. Wigglebottom” ([bit.ly/FMHoward](https://bit.ly/FMHoward), 5:15). After the story, engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✦ What happened to Howard when he didn’t listen?
- ✦ Why do you think Howard decided to try listening better?
- ✦ What happened when Howard used his listening skills?
- ✦ What do you think may happen when we don’t listen to God?
- ✦ How can we try listening to God better?
- ✦ What might happen when we use our listening skills to listen to God?



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- 
- Internet-connected device

## GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN



Show the YouTube video “God Speaks We Listen” ([bit.ly/FMGodSpeaks](https://bit.ly/FMGodSpeaks), 1:57). Play it again, inviting the children to sing along and do the motions.

Wonder together how we can listen to God speaking to us. The song suggests that we read the Bible, trust, and obey. Ask the children what are some Bible stories they know. As a story is mentioned, wonder together what we might hear God telling us and how we might trust and obey, or follow God’s way of living. Comment that the song also says that we meet Jesus in the Bible. Wonder how knowing more about Jesus helps us listen to God. Ask the children what messages we can listen to from Jesus.

## LISTENING ALL AROUND US

NS QC

Take the children on a listening walk, indoors or outdoors, as location and weather permit. Give each child their Spiritual Discipline journal and have them take writing and coloring supplies with them. Explain that you will stop at several places along the walk to pause and let the children write or draw in their journals what they are hearing. Ask the children to be silent, even as they are walking, so that everyone may listen for sounds.

After your walk, return to your meeting space and reflect on the walk together. Wonder what sounds the children heard in various places and if anyone heard something that no one else did. Ask the children where they might have heard God's voice in their walk or in the silence. Wonder together in what ways God's voice might be present in the everyday sounds of life.

- Spiritual Discipline journals from "Journaling Sounds" (p. 26) or "Lectio Divina" (p. 27)
- Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils



## FOLLOWING JESUS

### BLESSING OUR LISTENING

QC

Invite each child to hold their Spiritual Discipline journal in their left hand and place their right hand over it like a roof. Have them repeat after you as you lead them in a blessing:

Lord, we bring our prayers to you /  
as we try the practice of listening for God in the coming days. /  
Accept our prayers as a token of our love and devotion /  
and our desire to grow closer with you. /  
Amen. /

- Spiritual Discipline journals from "Listening All Around Us" (above)
- Items that make sounds from "Journaling Sounds" (p. 26)



Have the children leave their Spiritual Discipline journals in the room for the next session. Encourage the children to try listening to God and discover where they hear God's voice each day.

