

LAUNCH

How do I hear from God?

Description

The Creator of everything longs to talk to his creation—including and especially *you*. What exactly are you supposed to talk about? Are you only supposed to make requests or is prayer a two-way conversation? Create an ongoing dialogue by learning to recognize the many ways God speaks, and how you can know it's really his voice.

Goals

1. Help participants feel accepted, safe, and free to ask questions and grow spiritually.
2. Help participants realize God does speak to them and has spoken to them in the past, even though they may not have recognized him at the time.
3. Help participants recognize the variety of ways that God speaks to them, and practice hearing him.
4. Encourage participants to listen to God and build up their faith so they can trust they are hearing God's voice.

Outline

Starter: "Meet the Parents – Day by Day"

Story Part 1: Beau (written story only, video not yet available)

Bible Encounter: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Story Part 2: Beau (written story only, video not yet available)

Experience: 5 Tips for Discerning God's Voice, Daily Examen

Opening

Give a sincere and warm welcome to each person, letting them know you are glad they chose to come to the session. Share the vision for the group, then feel free to use the following language to open the session:

Today, we're going to discuss "How do I hear from God?" It's important to realize God has always been speaking to us even before we knew him. Many times, God has been speaking to us, but we were unaware, untrained in hearing his voice, or just not listening. But God does want to speak to us, and is willing and able if we'll open ourselves to hearing his voice.

God has many ways of getting our attention: through a friend, a moment of quiet reflection, a peaceful moment in nature, music, a Bible verse, an image, or a sense of an inner nudge or whisper to our hearts.

Today, we'll explore how it's possible to hear God's voice and know it is God speaking. We'll hear a college student's experience about hearing—and not hearing—God. We'll look at the story of a young boy in the Bible who heard God speak, and then we will practice listening to God ourselves.

Starter: “Meet the Parents – Day by Day”

What is one question you have about praying and listening to God?

Story Part 1: Beau

Have you ever thought or felt like God was speaking to you? If so, how did he speak and why do you think it was God? If not, how do you interpret the silence?

Besides sharing your experience, you may need to help participants by also asking “Can you think of a great song you heard and were really stirred by? What moved you?” or “Has anyone ever prayed for you before? What did you sense or what words came up then?” or “Have you ever heard a sermon and felt like it was speaking directly to you?” These are all ways God may have been speaking. We want each person to feel confident God is speaking and that they can hear because God wants to communicate with them.

Bible Encounter: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Context: Samuel was an Old Testament prophet and judge. He was born to a woman named Hannah who had been infertile until she asked God for a child. When Samuel was born, Hannah was so grateful to God for answering her prayer that she dedicated Samuel to the Lord’s service. When Samuel was very young, Hannah took Samuel to live with a priest named Eli and serve in the temple of the Lord.

1. Who are the characters in this story? Explain the role each plays in prayer and hearing God’s voice.

God

- God started the conversation. We often think we have to be the ones to start talking, which puts all the pressure on us to know what to do and say. As a beginner at prayer, this can feel overwhelming. God is the initiator. Prayer starts with God, not us.

Samuel

- Samuel was simply open. The most important thing was that he was not skeptical of God speaking.
- Samuel was expectant once Eli told him God was speaking to him. He listened for God’s voice and immediately responded, “Speak, for your servant is listening” when he heard God again.

Eli

- Eli was an interpreter and guide for Samuel. He didn’t tell Samuel what God was saying, he simply told him it was God speaking to Samuel and how Samuel should respond.
- Your notes:

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2. Why do you think Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's three different times?
 - God's voice is not usually an abstract audible voice that comes booming out of the clouds. God can speak any way he wants, but a lot of times it is through a voice that sounds very familiar.
 - Many people think God never speaks to them because they think they're hearing their own voice, or the voice of their pastor or leader in their head. For instance, if you had a good dad, you know how many times in life you say to yourself, "I can just hear my dad telling me..." When we become a Christian and God's Spirit lives in us, we start to hear God's voice just like that.
 - Again, that voice can come to us many different ways, depending on how we are wired to hear God.
 - Your notes:

3. Eli interpreted the activity of God in Samuel's encounter. What do you think the role of Christian community is in helping you hear and respond to God's voice?
 - They don't tell you what God says, they point you back to him.
 - They help you become aware of the fact that God is speaking to you.
 - They may show you how to respond.
 - Community is always meant to be involved with prayer and listening for God's voice. God speaks through community, not just individuals.
 - Your notes:

4. What does the passage indicate about God in that he called Samuel four different times?
 - God is patient. He will wait for us, even if we don't understand he is speaking right away.
 - God is persistent. He will keep speaking to us until we hear him. If God has a message for us, he will make sure we get it.
 - Your notes:

5. How does verse seven about God speaking to Samuel before Samuel knew him affect you?
 - God speaking does not depend on us knowing him. This verse shows that God can and will speak to us before we know him. As new believers, we can be confident that God is speaking now.
 - Hearing God's voice isn't something we achieve at a higher level, or some elite status of spiritual maturity or achievement. It happens now!
 - Your notes:

6. What are some key takeaways from this passage about God speaking and us hearing?
 - God initiates the conversation.
 - His voice can sound like a familiar voice.
 - There is a process in learning to recognize his voice.
 - We may need an interpreter to help us become aware of God.
 - Your notes:

Notice how God spoke to Samuel even before Samuel knew him and well before Samuel even recognized him. God's voice sounded so familiar, Samuel thought it was Eli. There are certain times in our lives when God is speaking to us, but it sounds so familiar that we want to write it off. Sometimes the small voice in our head sounds so much like "mom," or we assume that a song we listen to over and over touches everyone the same way, or that some inner nudge or sense is just wishful thinking. So we find ways to write off and discount what God might be saying.

The reality is that God is speaking, many times in very ordinary ways. Let's be more open and attentive to these ordinary ways God may be speaking to us!

Story Part 2: Beau

Experience: 5 Tips for Discerning God's Voice, Daily Examen

5 Tips for Discerning God's Voice Talk through the handout on "5 Tips for Discerning God's Voice." Help participants understand that just because they hear things in prayer or are moved by something, that doesn't always mean it is actually God speaking to them.

Daily Examen Give participants the opportunity to practice hearing from God immediately by leading them in the Daily Examen. You may want to provide some background using the following words:

The Daily Examen is a centuries-old practice of noticing where God shows up in your day in big ways and small. It helps you take a few minutes out from your busy life to quietly reflect on the highs and lows that day, and you can then sit and listen for God to speak to you about those things.