



Small Group Studies for Parents

Helping Your Child Hear from God Joy Vee

'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

Summary

This accessible and insightful resource aims to encourage us to consider how God might speak to our children – and sometimes through them to us!

As parents, we rightly take our responsibility to raise our children in the Christian faith seriously, helping them to read and understand the Bible, and to begin to engage with prayer. But how many of us are confident – or have even considered – parenting them in hearing God's voice?

Joy Vee has extensive teaching experience and has written multiple books introducing themes of faith for children and teenagers. Together with her husband, she has also raised her son and daughter, both now in their later teens, to expect God to speak to them. When making decisions big and small, they have many testimonies of how the Lord has both provided for them in the unlikeliest ways and walked with them through challenging events as they have grown-up expecting Him to speak.

Drawing on this rich experience, these three studies are a conversation starter. They will help you to think through how God spoke to children in various ways in the Bible, and how He might still today – including to the children in your lives. Practical tasks and tips accompany each study to facilitate putting into practice the lessons learned, for both you and your children.

Do you really expect God to answer your children's prayers and speak to them in turn? Be inspired to see God work in new ways in your family, and to help your kids discover God is very much alive today!

Joy Vee



Joy Vee grew up in Lincoln, in the East of England. Since the age of 18, she has had over twenty homes, living in Ukraine, Russia and now back in the UK. All of this travelling has given her a heart for missions, which has seen her teaching English to refugees and asylum seekers.

She has recently returned to Lincoln with her husband and two teenage children, where she now works with Acts Trust empowering people to get out of poverty.

Joy is the author of several books for children and young people, including *The Treasure Man*. Written for 8-12-year-olds, it is a fictional story intended to be read by parents with their children, that will introduce them to how God can speak and might talk to them:

www.instantapostle.com/books/the-treasure-man/

ISBN: 9781912726370 – 112 Pages – Paperback £7.99, Kindle £1.99

For more resources and information:

www.joyvee.org



Study One

The Lord Called to Samuel 1 Samuel 3

Summary

God speaks to and through our children. How do we teach them to listen to Him?

Opening activity

Do you have any experience of God speaking to you through children? Or speaking to you when you were a child (whether you grew up knowing Him or not)?

Context of the passage

As a small child, under the direction of Eli, the High Priest, Samuel served the Lord in the tabernacle, the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was kept until the Temple was built. Although in 1 Samuel 2 a man of God came to Eli and pronounced judgement on his family owing to his sons' rampant greed and immorality, chapter 3 tells us that 'in those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions' (v1) – so we can be sure that Eli wasn't expecting God to speak to Samuel.

At that time, Samuel was only a child, and there are no previous documented incidences in the history of Israel of God speaking to such a young person. Furthermore, we know from the previous chapter's prophecy that God wasn't happy with what was taking place at the tabernacle, so Eli might have assumed God wouldn't show up there. But as Samuel was sleeping in the house of the Lord, God spoke.

Samuel didn't know the voice of God and thought it was Eli calling for him. After Samuel had woken Eli for the third time, Eli realised this wasn't a normal disruption and 'that the Lord was calling the boy' (v8). He gave Samuel clear and simple instructions on how to respond.

Although Eli had not been a good parent to his own children, in this passage we can learn from him. He didn't dismiss Samuel as an

inconvenience or belittle his experience; he didn't barge in and try to take over; and nor did he leave Samuel alone to process what the Lord had said. Instead, we see Eli teaching Samuel how to hear the Lord, trusting that the Lord is able to speak to such a young child, and then helping him deal with the very difficult word that was given to him. Eli's input helped lay a foundation in Samuel's life of listening to God, and as we see at the end of the passage, the Lord 'let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground' (v19).

Samuel's ministry proved to be a turning point for the children of Israel, and he wisely guided them, through many tumultuous years, into David's kingship. But his journey started when he was taught to say, 'Speak, for your servant is listening' (v10).

Read Bible passage

1 Samuel 3

Discussion questions

1. How was Samuel (possibly unknowingly) preparing himself to hear from the Lord? (3:1-3)
2. What do you notice about Eli's instruction to Samuel? (3:9)
3. What did Eli do the following morning? (3:16-17)
4. What do you notice about Eli's reaction to Samuel? (3:18)
5. Would you have had the same reaction faced with a child giving you that news?

Further points to consider/topics to ask questions around

When Eli understood God was speaking to Samuel, he gave him clear instructions – the actual words to speak to God – and we see Samuel repeating them verbatim. Are we able to give simple instructions to our children about how to hear God? Simple, one-line prayers which even the youngest ones can pray?

The next morning, Eli asked Samuel what the Lord had said. Do we follow up with our children? If we pray that they have heavenly dreams or that God speaks to them about something in some other way, do we allow space the next morning to hear what happened?

Do we listen to our children when they tell us about a strange dream they had, or something that happened at night? I remember a phase when my children seemed to come down every morning with long, convoluted stories about what had happened in their dreams. I usually didn't pay too much attention. Looking through Scripture, we often see God speak to people at night or in their dreams. How can we be more discerning when our children talk to us about these things?

Eli himself had most likely never heard God speak to him as He did to Samuel. Are we ready for God to speak to our children in ways He hasn't spoken to us? Or would we prefer to dismiss anything like this as a child's overactive imagination?

Samuel's message from the Lord confirmed to Eli the prophecy previously given to him (although there's no sign Samuel knew of it). Eli didn't blame or accuse Samuel for his message, nor did he puff Samuel up and cause him to be proud. Eli's reaction pointed back to God. When God speaks through our children, how can we be careful to keep them focused on God, not on the power of the message?

Sometime dreams are just dreams, but having an expectancy for God to speak in this way, to us and others, is a great foundation.

Closing prayer and / or activity

Father, I want You to speak to my children. Help me to teach them how to listen to You. Help me be discerning about the things they tell me, and take them further than You have taken me.

Goal for this week

Begin a journal, making note of the dreams your children have, or other ways they think He may have spoken to them. Pray together over what you have recorded and ask God what He is saying or doing through them. And don't worry if they don't have anything to share straightaway – this is a journey and God will walk with each of us in our own way!



Study Two

Different Ways God Can Speak to Your Child Acts 2:17-18

Summary

God can speak to His people – including children – in many and varied ways.

Opening activity

Think of the many ways God has spoken to you and those you know in the past and write them down.

Does anyone have anything they would like to share from last week's journal exercise?

Context of the passage

In the last session, we considered the start of Samuel's ministry, which began in his childhood. This time, in the New Testament at Pentecost, we see God pouring out His Spirit, not just on the chosen few, but on all people, young and old. Personally, I am struck that even slaves (the Greek term translated 'servants' in v18 – *doulos* – included those who were legally considered to be their master's property, on the same level as animals) are apparently not excluded from hearing God.

'Your sons ... will prophesy' (v17) – anyone familiar with the Old Testament should be expecting this to happen! But '... and daughters'? This is different. Although not unheard of, female prophets were rare in the Jewish Scriptures. Yet here the Lord is speaking of a time when it seems both sons and daughters will prophesy equally, as Philip the evangelist's daughters do in Acts 21:9.

The passage lists several ways God will speak, and throughout Scripture we see God speaking in multiple ways. But one theme of this passage seems to be that God will speak in ways that are unexpected. It is not unusual for children to have dreams, and it wouldn't be out of place for an old, wise man to receive a vision, but here we see God turning things on

their heads – the old men are having dreams and the young men are seeing visions.

We must keep in mind that God is God. As Psalm 115:3 tells us, 'Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.' As He demonstrates in this passage, and as we saw in last week's study, God can speak to us (and our children) in various ways. Regardless of how God speaks to our children, our response, as we saw last time, should be twofold: to teach them to recognise His voice and to support them with what they hear.

Next time we will look at how to support the child, but for now we will look back at our verse for the key to teaching them how to hear. Twice we are told in today's verses that it is 'my Spirit' who is being poured out. Ultimately, 'how' God speaks to our children is not as important as 'who' is speaking to them. If we ask the Holy Spirit to speak to our children, or teach them to ask for themselves, we need to trust that He will, and in a way that He chooses. Matthew 7:9-11 says, 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!'

If our children are genuinely seeking to hear from God, we must trust that He will talk to them in a way that is appropriate and relevant to them. Let's encourage our children that their Heavenly Father wants to speak and be in relationship with them.

Read Bible passage

Acts 2:1-18

Discussion questions

1. How do you feel about the idea of God speaking to and through your children?
2. How would you feel about the opposing idea – that God does not speak to and through children?
3. In this passage, the Holy Spirit's intervention causes great amazement and some resistance – would we prefer God to speak in ways that are less surprising and 'safer'? If so, why?
4. Given some of the potential problems that can accompany ideas of dreams, visions and prophecies, why do you think God chooses to speak in these ways?

Further points to consider/topics to ask questions around

Can you find other ways in Scripture that God has spoken to His people?
Here are some ideas to get you started:

Dreams	Genesis 41
Visions	Daniel 7
Angels	Luke 1
Prophets	Isaiah 6
A voice from heaven	Matthew 3:17
Through other people	1 Thessalonians 5:11
Through creation	Romans 1:20

It's worth noting that many of the people in these instances were young when God first spoke to them, just teenagers – Joseph, Daniel, Mary, for example.

Can you think of any others?

Can you recall times God has spoken to you in some of these ways?

Closing prayer and / or activity

Father, help me to be open and sensitive to the times You talk to me and my children, especially when it is in unexpected ways.

Goal for this week

Continue to make notes in the journal of times your children approach you with something that may be God speaking to them – don't dismiss anything as too small or insignificant.

Is there a specific concern or problem they or you as a family are facing that you could pray into with them and ask God to speak about?



Study Three

Testing Every Word James 3:13-18

Summary

What tools can we give our children to test what the Lord is saying to them?

Opening activity

Consider in your own life how you discern what thoughts are from God and what are from yourself? This is an area we are constantly growing in. Share together what has helped you.

Context of the passage

1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 tells us, 'Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good.' It is important when we are learning to listen to God that we learn to test those thoughts we think may be from Him and evaluate their source. Spontaneous thoughts may be God speaking to us, but they could also be from ourselves, or even demonic suggestions.

We need to teach our children how to discern whether the thoughts and dreams they have are from the Holy Spirit, and what to do with them. The first thing is for them to share with us so that we can help them discern if something is from God. Our children need to know that not every word the Lord speaks is to be shared freely – sometimes He is trusting us with special truths.

I have taught my children a three-point test for any thought or word they receive and are unsure about:

1. Is it **KIND**? Philippians 4:8 gives us a good filter for us to run our thoughts through. Does this word pass that test?
2. Is it **PEACEFUL**? James 3:17-18 talks about 'peace-loving' wisdom. When you think about this thought or word, does it make you feel peaceful or uncomfortable inside?

3. Does it point to **JESUS**? John 15:26 tells us that the Holy Spirit will point us to Jesus. Does the word or thought make you want to run towards Jesus, or run away?

I believe God is always wanting to speak to us, and the enemy is always looking to deceive us. Our children need to know they can share with us what they think God may be saying, and that it is OK to test every word – it is actually helpful, and gives us assurance when the accuser whispers in our ear, ‘Did God really say...?’ (see Genesis 3:1).

Remember Samuel. The Bible describes him as being very young, a small child. I believe we are wrong if we think God will only speak to our children when they are older and have come of age. He is speaking to them now. We need to take that seriously and equip them.

And be encouraged – if hearing from God is not a normal part of your day, why not go on the journey of learning to listen to Him together with your kids? It’s never too early to start, and it’s definitely never too late!

Read Bible passage

James 3:13-18

Discussion questions

This is a really challenging Scripture. These questions may be good to reflect on further after the group and pray through individually with the Lord.

1. When we speak words we think may be from God, how can we check our hearts for envy and selfish ambition?
2. How can we make sure we speak and listen with humility?
3. List out the attributes of the wisdom from heaven – how can we foster these in our lives?
4. How can we weigh our words against these criteria?

Further points to consider/topics to ask questions around

If any of the thoughts your children think they are hearing from God do not pass the three-point test mentioned earlier – is it KIND, is it PEACEFUL, does it point to JESUS – teach your children to bring them to the cross and leave them there. I find it helpful to actually picture dragging the thought, by the scruff of its neck, to the cross. As I gaze on Jesus, and feel His great love for me, the thought runs away and is no longer an issue. (This is much more useful than simply telling a child not to think about it any more!)

As we grow in listening to God, it is important to note that there may be times when we 'sense' something bad will happen. This sense doesn't fit with the verses above. It might cause us to fear or become anxious. It is important we know how to handle that thought. The first thing is, we work in partnership with God. Sometimes things are revealed to us because God wants us to do something about it. If your child comes to you with an unsettled feeling, saying, 'I just think such and such might happen, and it makes me feel scared,' then that is your invitation to pray against that thought. You do not have to accept it.

One time my husband left the house early in the morning to travel to work. As I hugged him goodbye, a little voice told me that would be the last time I saw him. I instantly began to pray against that thought, knowing that God had promised my husband a long life. After about an hour of praying, I felt a peace and went back to sleep. An hour later my husband called. He had been in a car crash and his car had been written off. But he had walked away without even a scratch. The police called it a miracle.

Listen to your children when they express such fears, and teach them to pray against them, using the word of God. This is the most powerful weapon you can place in your child's hand and is all part of the journey of learning to listen to God and know Him better.

Closing prayer and / or activity

Father, help me discern when You are speaking to me, and help me teach that discernment to my children.

Goal for this week

Look through the journal you have been keeping with your child. Pray together over each of the entries and consider together what God is asking you to do with it, and what He may be teaching you through it about yourself, your child and Him.



About Hope 15:13

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'

Romans 15:13

Hope 15:13 was birthed in prayer out of Pinner Baptist Church at the beginning of the first Covid-19 lockdown. Back in spring 2020, the Church and nation were facing an unprecedented crisis as the pandemic took hold, and our aim, inspired by Romans 15:13, was to help individual Christians and congregations respond well.

Throughout the pandemic, we released regular virtual community-building resources and prophetic blogs on what God seemed to be doing through the crisis. Then, as we began to come out of the final lockdown, we prioritised resources aimed at bringing people back together around food, recognising what had been lost through the lack of in-person fellowship over the course of the pandemic.

Now, as we face challenges on multiple fronts – as individuals, as a Church and as a nation – our focus is on helping us find renewed hope in the gospel. It is when the darkness is at its greatest that the light can shine the brightest, and whilst many of the problems we are confronted by are problems of relative affluence, nonetheless they can challenge our faith and demand a response. Where will we look for hope?

One result of the current cost-of-living crisis and the lack of opportunity to meet in person during the pandemic, is that many churches have found their resources stretched thin. So as well as sharing inspiring stories of believers and communities who have found hope in God, we also want to share dynamic, original resources that individuals, small groups and congregations can use to strengthen themselves in the Lord and in the hope He promises.

All our content is provided voluntarily by people who share our vision and our prayer is that it is a blessing to many – and if something blesses you, please do let us know and share it further!

Hope 15:13 is now an independent initiative, overseen by Instant Apostle and capitalising on their publishing expertise, with strong links to the wider Baptist community.