

Listen to God

1 SAMUEL 3:1-11; MARK 1:35-39

1 As you gather, read the other side of this page to familiarize yourself with the topic for today. Once everyone has gathered, spend a few minutes making sure everyone knows each other and introducing any visitors. Open the session with the following prayer:

Holy God, may we listen for your voice as we gather today. Guide us in ways that help others and deepen our relationship with you. Be gentle with us as we pause and listen for your voice. Amen.

2 Read “Summary of the Practice” on the other side of this page. As a group, play the childhood game “Telephone” as a way to practice close listening. To play: a leader gives a message to one person who whispers the message to another person. They, in turn, whisper the message to another, passing the original message around the group. The last person to receive the message says it out loud, comparing it to the original message. Choose the original message from Mark 1:35-39. Afterward, talk about why it’s hard to listen sometimes, and how we mix up the message we’re hearing.

3 Read “Finding the Practice in the Bible” on the other side of this page. Then read 1 Samuel 3:1-11 aloud. Invite everyone to listen while one person reads. Read slowly and deliberately, savoring the words in the story. Invite everyone to share what they found most important about this passage.

4 Read “Finding the Practice Then and Now” on the other side of this page and then watch the YouTube video “Quaker Meeting for Worship Pt 1: The Challenge of Sitting in Silence” (bit.ly/FMQuakerSilence, 6:08).

5 Practice sitting together in silence for five minutes. Everyone get comfortable. Someone watch the time. Eyes may be open, closed, or lowered. During the five minutes, spend some time listening for sounds near and far and for God’s voice.

6 Ways I can better listen to God:

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.

SUMMARY OF THE PRACTICE

Spiritual disciplines have two key components: making space to keep company with Jesus and allowing God to transform us and nurture faith in us. Listening to God plays a central role in both. When we keep company with a friend, we speak and listen in a back-and-forth exchange. Listening to God brings into focus an invitation from Jesus to converse with him, with an easy flow of conversation that involves both listening and hearing. Both invitation and intention are involved with listening.

For many Christians, the Bible is God talking to us, and prayer is us talking to God. Listening to God's voice through the words of Scripture plays a significant role in listening to God. The more we listen for God, the more we are able to hear.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

A young Samuel received a word from God in 1 Samuel 3:1–11, though he needed guidance from his mentor and priest Eli to recognize God's voice. Three times, God's voice called to Samuel. Initially, Samuel mistook it as Eli calling to him. With God's persistence and Eli's direction, Samuel opened himself to listen to God.

The Gospels contain a scattering of verses that tell of Jesus slipping away from the crowds to pray (Luke 5:16 among others). There is not much elaboration on Jesus' words or activity in these solitary moments. Mark 1:35–39 describes an incident when Jesus had a renewed and clear sense of guidance from God after a time of solitary prayer. He must have been listening as well as speaking with God.

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

The church has been learning to listen to God from the beginning. The disciples heard Jesus say, "Let anyone with ears, listen!" (Matthew 11:15) as he taught and told stories. The early church practiced listening as they shared stories about the risen Christ. Through the centuries, church traditions of listening grew within monastic traditions that practiced silence, chanting, and shared readings. As the Reformation highlighted the importance of hearing the Word in worship, congregations learned to listen to God speak through sermons and liturgy. Listening to sacred and spiritual music has also been a practice for centuries.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS GUIDE

If possible, distribute this sheet to participants before gathering. Be prepared to summarize the information on this page. Bring extra copies, some pens, and a Bible.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Close the session with the words of Jesus from Revelation 3:20:

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.