



Helping Children Learn to Recognize God's Voice

Assume that your children already hear from God. It is important for them to learn how to recognize the voice of God. As parents, we could learn together with them.

*In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.* Acts 2:17; see also Joel 2:28

Children are so close to Jesus' heart, even the children who are still in their mothers' wombs. From the day they are conceived, God knew all about them, and the plans He has for them (Psalm 139:13-17).

Two things my husband, Peter, never wanted to do were to be a missionary or to adopt a child. One day, Peter said, "Let's adopt a little boy." This was a miracle! So, we put our name in at the Children's Adoption Centre in Montreal, where we lived at the time. Eleven months later, on our daughter Laurie's birthday, we received a phone call that there's a little boy available for adoption. His birth mother had already named him Peter. He was 2 1/2 months old and had some physical handicaps. We knew this was our son! We didn't care what the physical handicaps were. Later we realized that at the time that God changed Peter's heart to adopt a little boy, was right at the time that little Pete would have been conceived in his mother's womb.

Jesus used a little child to illustrate who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He declared "*whoever takes the lowly position of a child*" is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child, welcomes Him, and the Father (Matt 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:47-48).

Jesus showed much love to children:

- He placed his hands on them to pray for them and bless them (Matt 19:13a).
- He challenged the disciples not to hinder children from coming to Him (Matt 19:13b-14).

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me,
and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."* Matt 19:14

Don't forget what you've seen, and the faithfulness of God. Teach them to your children, and your children's children (Deut 4:9, 11:18-21; Prov 17:6). Children around the world are being taught to pray, and praise God.

*Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger. Psalm 8:2*

God is going to reveal more and more to children. We must teach them God's ways from a very early age (Luke 1:67-80).

*Train a child in the way he should go,
and when he is old he will not turn from it. Prov 22:6*

As we teach children, we must listen to them. We need to include the children. They hear differently than we do. They don't always close their eyes; they could be jumping from one place to another as they are listening to God.

*At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said,
"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned,
and revealed them to little children.
Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. Luke 10:21; Matt 11:25-26*

*The secret things belong to the Lord our God,
but the things revealed belong to us
and to our children forever,
that we may follow all the words of this law. Deut 29:29*

At age 12, Jesus listened to the teachers, and He asked questions. They were amazed at His understanding, and His answers. His parents didn't understand, but Mary treasured these things in her heart. Jesus was obedient to His parents, and grew in wisdom and stature, and favor with God and man (Luke 2:41-52).

Parents are responsible to lead their children into an intimate friendship with God, not a religious tradition. Traditions aren't wrong, but what God wants is a relationship with children.

Children hear the Lord easier than anyone else. It's the parents' unbelief that hinders them. Children will naturally hear from God. They see angels. God speaks to them in visions and dreams. Similarly, the enemy speaks through fears, nightmares, and the voice of others.

Parents can help their children to listen to God's voice:

- Simply help them to understand the Four Voices that they can easily listen to. (See chapter on "Four Voices We Can Hear").
- Ask Jesus if there's anything in their hearts that would hinder Him from talking to them.
- Lead them to submitting their minds to Jesus and silencing the voice of others.
- Explain to them that they can tell the enemy to be gone in Jesus' name.
- And ask the Holy Spirit to speak to them and lead them.

Children know right away when they've done something wrong. If there are unconfessed sins in their hearts, give them time to listen to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will bring these memories back to them.

I was teaching a group of children to help them learn how to listen to God's voice. When the children asked Jesus if there was anything that would hinder them from listening to Him, a little boy said, "Jesus told me to burn my Pokemon cards." And he wanted to do that. He wanted to be obedient to Jesus. Later, his mother asked me, "How did you get him to burn the cards? I've been trying to get him to do that for a year!" I replied, "I didn't tell him to burn them, Jesus did."

With another group of young children, we asked Jesus if our hearts were right. A little boy said he had an argument with his daddy before class that morning. His daddy wasn't very kind to him. When I asked him if he'd been kind to his dad, he responded that he had argued with his dad. I asked the little boy if he'd be willing to forgive his dad for how he treated him. And if he'd be willing to ask for his dad's forgiveness for how he responded. He said "Yes!" and that he would do that at lunch time.

The class went on to ask if there was anything that Jesus wanted them to do. Together with his friend, the little boy who got his heart right had a picture/vision of a man in blue jeans and red shirt. Jesus wanted them to share the gospel with him. They asked Jesus where this man was, and Jesus told them that they would find him at the bottom of the driveway. At lunch time, they went down to that driveway, but the man wasn't there. They went again after school, and there was the man that God had shown them in the vision! He was across the road, and they weren't allowed to cross the road by themselves. So, they asked Jesus to send the man to them. Jesus did – suddenly, the man crossed the road to get into his friend's car. The boys went to the man and told him that Jesus loves him, and that they've been praying for him that morning. They had an amazing talk with this man, and his friend.

When I was a child, we were often told, "That's just your imagination!" God gave us imaginations so we can see with our spiritual eyes. So, we mustn't hinder, but instead, encourage children with their imaginations.

God usually speaks through children's imaginations and gives them pictures. Jesus said "*I will never leave you*" (Heb 13:5b). So, ask children where they see Him. Tell children that Jesus is right in the room with them, and ask the children where Jesus is in the room with them, what's He doing, and what does He look like. Children may get thoughts in their minds, or they may get pictures.

Children may sometimes get a picture or hear from the Father a piece of a puzzle of a whole story. It seems incomplete, but don't dismiss what they see or hear. Instead, teach them to ask Jesus how they can put all the things they have seen or heard together, and what they can do.

One day in a Korean village, I was meeting with a small group of children whose families were on outreach. After we got our hearts right, we asked Jesus, "How can we reach this village for You. What do You want us to do?" We waited, and one child said, "I just saw a bunch of balloons." Another said, "I saw somebody playing a flute." Yet another child said, "I think we need to go talk to the mayor." Another child said, "I just saw a puppet show!" So, I said, "Okay, you all got part of a picture of what Jesus wants us to do. Let's ask Him how we can put all these together."

We went to the mayor and asked if we can have a little parade in the village, and have a puppet show at the end. He gave his permission. We bought balloons. And it just happened that one of the parents could play a flute! He brought his flute with him, and we prepared a puppet show. A couple of days later, we went down through the village. When the children heard the flute and saw the balloons, they came out of their houses. They followed us, and when we got to the end of the road, we shared the story of Jesus through puppets. Many came to know Jesus as their personal friend and Savior that day.

Explain to children that Jesus wants to be their best friend. He's in their hearts, but what does that look like. Children can ask Jesus, "Where do you want to meet with me?"

Bedtime prayers can be turned into listening prayers. Instead of us just talking, we can talk back and forth with Jesus. If your child has burdens, or worries, let them picture themselves putting these in a sack and giving them to Jesus. And He will take them away. Now they can sleep peacefully without worries.

When a child has a nightmare, you can invite Jesus into the nightmare. Go back to the picture the child had in the nightmare, and teach your child to ask Jesus:

- Where are You with me in the nightmare?
- Where did the monsters come from?
- What do You want to do with them?

You can ask the children, "Can you also see angels there? What are the angels doing?"

A 9-year-old, John, has been having some terrible nightmares. They were so bad that he spent those nights with his parents in their bed. John's mom asked my daughter, Laurie, if she would do some listening prayer with him. Below is the account from Laurie.

"When we met, John was nervous and fidgety. He told me that his nightmares were about monsters—they would come into his room and scare him. Before we started asking Jesus questions about these monsters, I told him that if he wanted to, he could walk around, or keep his eyes open, or even do somersaults if he needed to. He could even play while we talked to Jesus. We began by asking Jesus some simple questions so that John would understand exactly what we would be doing. After John became more comfortable, he agreed that we would ask Jesus about the monsters.

So, I asked Jesus what He would like to do with these monsters when they scared John in the night. At first John said, "I don't know." When we asked Jesus the question again, he said, "I see a cage!" Then we asked Jesus what the cage was for. By now John was hearing very quickly from Jesus. He heard Jesus say that the cage was for the monsters. Next, he asked Jesus what He would do with the monsters. Jesus told John that He was going to lock the monsters up in the cage! And that only Jesus and John would have the key to open the cage. Nobody else! Jesus would take care of the monsters and He would keep them in the cage.

I asked him: "What do you think about that, John?"

John: "I think that's cool!"

He agreed that every time he had nightmares about monsters, he would put them inside the cage that Jesus provided. We closed by praying that Jesus would help John to do this, and that He would take away the nightmares completely.

We don't deny what children are seeing and experiencing. We invite Jesus into the situation, e.g. If they are having a hard day at school, try to find out as soon as they get home what is hurting them. These are some of the questions that you could ask children:

- What happened?
- How did that make you feel?
- Can you forgive _____?
- Anything you need to say you're sorry for?
- And how does Jesus see that person who _____?

When our son, Pete, was about 10 years old, he came home from school one day clearly very upset. When I asked him what was wrong, he replied in a rough way, "Nothing!"

I said, "Something is bothering you."

He said, "No!" in what sounded like a rebellious way.

I asked Jesus, "Is he hurting, or is he being rebellious?"

Jesus said, "He's hurting."

So, I said, "Peter, would you like some juice and cookies?" He said, Yes!

And I asked, "Pete, something is bothering you. Something's hurting you. What's wrong?"

He said, "David was unkind to me on the bus."

I said, "Well, can you forgive him?"

He said, "No."

I said, "Pete, if you can't forgive him, Jesus can't forgive you. We don't always feel like forgiving, but we choose to forgive."

He said, "Okay, I'll forgive David!"

Before I knew it, he was outside playing with his friends. If I had disciplined him instead of listening to Jesus, and to him, it would have been adding one hurt on top of another.

When we hear God's voice through children, the secrets of heaven are just around the corner because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them (Matt 19:14). My daughter, Michelle, shares her experience with her son, Jonathan below. He sees angels often.

One day I went on a long walk with Jonathan. He was about 8 years old then. I (Michelle) asked him if he'd seen any angels lately. He said, "No", and then went on to say, "but I did see heaven".

I asked, "How?"

Jonathan: "It was like a television set that I could see into - I wasn't asleep."

And for the next 20 minutes, Jonathan described what he had seen in Heaven.

"There was water; very clear. You could walk into it. And you could breathe in it - you didn't have to hold your breath. Jesus had a throne room. And He would take like a roll call and have each of His people come into His throne room with Him. He would tell each person why He created them and why He gave them the gifts that He gave them. He would also show you where your special friends were in Heaven so you could be together. It was always light - very, very bright. And, mom, He is funny and He laughs at your jokes even if they aren't funny. Also, you can see the three crosses at a distance on a hill."

Encourage children to ask God questions. Often, when you want to include Jesus in your imagination, it's easier to close your eyes. Encourage children to talk to Jesus in their imaginations, and to ask Him questions.

What is your favorite memory?
What did it look like?
How did it sound, smell, or taste?

Ask children to look for Jesus in that picture.
What's He doing?
What's He saying?

Jesus lives in your heart. What does that look like?
He's with you everywhere; in the bedroom, school, church, or park.
While in church during worship, ask children if they see angels, and to draw pictures of what they see is happening.

You can also do this with a Bible story. Ask children what their favorite Bible story is. Then have them close their eyes while you read the Bible story to them. Tell them to 'step' into that picture in their imagination, e.g. Daniel in the lions' den, or being on the boat as Jesus was sleeping when a storm came up. Ask children where they are in the picture, and what are they doing.

Children need to know that God will never leave them. He's with them when they are playing games, and He also cries with them when they hurt. In fact, children can ask Jesus what game He wants to play with them, and why. Jesus loves to play games, and to be included in their games.

Much of what I've learned, and taught, about helping children to recognize God's voice is from Brad Jersak's ***Children Can Hear Me?***

When I was in Egypt, teaching young adults how to listen to God, I led them to ask Jesus what game He wanted to play with them. They all looked at me with faces that seemed to say, "What on earth are you asking us to do?" I sensed the Holy Spirit say to get Brad Jersak's book. I read the book to them, and at the end again led them to ask Jesus what game He wanted to play with them. I learned that they never played games with their fathers before, so this was a foreign concept to them. They each heard a game that Jesus wanted to play with them, and it brought such joy to them. We even ended the time with a water fight! We had such fun!

This confirms what Jesus says ...

... *"Truly I tell you,
unless you change and become like little children,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matt 18:3*