

# The Immanuel Approach

With Children

By Georgene Assur



# The Immanuel Approach

## **Prayer**

Hearing God

## **Purpose**

To train and empower children to build a relationship with God by “catching” his voice in their daily lives.

- Know that God loves them and wants to “hang out” with them
- Enjoy being in God’s presence
- Understand that they can have a real live relationship with God—not just in their heads

An encounter with God is life changing no matter what the age! In order to experience God’s presence and hear his voice, we must use our imagination. Imagination is a gift of God and one of the things that make us truly human.

- Focus less on what God wants children to do and obey and more on how to do relationship with him.
- To know God, experience his presence and hear his voice so that he becomes very real
- Chatting with God so that we can talk and listen to God all the time about everything

## Week One | All About God

### Purpose

Every human being/child needs to be seen, heard, understood and delighted in. Even if we (the children in this case) do not experience all four fully and consistently (or ever!) in our daily life, we can and do experience them when we engage with God. So to begin, the children need to know that God is relational (he speaks and interacts with his people). God loves them. God is good. God is safe. God is strong. God is with us, and God has good plans for us. When we engage with God, he sees us, hears us, understands us and is really glad to be with us (delights in us).

Children must know the God to whom they will be speaking and listening to.

God is GOOD (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; 3 John 1:11).

God is SAFE. We can trust him (Psalm 31:14; Psalm 56:14).

God LOVES you (John 3:16; 1John 4:7).

God is STRONG (Jeremiah 32:27; Job 42:2; Genesis 18:14).

### Instructions

To do this exercise, you will need a large sheet of paper with the word GOD in the center. Have the children sit in a circle on the floor. As the children offer suggestions in answer to the questions, the teacher writes them down on the large sheet of paper. This will be saved and referred to/added to each week.

### Questions

1. What do you know/think about God? (Children need to know the God to whom they will be listening).

**Note:** The teacher can fill in and explain the characteristics of God that the children do not list.

2. Additional questions to help children explore the character of God:
  - a. What do you think God is doing today?
  - b. How do you think God feels about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What do you think is God's favorite Bible story?
  - d. What do you think God's voice sounds like?
  - e. When has God spoken to you?

Not much correction is needed, just release the children to talk about their real feelings about God.

## **Bible Story**

“Let the Children Come to Me” from Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18

## **Instructions**

Read the story from scripture or from a Children’s Bible storybook. You could perhaps read it twice but as you read it a second time help the children to imagine that they are in the story.

You can ask:

- I’m wondering, what is your favorite part of this story?
- I’m wondering, what do you think is really important in this story?
- What does it feel like to be welcomed by Jesus?
- What does he say to you?
- What does he do?

## **Prayer Time**

Appreciation. Thinking of and reliving/experiencing a positive time engages the part of the brain that is relational which in turn helps us to better relate to (hear) God and better relate to others. Two approaches you can use to do Appreciation are provided here:

**(1)** Get comfortable. Sit quietly. Breathe in and out. Scrunch your toes and let them go, then scrunch your hands and let them go. Think of something or someplace that makes you feel really happy. Imagine you are there. What can you see? What is around you? Are you inside or outside? What can you hear? What is the weather like? What can you feel? Now imagine that Jesus comes into your place to be with you. What does he look like? What is he wearing? You can say hello to him and talk to him. What does he say to you?

**Note:** Appreciation/Thanksgiving engages the part of the brain that enables us to be relational, i.e. enables us to engage with God in listening prayer and to engage well with others.

**(2)** Use the Bible story and have everyone imagine that they are in the story. As the people in the story disperse and go home, you are left alone with Jesus. How does it feel to be with Jesus? What do you want to say to him? Listen and hear what he wants to say to you.

**End with a closing prayer.** The Lord’s Prayer would be good, or, “Thank You, Lord, for loving us; for being with us today and always. Bless us and protect us and our families. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

You can also **bless the children:** “I pray God’s blessing on you, his protection over you and his love guiding you in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

## Week Two | What is Prayer?

### Instructions

Take a large sheet of paper with the word PRAYER in the center. Have the children brainstorm ideas of what constitutes prayer. Hopefully, they will include: praise (I love you God), confession (I’m sorry God), thanksgiving (I thank you, God), intercession (Help others please, God), petition (Help me please, God), and the new one for them—Meditation (I’m listening, God). You can, if you have time, let children draw their hand with each finger numbered. The thumb is one and the whole hand is six.

What constitutes prayer?	Prayer	Hand
Praise	I love you, God	Thumb
Confession	I’m sorry, God	Pointer finger
Thanksgiving	I thank you, God	Middle finger
Intercession	Help others, God	Ring finger
Petition	Help me please, God	Pinky
Meditation	I’m listening, God	Whole hand

### Bible Story

“Samuel and Eli” from 1 Samuel 3. Read from the Bible or a children’s Bible. Then, you can ask:

- I’m wondering, what is your favorite part of this story?
- I’m wondering, what do you think is the most important thing in this story?
- How do you think Samuel might have felt when he realized God was speaking to him?
- How do you think you would feel (or do you feel when) if God spoke to you?

Let's look at our prayer sheet again. We've been writing down all the things we can say to God but there is something else important about prayer—do you know what that is? **Listening.** Did you know God speaks to us? Remember our sheet of God's characteristics from last week? We learned that God loves us and wants to be with us. He wants to share what we are feeling and thinking, and he wants to share with us what is on his heart too.

Let's spend time listening to God. First, we will quiet our bodies. Think of a quiet happy place and imagine Jesus is with you (he is always with you). Is there anything on your heart you'd like to share with him? Anything that is sad or happy that is going on? Remember, Jesus is your friend so you can tell him anything and ask him anything. Now, let's be quiet and ask!

Teachers, choose a question or questions as led by the Holy Spirit. Here are some suggestions:

1. Jesus, what do you see when you look at me?
2. What do you like best about me?
3. What do you love best about me?
4. Is there something you want to tell me?
5. Can we do something fun together?
6. Before I was born, what were you excited about for me?

### **Closing Prayer & Blessing**

“Thank You, Lord, for loving us; for being with us today and always. Bless us and protect us and our families. I pray God's blessing on you, his protection over you and his love guiding you in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name, Amen.”

Or, you can use your own prayer and blessing.

## Week Three | Chatting with God

### Focus

When God made us, he made us for the whole purpose of hanging out with him, chatting with him—talking back and forth—and having fun together! Teachers, read the first six pages of [\*Children, Can You Hear Me?: How to Hear and See God\*](#) by Brad Jersak (or pick up the [kindle edition](#)). You can read the whole book if the children seem interested and you have time.

**Note:** You will need a big sheet with CHATTING WITH GOD in the center or you can just discuss.

I'm wondering what you think about what I just read. How does the author say we can hear God? What does the author say God's voice is like—how does it sound? How does God's face look? How does God feel when something bad or evil comes near you? How does God feel about being with you? What are some questions you can ask him?

**Bible Story** (if time): “Jesus Stills the Storm” from Matthew 8, Mark 4 and Luke 8

- Favorite part?
- Important part?

How do you think the disciples were feeling? How do you think Jesus was feeling? What did the disciples say to Jesus when they woke him up? What did Jesus do? How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus made the storm stop? Let's pretend we are in the boat in the storm, how are we feeling? What are we thinking? How do we feel when Jesus stops the storm?

What do you think this story tells us about Jesus (his power and love)?

What are you afraid of? What do you do with this fear? What can you do?

**Note:** Read Jersak's book beginning in the section that begins with memories and goes through dreams, nightmares and faith. Or, save for the next class.

**Prayer Time:** Think of something you are afraid of or something sad or bad that has happened to you. Now get quiet and let's ask Jesus about this. Where is Jesus? Lord Jesus, what do you want me to know about this?

**Closing prayer** and blessings as in Week One

## **Week Four | Catching God's Voice**

### **Focus**

God is the ultimate anchor in children's lives and only he has the power to bring them the peace, strength, healing, identity and purpose they need to flourish. Let's grow them God-connected not just God smart. Let this four-week Sunday school time be a place where we focus less on what God wants children to do and obey, and more on how to do relationship with him.

### **Instructions**

Brainstorm with the children times and places where we can pray and ask God questions—"hear God".

### **Ideas**

When we pray, read a Bible story, go outside and see something beautiful, we can be talking and listening to God. If it seems appropriate you can remind the children that we can tell God jokes, we can cry in front of him; watch TV with him, tell him our favorite color, the name of the person who hurts our feelings sometimes and something you really like about yourself.

Who is the person you are most glad God created? Tell him a memory or picture in your head you wish you did not have or a time when you felt so lonely you wanted to cry. Then, listen as God speaks to you about what you have shared with him.

Where do you catch God's voice best? Outside? In a Bible story? In Church? Share your own story here about your best place to hear God.

Read the sections of Jersak's book that you would like to finish up this four-week session with.

### **Bible Story**

"Jesus feeds the 5,000" from Matthew 14, Mark 6 and Luke 9

- I'm wondering what is your favorite part of this story?
- What do you think is important in the story?
- How do you think Jesus was feeling?

### **Instructions**

Read the story a second time by imagining you and the children are in the story. You can be part of the crowd or the little boy with the fish. What do you see, hear, smell, taste or feel? As the crowds disperse you are left alone with Jesus. Get very quiet and



still. Breathe deeply and calmly. What do you tell him? What does he tell you? What is it like being with him?

### **Closing Prayer**

Thank you prayers: Children share the things they want to thank Jesus for in our last few weeks together.

**End with a blessing.**

### **Extra | Ideas for Children Who Have Difficulty Listening & Sitting Still**

Don't sit on the floor. If you are sitting around a table, they may be less likely to touch/punch each other. Try having the children draw their appreciation moment, their fear and see/draw where Jesus is in that fearful or sad place (See Praying in Color).

Make a game out of the relaxing and listening time such as Simon Says. In my class, the children seemed unable/unwilling to listen to me let alone to God. But they were quite willing to listen to Simon. So, Simon says: sit, breathe in and out; yawn. Simon says: scrunch up your whole body or individual body parts then relax them. Simon says: relax your head, eyes, shoulders, etc. When the children are quiet and relaxed, you can say, Simon says: close your eyes and think of something that makes you happy/thankful. Simon says: look for Jesus—where is he? What is he doing? What does he say to you?

## Sources

*Parenting Children for a Life of Faith* by Rachel Turner

*Children Can You Hear Me?* By Brad Jersak

Immanuel Prayer by Karl Lehman, M.D.

## Georgene Assur



Georgene has worked with children and children's ministries since 1982 as a Sunday School teacher, Preschool teacher and chapel leader for Truro Preschool and Kindergarten (20 years); as a Junior and High School English teacher and now as a grandmother of three (almost four) grandchildren. She has been incorporating listening prayer and the Immanuel Approach with children since learning about it five years ago. Children hear the most delightful things from the Lord: "He says, he likes it that I am funny and make people happy." He says, "I am good at soccer and he likes watching me play." He says, "He likes it that I am faithful and joyful." He says, "My brother is mean and it's okay to hit him back." (Whoops! not sure that is from the Lord!). It has been a joy for Georgene to lead these little ones into a closer walk with Jesus.