

# 3

# Listen to God

JOHN 10:11-15, 27



## GOAL

Children hear how Jesus compared himself to the good shepherd and identify how they can be like the sheep who listen to his 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

Good Shepherd, open my ears so that your voice alone directs my words and actions as I attend to your sheep. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

God is the creator who continues to communicate with creation. Communication involves a sender and a receiver. The spiritual discipline of listening to God places us in the receiver's seat. Drawing near to God through listening involves more than our ears. As we spend time with Jesus, we strengthen our skills in divine voice recognition.

## THE BIBLE STORY

Referring to himself as the good shepherd, Jesus refers to his intimate relationship with his followers. Just as sheep recognize and follow the shepherd's voice, keeping company with Jesus involves a posture of active listening. 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 we encounter in everyday life.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Given their proximity while developing in utero, children recognize their mother's voice right out of the womb. Completely dependent upon caregivers, the bonding process between babies and their parental figure(s) is a critical part of human development. Likewise, recognizing the good shepherd's voice comes with proximity. The good shepherd loves the sheep, bonding with them the more they spend time together. Learning to focus on listening instead of just speaking are key communication skills children can use in their relationship with God and others.

Listening to God is an abstract concept for young children, however, so helping them understand different ways that we listen to God is important. Scripture, or the Word of God, is often understood as the only way we can listen to God; God speaks to us as we listen to what God has to say through Scripture. But God can also speak to us through nature, music, words in church, friends, and even silence.

## SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the choices you make:

- "Listening to God through Scripture" (p. 29): Plan to read Psalm 23 from a Bible, obtain *Psalms for Young Children* by Marie-Hélène Delval (Eerdmans Books, 2008), or use the YouTube video "St. James Parish Book Series: Psalms for Young Children" ([bit.ly/FMPsalmsForYoung](https://bit.ly/FMPsalmsForYoung), 3:30; show 0:45–1:00).
- "Glitter Meditation Jars" (p. 30): Use the directions provided in the activity to make a glitter meditation jar to show as an example and/or make a jar for each child in advance.



## GETTING STARTED

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Crayons and colored pencils
- Internet-connected device or music player and meditative instrumental music



Rooted in Asian meditative practices, the word *mandala* is Sanskrit for “circle.” Long before they made their way into Western art therapy practices or popular adult coloring books, mandalas were part of Hindu and Buddhist meditation and prayer practices. Over time other religions, including Christianity, have incorporated these sacred circles into their spiritual practices.

### MANDALA COLORING



As children arrive, have relaxing music playing in the background. Provide copies of Resource Page 1, crayons, and colored pencils. Invite children to color the mandala picture. Encourage them to enjoy the coloring process, assuring them that there is no wrong or right way to color them. Tell the children that pictures in circles are often called *mandalas* (man-DOLL-ahs). Explain that people from different parts of the world have used them to meditate and pray; the pictures and patterns in the circle help them focus. Suggest that they might focus on Jesus, and perhaps wonder how Jesus might be like a shepherd of sheep, while they color. They may choose any color(s) and do not need to worry about coloring in the lines.

### DRAWING NEAR TO GOD



The opening ritual in this unit includes a responsive litany with one line changing to correspond to the spiritual discipline in each session. There are motions to help children learn their responses. The children’s response is printed in the bold text and remains the same throughout this 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” with hands using right middle finger to touch the middle of left palm and repeat with left middle finger to touch the middle of right palm*)



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE



If you need the tune for “Where Is Thumbkin?” show the YouTube video “Where Is Thumbkin?—Featuring Noodle & Pals—Super Simple Songs“ ([bit.ly /FMThumbkin](https://bit.ly/FMThumbkin), 2:00).



While some children love to be the star of the song, others may not like the attention. Allow children the option of not doing the motions when their name is sung.

### WELCOME NAME SONG



Invite everyone to sit in a circle. Teach the song below to the children using the tune of “Where Is Thumbkin?” taking turns naming all the children in the group. Prompt the children to repeat the lines and actions as indicated. After the first or second child is named and responds, the children and the group will pick up their parts.

Where is (*Name*)? (*pretend to look around the circle through binoculars*)

**Where is (*Name*)?** (*pretend to look around the circle through binoculars*)

(*Child responds*) Here I am! (*child stands up*)

(*Child responds*) Here I am! (*child waves hands*)

**How are you today, friend?** (*group waves to child*)

(*Child responds*) Very well, I thank you. (*child bows*)

**Turn around. Sit back down.** (*child turns around and sits down*)



# FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

## HEARING THE SHEPHERD



Read the adapted Bible story, based on John 10:11–15, 27, from Resource Page 2, which introduces Jesus as the good shepherd.

Have the children play a game taking turns listening for the shepherd’s voice calling their name. Show the children the cards cut apart from Resource Page 3. Review the animal cards with the children, inviting them to make the corresponding animal sounds.

Hand out a card to each child, making sure to give someone the Sheep card and another child the Shepherd card. Blindfold the person who is the Sheep or have them close their eyes. Tell the rest of the group to spread out around the sheep. When everyone is in place, count down from five to one. At one, have each person make their animal’s sound. The Shepherd calls the name of the person who is the Sheep and the Sheep tries to follow the voice and find the Shepherd. Allow the children to take turns being the Sheep, as they wish.

- Resource Page 2
- Cards cut apart from Resource Page 3
- Blindfold (optional)



If you have more than twelve children, have some children form pairs and share a card, both making the animal sound on their card.



# FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

## LISTENING TO GOD THROUGH SCRIPTURE



Tell the children that one way to listen to God is through reading or hearing the Bible. Explain that you will lead them in meditating on, or thinking about, Psalm 23. Choose one or both of the meditation activities below.

For the first meditation activity, ask children to find a comfortable sitting position. Guide them in taking a few deep breaths. Show the YouTube video “Guided Prayer - Psalm 23” ([bit.ly/FMPsalmon23Meditation](https://bit.ly/FMPsalmon23Meditation), 1:46). Read aloud the prompts after the psalm to the children.


For the second meditation activity, introduce the children to *lectio divina*. Explain that it is an ancient prayer practice that uses the Bible to listen to God. Lead them in a modified version of *lectio divina*. Have the children get into a comfortable sitting position again. Invite the children to close their eyes and pay attention to any words that stand out to them or warm their hearts as you read the Bible passage.

1. Read Psalm 23: Read it from a Bible or from *Psalms for Young Children* by Marie-Hélène Delval, or show the YouTube video “St. James Parish Book Series: Psalms for Young Children” ([bit.ly/FMPsalmsForYoung](https://bit.ly/FMPsalmsForYoung), 3:30; show 0:45–1:00).
2. Meditate: Ask the children what word(s) stood out to them. Ask them if this word(s) reminds them of anything happening in their lives. Wonder what these words might tell them about God or about themselves.
3. Pray: Lead the group in prayer. Seek guidance in understanding God’s message. Express gratitude for God’s revelations.

- Bible
- Internet-connected device
- Psalms for Young Children* by Marie-Hélène Delval (Eerdmans Books, 2008) (optional)

4. Contemplate: Lead the group in a period of silence. Wonder together what God is calling us to do in response to the word(s) we meditated on today.

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- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 4
  - ☐ Internet-connected device

 Labyrinths pre-date Christianity by thousands of years and walking them has been a spiritual practice embraced by adherents of many faith traditions. If you have access to a walking labyrinth, invite the children to walk it.

## FINGER LABYRINTH

AM QC T

Distribute copies of Resource Page 4. Ask children to describe what they see. Explain that this is a *labyrinth* and that, since ancient times, people have walked inside large ones to help them listen to God. Tell the children that labyrinths can be used as a tool in listening for the good shepherd's voice in their life. Show the YouTube video "Labyrinth Journeys Official Trailer ([bit.ly/FMLabyrinthTrailer](https://bit.ly/FMLabyrinthTrailer), 2:29), stopping at the 1:12 mark after the child speaks.

Make some observations and discuss how labyrinths are similar but different from mazes. Unlike mazes, labyrinths do not include dead ends, and they have the same entrance and exit points.

Invite the children to try the finger labyrinth. Play meditative music while you instruct the children to use one finger as they trace the labyrinth line. Ask them to start at the opening of the labyrinth at the bottom of the page and pause when they reach the center before continuing by retracing the line back to the exit. Debrief the practice. Ask the children if they give it a thumbs up, a thumbs down, or place their thumb somewhere in the middle. Invite children to share what thoughts come to mind, how their bodies feel, or anything else they want to say.



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- ☐ Prepared glitter meditation jars or supplies to make jars:
    - Plastic jars with lids
    - Hot tap water
    - Clear school glue (must be clear)
    - Craft sticks
    - Food coloring
    - Fine glitter and coarse glitter
    - Super glue

## GLITTER MEDITATION JARS

A QC X

Show children the glitter meditation jar. Shake up the jar and explain that, sometimes, it's hard to listen for the good shepherd's voice because of the noise *inside* of us. Share that their thoughts and feelings can be like the glitter inside the jar. Distribute a glitter meditation jar to each child or invite the children to make a glitter meditation jar using the following directions:

- Fill a plastic jar  $\frac{2}{3}$  full with hot tap water and the remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  full with clear glue. Stir glue with a craft stick until it mixes well with the water.
- Add a drop or two of food coloring and a combination of fine and coarse glitters. Stir.
- Have an adult apply super glue to the inside rim of lid and secure on the jar.

Invite the children to shake their jar. Have the children sit in a relaxed position and focus on their jar. Direct them to take deep breaths as they imagine their thoughts and feelings settling down and calming inside of them like the glitter. Reflect on the exercise using the following questions:

- ➔ How do you feel?
- ➔ In what situations might you use this jar when you are at home?

## NATURE FREEZE DANCE

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Internet-connected device

This activity is a twist on the children’s game “Freeze Dance.” Ask the children to stand in a large circle, being as still as possible. Instruct the children that when they hear the sound from nature, they are to freeze. When the nature sound stops, they can dance while they walk around the circle. Start and stop the YouTube video “Sounds of Nature, Birds Singing, Sounds of Forests, for Relaxation, Sleep, Meditation, Relax 8 Hours” ([bit.ly /FMNatureSounds](https://bit.ly/FMNatureSounds), 8:00) at intermittent times for the children to freeze and dance as they use their listening skills. To extend the activity at home, encourage children to go on nature walks with their family or caregivers and stop whenever they hear a new sound.



## FOLLOWING JESUS

### COME AND SEE

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Rhythm instruments (optional)

Introduce the song you are singing to close each session of this unit. It is sung to the tune of “London Bridge Is Falling Down.” Teach the chorus by singing one line at a time. Then have the children sing the chorus with you. Teach the verse of the song in the same way. Invite the children to sing the chorus and the verse using rhythm instruments, if you choose.

Chorus:

Jesus says to come and see, come and see, come and see.

Jesus wants to be with me.

I love Jesus!

Verse:

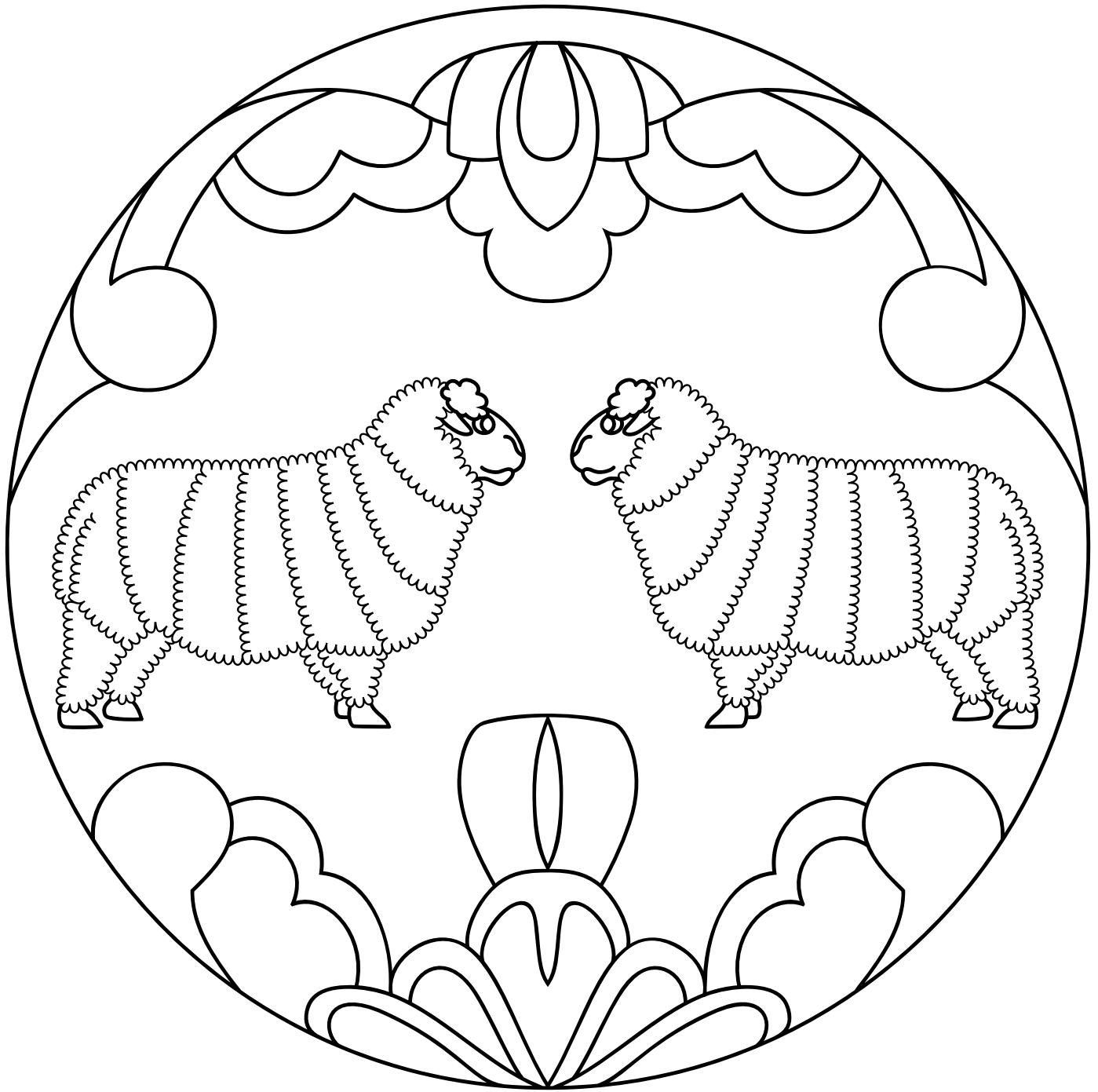
Listen for the good shepherd, call your name, call your name.

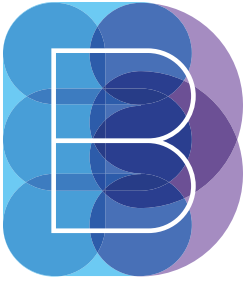
Open up your ears to hear.

God is speaking.



The chorus of the song is repeated in each session of this unit. The verse changes to reflect the spiritual practice highlighted in that session.





## BIBLE STORY

### BASED ON JOHN 10:11–15, 27

People were arguing about Jesus. They all saw him doing miracles, but they could not agree if his powers were good or bad. Some people thought his powers came from God. They wanted to follow Jesus and learn from him. Others thought Jesus was dangerous. They thought his power threatened, or might take away, their power. People did not know if they could trust Jesus. So Jesus told them this story:

I am the good shepherd. I will protect my sheep and even die if it means keeping them safe. Sometimes, a shepherd will hire people to help watch the sheep. But these workers do not care about the sheep as much as the shepherd does. If a hungry wolf came near, the hired help would run away and save themselves. They would leave the sheep behind to be scattered and in danger. But watching the sheep is more than a job for me.

I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and they know me. And this is also how it is between me and God. God knows me, and I know God. I know the sheep so well that I will die for them.

“Baa! Baa!” Listen!

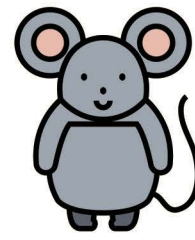
“Baa! Baa!” I hear them. I know them. I will call to them, and they will listen to my voice. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.







Sheep



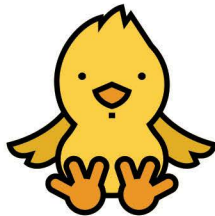
Mouse



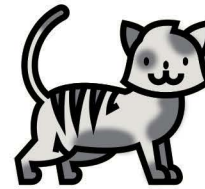
Bear



Dog



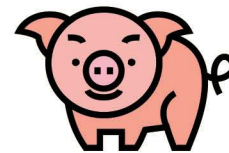
Chicken



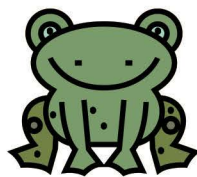
Cat



Lion



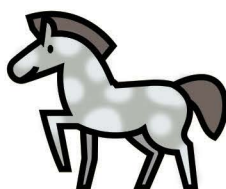
Pig



Frog



Wolf



Horse



Shepherd



# Finger Labyrinth

