LISTENING FOR GOD

OBJECTIVE: Learn to listen for God’s voice by prayerfully meditating in silence and reflecting on His creation.

SESSION SNAPSHOT
Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Adjust the suggested time allotments as necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>SESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>CONNECT</td>
<td>Practice listening for one voice through noisy distraction. Then open in prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>DISCUSS</td>
<td>Watch a brief YouTube video featuring an awkward prayer; then discuss how Elijah listened for God on the mountain. Then practice the Silence Exercise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>COMMIT</td>
<td>Ask participants to commit to silent prayer every day this week. Share a quote from Blessed Mother Teresa.</td>
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SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- Blindfold
- A large wooden cross or other item to hide
- Bibles
- Media device for access to YouTube video
- A quiet place for meditation (outdoors if possible)
- Small devotional books (optional)

- Participant Sheets
- Pens or pencils
- Snacks (optional)
LEADER TIPS

- Go through the session ahead of time and have the Bible passages, discussion questions, and prayer activities planned and rehearsed.

- Prepare the YouTube video ahead of time. Be sure to preview the video (as well as any commercials, which are sometimes risqué online) in advance. The video is called “Meet the Parents—Saying Grace” and can be found at youtube.com/watch?v=0DINF_ukr0I

CONNECT

Discipleship is about more than discussing the faith and participating in a small group. Discipleship requires learning from the example of a rabbi—in this case, participants learn from your daily example. It is healthy for your group members to do regular, everyday activities together because they will learn from your example and the example of their peers. As they grow in fellowship and deeper friendship through these activities, they will grow as disciples.

ACTIVITY

SAY: We’re going to focus today on how we can hear God in our prayer lives. There’s a lot of noise in our world, and this can be distracting when we try to listen to the voice of God in our prayer.

Let’s start with a game. I need one volunteer to be blindfolded and another volunteer to be the guide.

Choose two volunteers. After one is blindfolded, hide an object such as a large wooden cross or a Bible somewhere in the room. Clear away dangerous obstacles that could cause injury to the blindfolded person.

When I say “Go,” [name of blindfolded person] will need to find the [object] in the room. [Name of guide] will help you using only voice commands. The rest of us will create distractions by making as much noise as possible to prevent you from finding the object.
Begin play. The blindfolded person should try to find the object with only the help of the guide’s voice. Everyone else should make loud, distracting noises—to make things extra difficult, shout out wrong directions!

Play several rounds with other volunteers if time allows.

SAY: That was fun! It is difficult to hear and know which direction to go when there’s a lot of noise in the room. The same can be said of our prayer lives. With so much noise in the world, it can be difficult to take time for silence and to listen for God’s voice.

**INTRODUCTION**

**OPENING PRAYER**

Share the following passage from Blessed Mother Teresa. Then lead prayer and read the Scripture passage below.

“In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realize your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself. Souls of prayer are souls of great silence.”

—Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, *In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories and Prayers*

**PRAY:**

Gracious God, we ask that You teach us to listen to silence. Speak to us, Lord, for Your servants are listening. Open our hearts to listen and to love silence. We ask this through the intercession of Mary our Mother as we pray, Hail Mary….

OR

Have one of the participants open in prayer.
And he said, ‘Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.’ And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.”

—1 Kings 19:11-13a

SAY: Prayer is necessary for us to grow in the Christian life. It involves communicating with God. All forms of communication involve both speaking and listening to God.

Do you ever feel lost in prayer? Maybe you can relate to Greg in this video clip from the movie Meet the Parents.

Show this YouTube clip: youtube.com/watch?v=0DlNF_ukr0I

Sometimes, we’re uncomfortable taking time for prayer because we don’t know how to communicate with God. In particular, learning to listen to God can be really difficult. Blessed Mother Teresa says, “In the silence of the heart, God speaks…” Many saints in the Church have directed their disciples to learn to listen for God in the silence.

God once asked the prophet Elijah to go to a mountain and listen for Him. Here is what Elijah saw and heard while he was waiting for God.

Ask someone to read 1 Kings 19:11-13a as the others follow along. The passage can be found on the Participant Sheet.
“And he said, ‘Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.’ And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.”

—1 Kings 19:11-13a

**SAY:** Let’s take a few minutes to discuss the questions on your Participant Sheet. Get into groups of three or four for discussion. You’ll have about 5 to 7 minutes; then I’ll ask for volunteers to share some of your responses with the whole group.

*Allow time, and give a heads-up when they have just a minute or two remaining. Then read each of the questions and take several responses from the group.*

- Why do you think that God was not in all of the mighty natural disasters but instead in the still small voice?
- Why do so many people have a hard time hearing God in our world today?
- How much time do you spend listening to silence during the week? (Note: This does not mean simply time spent “without speaking.” Young people today spend a lot of time listening to music, texting, and sitting at a computer. They spend very little time in quiet or silence).
- Why is silence important in prayer?

*After you’ve discussed the above questions, continue.*

**ACTIVITY**

**SILENCE EXERCISE**

**SAY:** Mother Teresa always taught her postulants to begin prayer with a period of silence. Silence is the voice of God, and when we learn to listen to silence, we hear God’s voice. Today [or tonight] we’re going to take some time for silence. I want you to find a quiet place where you can go and be with God. Do not talk, make eye contact with another person, or get on your phone or media device. On your Participant Sheet, you’ll find instructions for how to engage with God in prayer.
Point out the “Silence Exercise” instructions, and then send everyone off to find a private space for 20 minutes of quiet time and reflection. Invite them to take along some small devotional books if you have them available. Be sure to participate in the activity yourself.

Weather permitting, take the group outside for prayer. Being in nature can help them to learn to listen to God in the silence. If you have a backyard, a park, or a scenic piece of land, it can really help the prayer exercise.

After 20 minutes, gather everyone back together.

**Ask:** What was your experience with God like in this period of silence?

Give everyone an opportunity to share.

**Commit**

Challenge your group members to take time for silence every day, using the steps in the Silence Exercise for guidance.

If time allows, read the following quote from the Participant Sheet.

“**There are some people who, in order not to pray, use as an excuse the fact that life is so hectic that it prevents them from praying. This cannot be. Prayer does not demand that we interrupt our work, but that we continue working as if it were a prayer. It is not necessary to always be meditating, nor to consciously experience the sensation that we are talking to God, no matter how nice this would be. What matters is being with Him, living in Him, in His will. To love with a pure heart, to love everybody, especially the poor, is a twenty-four hour prayer.**

“**Prayer begets faith, faith begets love, and love begets service on behalf of the poor. The first requirement of prayer is silence. People of prayer are people of silence.**”

—Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, *In Her Own Words*
CLOSING PRAYER

**Say:** We need to be comfortable in the silence and be aware of how God is speaking to us in those quiet times. I hope that your experience in the silence tonight revealed at least one thing that God was trying to communicate to you. Sometimes it's also good to say our prayers aloud, so everyone can benefit from participating in the prayer together. Let’s close our time together with a short prayer together.

*Ask for a volunteer to close the discipleship group in prayer. It can be a simple recited prayer or something spontaneous.*
SCRIPTURE QUOTE FOR THE WEEK

“And he said, ‘Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.’ And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.”

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DISCUSS

• Why do you think that God was not in all of the mighty natural disasters but instead in the still small voice?

• Why do so many people have a hard time hearing God in our world today?

• How much time do you spend listening to silence during the week (no music, texting, looking at computer…)?
• Why is silence important in prayer?

SILENCE EXERCISE

*During your time of silence, use the following steps to assist your prayer:*

1. Enter into complete silence. Silence is more than refraining from speaking. It means refraining from distractions, including use of phone, music, media, or even eye contact with another person.

2. Start with the sign of the cross, and then take a few moments to come into the presence of Jesus. Imagine Him in front of you and with you as you reflect in silence.

3. Ask God to speak to you in the silence.

4. Listen to the quiet and allow it to bring you into a peaceful state.

5. Just as a piece of art says something about an artist, nature communicates something about our God. If you are outside, observe nature and allow it to teach you about your Creator.

6. If you need an additional piece of inspiration, read and reflect on a Scripture verse or a devotional book.

What was your experience with God in this period of silence?

 COMMIT

During the week, take some time every day to practice the exercise of silence. Use the steps above for guidance. Read the following quote from Blessed Teresa for inspiration.
Here are four examples of how you can grow in your prayer life this week.

• Silence can be a great gift when we learn to enter into it. Turn off your music in the car or at night in bed. Spend less time on the computer and television this week. You may find more peacefulness when you learn to enter into silence.

• Prayer does not always bring a peaceful state or positive “feelings.” But if you are consistent with prayer on a daily basis, you will see long-term fruitfulness in your life.

• Get outside and take in the great outdoors. The earth was created by God and it speaks to us about His greatness. Go for a hike, sit by a lake, or lay in your backyard to gaze at the stars—as you enjoy God’s great creation, pay attention to how God is using it to speak to you.

• If you are trying to discern the voice of God, journaling can be a big help. When you take time in silence and prayer, always end it with some journal time. Take a few notes on what you heard and reflected on during your prayer. Also, write your questions and prayers to God in your journal. Over time, you will be able to look back on your journal entries and see how God answers your prayers.

“There are some people who, in order not to pray, use as an excuse the fact that life is so hectic that it prevents them from praying. This cannot be. Prayer does not demand that we interrupt our work, but that we continue working as if it were a prayer. It is not necessary to always be meditating, nor to consciously experience the sensation that we are talking to God, no matter how nice this would be. What matters is being with Him, living in Him, in His will. To love with a pure heart, to love everybody, especially the poor, is a twenty-four hour prayer.

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Every YDisciple session has three parts: CONNECT, DISCUSS, and COMMIT. The CONNECT section is designed to build trust, transparency, and community in the group. The DISCUSS section introduces topics of the faith, engages critical thinking, and facilitates valuable conversation. And the COMMIT section helps students take ownership of their faith and put it into practice. Use this Parent Sheet to take a glimpse at our most recent session so you can have a follow-up conversation with your teenager about his/her experience in the small group and encourage spiritual growth.

SESSION OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session is to teach teens to listen for God’s voice by prayerfully meditating in silence and reflecting on His creation.

CONNECT

In today’s world, there is far too little silence. We live amidst the constant clutter of noise and distraction, and when we do have a moment for silence, we often fill it by turning on music or the television or by picking up the telephone or logging on to the Internet. Interaction with God requires us to listen, and this requires us to be intentional about entering into silence.

Teens discovered how to listen to God in their prayer lives through meditation. Listening to God can take many different forms—reading the Scriptures or a devotional, basking in God’s creation outdoors, or experiencing God through holy artwork. When we learn to grow in our prayer lives, silence becomes a necessary part of our formation. Teens walked away with a challenge to embrace the silent times in their lives and use them to listen for God's voice.
Here are some conversation starters for this week. Remember to share your perspectives as well.

- When have you experienced hearing God’s voice the most in your life?
- Why is silence so important for growing in your prayer life?
- How can you be better at embracing the silence and allowing God to speak to you during those times?

These ideas can help teens with their challenge to create silent space for prayer time daily:

- **Take every opportunity for silence.** Silence can be a great gift when we learn to enter into it. Turn off your music in the car or at night in bed. Spend less time on the computer and television this week. You may find more peacefulness when you learn to enter into silence.

- **Be consistent.** Prayer does not always bring a peaceful state or positive “feelings.” But if you are consistent with prayer on a daily basis, you will see long-term fruitfulness in your life.

- **Spend time in nature.** Get outside and take in the great outdoors. The earth was created by God and it speaks to us about His greatness. Go for a hike, sit by a lake, or lay in your backyard to gaze at the stars—as you enjoy God’s great creation, pay attention to how God is using it to speak to you.

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**Parent Tip**

As a family, spend some time in the great outdoors. Choose a place where you can spend a few minutes in silence without too many distractions, and ask your family how this silent time went during the drive home.