

5 Steps For Teaching Kids To Listen [Hear] to God in Prayer By Natasha Crain

A couple of years ago, my husband and I became involved with a ministry to feed homeless people. We were considering different directions for the ministry's future and the leader at the time came to our house for discussion. Preparing for this meeting, I made flowcharts and drafted some financial models. When the leader arrived, however, he asked if we could pray and just listen to what God had to tell each of us.

I truly started to panic. Did God talk to him so clearly on a regular basis that he knew he could just pray right now and hear an answer? Without considering my charts and financial models? I had no idea what I was supposed to do to hear God speak at that moment.

Our friend started praying: "Lord, please speak to each of us now..." and then paused. A couple of minutes passed like hours before he pierced the silence by asking, "What did you hear?" My husband and I sheepishly reported radio silence. I was, however, on pins and needles, waiting to hear how God spoke to our friend. He indeed had a strong feeling about the ministry's direction that had developed over days of prayer.

He was able to hear God's voice because he was used to listening. I was only used to talking.

That experience brought to light a sorely lacking spiritual discipline in my life: listening to God in prayer. It's something I was never taught in church (or home), and I would venture to say most people aren't. Your kids may never be introduced to this prayer discipline either if you don't personally teach them.

Here are 5 practical steps for teaching kids to listen to God through prayer.

1. Explain why listening is as important as talking.

"Personal relationship with Jesus" may be one of the most underexplained phrases in the Christian lexicon. We all know we should have a personal relationship with Jesus, we tell others they should have one and we want our kids to have one, but have we really considered how foreign that idea is to a new (child or adult) believer? Our earthly notion of "relationship" involves two people seeing, hearing, and touching each other. 99.999% of people have not seen, heard or touched Jesus. Thus, the concept of a "relationship" with Him is literally foreign to us – there are exactly zero models for it here on earth. We need to be mindful of this and explicitly give our kids guidance on how this "other worldly" relationship can and should look. Listening in prayer is a cornerstone of that relationship.

Explain to your kids that listening is as important as talking because it transforms prayer into the two-way communication needed for relationship; it's the difference between writing mental letters to Jesus versus being "on the phone" with Him.

2. Manage expectations.

Since God's voice is usually not overly obvious, we need to provide guidance on what to expect and what not to expect from listening in prayer:

You probably will not hear God's voice audibly. God's voice in prayer tends to be in how He directs our thoughts during that quiet time.

It's completely natural to wonder whether those thoughts are coming from God or from yourself. It is continued prayer and listening that distinguish God's voice from our own.

God sometimes seems completely silent. That doesn't mean he isn't there or that we should give up listening. We have to rely on God's timing and continue to pray.

God doesn't usually answer our questions with the final answer. For example, asking God, "What should I do with my life?" rarely results in a crystal clear message about the end-game 40 years from now. God often holds our hand through baby steps rather than catapulting us to final answers. Listen for those next steps.

3. Offer practical examples of how to listen during prayer.

We need to provide practical guidance on how to incorporate listening time into prayer. Here are two possibilities to introduce (there are many others):

Simply ask, "God, is there anything you would have me hear from you right now?" Then, be silent.

If there is something specific for which guidance is needed, ask the question, then be silent.

A natural question for someone new to this is how long one should remain silent. There is no right answer, but kids need to understand it is more than two seconds.

4. Teach the importance of a scheduled "God" time.

It's very difficult to talk to God during the hustle and bustle of life if you don't have a quiet time reserved for prayer. It's even more difficult to listen to God in those busy times. "God, is there anything you would have me hear from you right now?" followed by a two-second pause before heading out the door is highly unlikely to result in a spiritual awakening. Listening requires time set apart. If you haven't talked to your kids about setting aside God time, this is a great reason to do so.

5. Point out opportunities for your kids to ask for God's guidance.

Knowing what kinds of things we can and should seek guidance on is half the battle. If your kids are facing big (or small!) decisions, take the opportunity to point out that they should pray for God's guidance and listen accordingly. Even better, take the opportunity to pray with them while you both listen for God's voice!