

HEARING FROM GOD

GOAL: *To encourage families to listen to what God might be saying to each of them as they gather together in family prayer and to speak out these words for encouragement, edification and comfort (gift of prophecy 1 Corinthians 14:3).*

Preparation:

1. Bibles, pens, paper, whiteboard and markers, pillow and blanket, tube of downpipe, socks, phone, pup tent (or blanket draped over two chairs), balloon with heart drawn on it, rope, cuddly blanket.
2. Illustration cards (see *Inspire them* section below).
3. Bible story response cards (see *Extra Resources* on website).
4. Copies of chapter 'Listening prayer with children' (from *Can You Hear Me? Tuning into the God who Speaks*, by Brad Jersak—see *Extra Resources* on website).

Explain it: (10 min)

About 3070 years ago in the land of Israel a young boy was dedicated by his mum and promised to God to work in the temple with the high priest. His name was Samuel and he has two Bible books named after him, **1 and 2 Samuel**. We are going to act out part of the story so I need someone to be Samuel.

[Act out the story with a young boy taking the part of Samuel]

One night when he was still quite young he was asleep in the temple and he heard a voice calling, "Samuel, Samuel." He got up and ran to the priest Eli, thinking he was calling him but he wasn't so he sent Samuel back to bed. It happened two more times, then Eli realised God must be calling Samuel, so he told him to say, "Speak Lord. Your servant is listening." When Samuel said this the next time God called him, God gave him an important message to tell Eli. Eli hadn't been obeying God so when Samuel gave Eli the message from God, Eli knew it was true.

[Thank actor and send back to seat]

This message to us from the Bible tells us that God does speak to us no matter how old we are and the important thing is that we are ready listen to Him.

God, the creator that we worship, is three in one. God the Father, God the Son—whom we call Jesus—and God the Holy Spirit. God loves us so much that He sent Jesus down to earth and Jesus died for each of us, but was raised to life again. When Jesus went back to heaven to be with His father he said he would send the Holy Spirit to be with us to help us

We'll look at Scripture as our base. *[Get volunteers to read below]*

John 16:13

The Holy spirit shows us what God wants to say to us and the Holy Spirit helps us to pray.

Romans 8:26

God speaks to our hearts through the Holy spirit.

Do you know that there are at least 20 radio stations playing music right in this room now? *[Pause to listen]*. Why can't we hear them? We need to turn on the radio and tune it in to hear. That's a bit like us and God. We need to tune into His voice to hear what He has to say to us. One way to tune into God is to show thankfulness.

1 Thess. 5:18

We are thankful for all the good things God has given us and all the good things he still wants to give us. What are some things you are thankful for? *[Write them on white board.]* Ask for volunteers to pray prayers of thanks for these things. These can be one sentence prayers—model if you need to “Thank you God for...”

Sometimes we have done something wrong and we feel guilty. It is hard for us to hear from God when that has happened.

[Have a large tube of down pipe on the stage.] Get a volunteer up and whisper to them through the pipe “God loves you very much.” Can you hear what I said? Then stuff some socks in the downpipe. Whisper again. The socks are a bit like the wrong things we do. It blocks us from hearing God's voice clearly. Someone please read 1 John 1:9.

Before we go any further we are going to spend a minute in silence to ask God if there is anything we need to say sorry to Him for. *[Pause.]*

If something popped into your mind just then, you can do one of three things: think a sorry prayer to God in your mind, whisper the sorry prayer to God into your hand or whisper it to the person you have come with. Now we have the downpipe clear we can think about hearing from God for ourselves.

Sometimes we are too busy to hear from God. If we are always talking and never stop to listen then we never give him a chance to speak. *[Act out skit with someone pretending to have a phone conversation but never giving the other person a chance to speak.]* Today we will have some time to stop and listen to what God wants to say to us. We will practice it here so you can go home and keep practicing hearing from God at home too.

God is a spirit so how does He talk to us?

Inspire them: How does God speak to us in Scripture (5 min)

God has spoken to His people for thousands of years through the Bible. Today we are going to practice listening prayer in our family groups from a Bible story.

(You could choose any story you like for this exercise.) As I retell this story today, I want you to ask Jesus what the main point of this story is for you.

Story from Luke 1:26-49

2000 years ago in the country of Israel, God's people were waiting for him to speak to them. He used to speak to them through his prophets but they had been so disobedient that God stopped speaking to them for 400 years! Finally, one day in the Town of Nazareth, God sent his angel Gabriel, who was one of his special messengers, to speak to a young girl called Mary, who was probably only in her teens and she was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. The angel said “Peace be with you! the Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you.” Mary was quite shaken up by this but the angel said, “Don't be afraid, Mary. God has been gracious to you. God has a surprise for you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. He will be great, be called ‘the Son of the Highest’. The Lord will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will be king of the descendants of Jacob forever, his kingdom will never end.” Mary said, “But how? I'm not married.” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; Therefore the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God. And your relative Elizabeth, even though she is old is now six months pregnant. There

is nothing God cannot do.” Imagine you are Mary. In this culture 2000 years ago it is a terrible thing to be pregnant and not married. You love God, but this is really big. People will probably say really bad things about you! Will you say “No” to the angel and to God or will you be obedient to God and trust that God will look after you? Mary decided to trust God. She said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen to me as you have said.” And the angel left her. She went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was so happy to see her and Mary sang a song. “My heart praises the Lord. My soul is glad because of God my Saviour. He has remembered me his lowly servant. From now on all people will call me happy, because of the great things the Mighty God has done.”

Practice it: Putting it into practice in your family (5 min)

Hand out Bible story response cards.

In your family group have a chat about: What you think the main point of the story is? Where was God the Son in that story? What was He doing? Has God ever asked you to do anything big? Did you say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to it? Did God help you if you said Yes?

Inspire them: (20 min)

There are many other ways which God talks to us. I am going to choose children to come up front and hold up illustrations. (*I have laminated pictures of each one of these highlighted words*).

So as we have just learnt, God speaks to us through the **Bible**. Someone please read out **Psalm 119:105**. When we are reading sometimes a verse seems to jump out of the page very clearly. I have lots of these underlined in my Bible. This may be something God wants us to know.

When we stop and ask him to speak to us we may find that He pops a **picture** into your mind. If you are not sure what the picture means you can ask Him to explain it to you. This is the way God speaks to me the most.

Sometimes we will have a special **dream** while we are asleep, like Joseph did in the Bible, or we might have a **vision** while we are awake like John did when he wrote the book of Revelation.

Sometimes He shows us **colours** or **numbers**.

Sometimes we might just have an **impression** or a **feeling**, like peace or sadness.

Sometimes we hear God speaking **words** into our minds. One special gift mentioned in the bible is the **Word of Knowledge**. Someone please read **1 Corinthians 12:4,8**.

Discuss it: (3 min if time)

Have a chat in your families: Have you ever heard God speaking to you in any of these ways?

Sometimes we wonder if this is God talking to us? We can ask Him and He will tell us the truth. Someone read out **1 Corinthians 12:1**. If we think God has said something to us we can ask Him “Is that really you Lord Jesus?” It’s like this.

[I had a small pup tent erected on stage.] Show the pup tent. Tell the story below taken from the book Can You Hear Me? by Brad Jersak.

Jesus in the Pup Tent

“If your heart and mind were a pup tent and you were camping out, Jesus would be in the tent with you, because he is your friend. He loves you, and he promises to be there all the time.

Imagine that you are having a sleepover in the pup tent with him, and it is such a dark night that you can’t see him. But because he is your friend, and he loves you, he promises to answer you if you talk to him.

Imagine that when he answers you, for some reason you don't recognize his voice. When you double-check by asking, "Was that really you?" he won't be offended, and he won't ignore you. Because he is your friend, and he really loves you, you can expect him to reply, "Yes that was me."

Now imagine that three bullies have surrounded the tent without you realizing it. Maybe one of them has even snuck into the tent. They represent the world, the flesh and the devil. You ask Jesus a question and one of the bullies speaks up, trying to imitate your friend. You may think, "That sort of sounded like my friend, but I'm not so sure." So you ask, "Jesus was that you?" What's going to happen?" Will he stay silent? Will he let a sincere seeker (one who doesn't want to be deceived—one who hasn't purposely shut out his voice) fall prey to the bullies' deception? If Jesus is your friend and he really loves you, won't he speak up, saying, "No, that wasn't me?"

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God can talk to us and because he loves us, he can give us a gift called prophecy to talk through us to other people. Someone please read out **1 Corinthians 14:3**.

There are three reasons God gives us this gift. One is called **edification**, to build people up. *[Have a balloon with a picture of a heart drawn on it and get a child to blow it up to illustrate.]* As you hear the words of edification our hearts expand like this balloon.

One is called **exhortation**, to draw us nearer to God. *[Have a rope and draw a volunteer closer to you.]* As we hear words of exhortation, it is like God drawing us closer to him.

The third one is called **comfort**. When we are going through sad times we need comfort. *[Have a cuddly blanket to wrap round another volunteer.]*

In this way we are being like the telephone. God speaks through us to the other person.

Model it: Hearing from God for one person (5 min)

We are going to practice hearing from God for someone now. I would like you all to hold your hands out in front of you with palms up showing that you are ready for God to give you the gift of prophecy to encourage, edify or comfort someone today. Let's close our eyes while I pray.

"Dear God, Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit and I thank you that you give us each this gift of prophecy that we can encourage, edify and comfort the people around us and especially the people in our families. I pray that we will be open to receive this gift today and use it to help each other. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen."

I am going to ask a volunteer to come up the front for us to all pray and ask God to show us a word of encouragement, edification or comfort for them. Sometimes we might share something that is very meaningful to them. I would ask them to let us know. Sometimes it doesn't make sense to us now but God may show us what it means later on.

I am going to ask you to close your eyes and ask God to pop a word, picture, verse or impression into your mind right now to share with the person. Often it will be the first thing that you see or hear. Don't be shy to share it. Sometimes if we share a picture and we don't know what it means, someone else will know the meaning. We are practicing and it doesn't matter if you are not too sure. This is a safe place to have a go at sharing what you think God might be saying.

Spend a few minutes allowing time for people to share. Get the person to share if anything was really meaningful for them.

Practice it: (10 min)

Now we are going to try this in our family groups. Each person will have a turn receiving words of encouragement, edification or comfort from each other. The person whose turn it is should sit in the middle so they can hear what everyone else in your family is saying to them. **Don't start by praying for the person.** Start by asking God what He wants to say to them or show them. You have paper and pens in your group. Sometimes it is easier to draw what you see. You might want to write a note of something that really stood out for you and put in your Bible to take home and keep encouraging yourself with it. At the end if you want to pray for each other that is great.

Take it home: (1 min)

As you leave you will find a chapter entitled 'Listening Prayer with children' from the book *Can You Hear Me? Tuning into the God who Speaks*, by Brad Jersak. This chapter will give you ideas about continuing the journey of listening prayer in your families at home.

May God bless you all in your journey as you listen to His Voice.