

Calling

God called Samuel to be a prophet.

Scripture Passage: 1 Samuel 3:1-14 **Memory Verse: 1 Samuel 3:10**

We live in a loud, chaotic world. Every day, we're bombarded by noise and distractions. Our senses are assaulted by social media, streaming services, advertisements, magazines, newspapers, email, text messages, and so much more. We are inundated by information.

The level of distractions in our lives is at an all-time high. Think about how much time you spend on your phone (your "pocket computer") each day. One analyst estimated that we take in enough information in a week's time to cause an average laptop computer to crash—and that was in 2012! All these years later, things haven't slowed down. If anything, the information overload has grown exponentially.

Of course, all these other voices make hearing God's voice more difficult. Our only hope is to slow down and make room for Him. Just like Samuel in today's passage, God is calling out to us. We need to take time to listen. As you dig into 1 Samuel 3, examine the noise level in your life. Determine ways you can be still and hear from God (Ps. 46:10). Consider ways you can challenge the adults in your Bible study to embrace Samuel's simple prayer: "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10).

Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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It's a familiar scene: moms sitting on benches around a playground buzzing with noise and motion. Kids are sliding, swinging, playing chase, and jumping rope. One mom stands and loudly calls out her child's name. Not every child stops—only one. The one who knows that voice is his mom's and that it is time to go home. (PSG, p. 19)

Did one of your parents have a distinctive way of calling you that you immediately recognized? Did different tones convey different messages?


SESSION 2

Calling

GOD CALLED SAMUEL TO BE A PROPHET.

1 SAMUEL 3:1-14

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SUGGESTED USE | Week of December 13, 2026

19

Understand the Context (1 Samuel 3:1-21)

The larger picture of Samuel's story stretches back to the death of Joshua. As the book of Joshua closed, we saw that the Israelites continued to worship God and serve Him faithfully during Joshua's lifetime (Josh. 24:31). They even followed the Lord after his death, as long as other leaders of his generation were there to guide the people well. Once that generation passed from the scene, though, their descendants turned from God, falling into idolatry and immorality.

The testimony of this generation is narrated in Judges 2:11-12a: "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt." In large part, this abandonment of the Lord was the result of a lack of spiritual leadership. God had raised up judges who served in leadership capacities, but the majority of these judges served locally within individual tribes. Thus, no real leaders kept God's ways before the entire nation. Everybody pretty much did what they wanted and followed the gods of the Canaanites who still lived in the promised land. As a result, words from God and visions from His prophets were rare (1 Sam. 3:1).

Things began to shift in 1 Samuel 1. God gave a son named Samuel to Hannah, a woman who had been barren and passionately prayed for a child. In turn, Hannah and her husband, Elkanah, gave the child back to the Lord to serve Him in the tabernacle. This young man would become the leader who would point the nation back to God and help the Israelites navigate the transition from being a theocracy to becoming a monarchy.

Samuel's role was that of a priest and prophet. He served as a ministering priest on behalf of the people before God, though his greatest function was perhaps that of a prophet. As a prophet, he would call the people back to the worship of God alone. God also would use him to anoint the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David.

This session focuses on God's call to Samuel to be his spokesman. His first task would be difficult: He would share God's message of judgment on Eli and his family for their sinfulness. Although Samuel feared telling Eli what God had said to him, Eli demanded the truth, so Samuel told him everything the Lord had revealed.

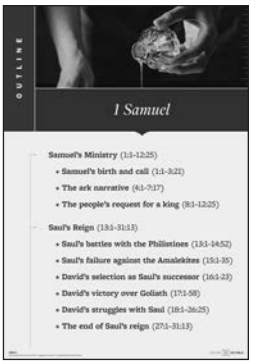
First Samuel 3 closes by describing the growth of Samuel in his relationship to God and his growing reputation as God's prophet. God always equips the ones He calls. He did it for Samuel, and He will do it for us.

As you read through 1 Samuel 3:1-21, highlight the verses that show God was raising up another to serve as the priest in the place of Hophni and Phinehas. What does this teach us about God and His raising up those who are to serve Him? (PSG, p. 20)

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ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of 1 Samuel*) and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Prophets, Priests, Kings*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: 1 Samuel Time Line*). Enlist a volunteer to create the chart described in the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 26) and to present it during the session.



READ: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 19 of the PSG. If possible, share your own recollections of being called by your parents when you were a child.

ASK: **Did one of your parents have a distinctive way of calling you that you immediately recognized? Did different tones convey different messages?** (PSG, p. 19)



RECAP: Remind adults of the vow Hannah made and how she fulfilled it. Highlight the difference between Samuel's spiritual growth and the actions of Eli's sons.

> *The writer of 1 Samuel masterfully contrasted Eli's sons with Hannah and Elkanah's with the phrase: Samuel "grew up in the presence of the* Lord *" (2:21b). He also "continued to grow in stature and in favor with the* Lord *and with people" (v. 26). The text also says, "The* Lord *was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground" (3:19). Eli's sons were also growing—but not in favor with God and the people. Describing Hophni and Phinehas's behavior, the Scripture says, "This sin of the young men was very great in the* Lord*'s sight, for they were treating the* Lord*'s offering with contempt" (2:17). . . . Hannah and Elkanah's son grew in godliness. Hophni and Phinehas grew into great sinners.* (PSG, p. 20)



TRANSITION: *In today's session, we will study how God called Samuel to be a prophet and how part of the call involved him sharing a message of judgment from the Lord about Eli and his sons.*

Group Activity Option

Music

Provide hymnals and direct adults to find "I Am Thine, O Lord" (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 535). Lead adults to read or sing the first two verses and chorus. Ask: ***How does your prayer life affect your relationship with the Lord?*** After a few responses, read or sing the third verse together. Lead in a time of silent prayer, guiding adults to prepare to hear God speak as they spend time in His Word.

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A Persistent Call (1 Sam. 3:1-7)

1 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. 2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 5 And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. 6 Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

(v. 1) The age of ***the boy Samuel*** at this point is difficult to ascertain. Some commentators align with the Jewish historian Josephus, who indicated that Samuel was twelve years old. Keep in mind that Samuel was a Levite by lineage, so it was appropriate for him to serve the Lord under the guidance of Eli.

The writer inserted a commentary on the spiritual condition of the times. God scarcely spoke and ***there were not many visions***. *Visions* would involve a God-given revelation through a prophet or seer. Most likely, God's voice was ***rare*** because the spiritual leaders were corrupt, and the people were disobedient and idolatrous. This would create less than ideal conditions for people to hear God speak.

Also, God's silence was a sign of His displeasure. Amos described silence from God as a famine of hearing (Amos 8:11). This clearly describes the times in which Samuel grew up.

(v. 2) The events in this passage took place during the night, possibly near dawn. ***One night*** simply means "at that time." The writer also noted Eli's fading health. In 1 Samuel 4:15 we learn that Eli would eventually go blind, but here his sight was simply ***weak***. This statement also serves as a commentary on the spiritual condition of both Eli and the nation of Israel. God's words were scarce because the people didn't have the spiritual eyes to perceive what He might say.

(v. 3) ***The lamp of God*** refers to the golden candlestick with seven branches. It was located in the holy place of the tabernacle, near the curtained-off holy of holies. Exodus 27:21 specifies that this *lamp* was to burn from evening until morning.

This lamp was the only source of light in the holy place. The Mosaic law commanded that the priests were to maintain this lamp and trim the wicks each morning and evening as they burned incense to the Lord.

The phrase ***gone out*** could indicate when Samuel heard God's voice. Again, this could have occurred just before dawn. Whether the lamp burned out on its own or was extinguished by someone in the tabernacle is not clear.

Apparently, Eli's room was not near the area where Samuel slept. Samuel's sleeping area was ***in the house of the LORD*** and close to ***the ark of God***. In addition to his physical proximity to the symbol of God's presence, Samuel would grow to have a much closer spiritual relationship with the Lord than his mentor demonstrated.

(vv. 4-6) Samuel was loyal to Eli and was ready to obey his mentor's command, even in the early hours of the morning. His words ***here I am*** displayed a quick response to what Samuel thought was a request from Eli. For his part, Eli supposed that Samuel was dreaming and quickly dismissed the boy's inquiry.

In fact, Eli missed God's call to Samuel twice. The old priest was so insensitive to spiritual matters that he failed to perceive the voice of God. Only after God's third call did Eli finally understand that the Lord was speaking.

(v. 7) Undoubtedly, Samuel had studied the law, the written word of God available at that time. He knew the story of God and His work in Israel's history. But he ***did not yet know the LORD*** personally. He had never heard God's voice before and couldn't discern the identity of the One calling him. Thus, he assumed that Eli was calling.

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EXPLORE 1 Samuel 3:1-7

1 2 3

APPLICATION POINT: Believers can be assured that God knows us personally and chooses to use His people for His plans.

READ: **Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 3:1-7** as the other adults listen for what Samuel experienced and how he responded.

DESCRIBE: Call attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of 1 Samuel*) and note that this passage is still in the earliest part of Samuel's life. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: 1 Samuel Time Line*) and highlight that the initial events in the book came toward the end of the period of the judges.





EXAMINE: Direct adults to work in pairs to read the content for verses 1-6 (PSG, pp. 21-22) and discuss key ideas that stick out to them. After a few minutes, allow a few volunteers to share. Point out that Eli was old and his sight was failing. Note how this also could reflect the spiritual blindness of the priest and the nation.

ASK: **Why do you think Samuel thought it was Eli he heard calling him?**

RECAP: Point out that the writer explained why Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's voice.

> *Samuel did not yet know the* LORD. . . . *[He] was merely inexperienced. He had not heard God's voice until now. Receiving a divine revelation was a new experience for Samuel.* (PSG, pp. 22-23)

SHARE: Note that while Samuel didn't know God well at this point, the Lord knew him and called out to Samuel by name. Encourage adults to consider how this applies to their lives.

ASK: **How does being known by God influence your faith?** (PSG, p. 23)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Mobile Phone

Display your mobile phone. Ask: ***When your phone rings, how do you decide whether to answer it or not? How can you tell the difference between a legitimate call and a telemarketer?*** Explain that Samuel needed to learn how to recognize God's voice. Encourage adults to discern whether or not something we hear is from God or a spiritual distraction.

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An Attentive Ear (1 Sam. 3:8-10)

8 A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

(v. 8) For ***a third time***, God called to Samuel. Even though his first two trips to Eli turned out to be fruitless, Samuel responded immediately when he heard the voice again. In this, he demonstrated his servant attitude. He consistently was ready to give attention to Eli's needs. At his advanced age, Eli no doubt needed much attention from Samuel.

With this third call, Eli finally ***realized that the Lord was calling the boy***. The ears of Eli had been spiritually dulled by a shallow commitment to the Lord. This reality partially explains the nation's spiritual dilemma expressed in verse 1. God's voice was scarce in that day because spiritual leaders like Eli and his corrupt sons were blind to His movements and deaf to His voice.

(v. 9) Although Eli might have felt a twinge of envy because God was speaking to Samuel and not to him, the priest didn't give evidence of that. It's also possible that Eli might also have felt some sense of dread. In 1 Samuel 2:27-36, the Lord had spoken a message of judgment through an anonymous man of God. Now, God was speaking to Samuel.

Of course, the text is silent about Eli's feelings, and any attempts to speculate would be pointless. Instead, the writer focused on Eli's eventual recognition of what God was doing and on his efforts to help Samuel know how to respond. Eli told the boy to ***lie down*** again. If the voice returned, Samuel needed to understand that the Lord was speaking and that he should respond with an open heart and mind: ***Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening***.

(v. 10) God finally connected with Samuel on the fourth call. This call was distinct in three ways. First, God called the boy's name twice: ***Samuel! Samuel!*** The repetition of the name was reminiscent of God's call to both Abraham (Gen. 22:11) and Moses (Ex. 3:4).

Second, God ***came and stood there, calling*** Samuel. This is significantly different than the statements in verses 4-8. The idea of God standing before Samuel may refer to a visual appearance of God, such as in a vision. If so, this time Samuel would plainly see that this was not Eli calling him.

The third difference was Samuel's response. This time, he responded with the words Eli had given him: ***Speak, for your servant is listening***. Samuel's use of *servant* is significant. While he was repeating the words Eli had given him, his adoption of a servant's attitude also was a direct fulfillment of his mother's prayer (1 Sam. 1:11). No doubt Samuel was well aware of his role as a servant of the Lord. With that awareness came a sense of humility before the voice of God, a quality he would carry throughout his life.

This was the first time God spoke to Samuel, but it would not be the last. The last verse in this chapter states that God kept on appearing at Shiloh and revealing Himself and His message to Samuel. God's calling represented a critical moment in Samuel's life. It would also be a turning point for the nation of Israel. From this point on, Samuel would hear from God and speak for God to the whole nation.

Key Doctrine

God

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. (See Psalm 111:10; Hebrews 12:28-29.)

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APPLICATION POINT: **Believers should be attentive to God's call.**

READ: **Read aloud 1 Samuel 3:8-10** and guide adults to listen for how Eli's response to Samuel changed.

ASK: **How was Eli's response in these verses different from what he had told Samuel the other times?**

EXPLAIN: Point out that Eli discerned God was calling Samuel. Emphasize the significance Eli recognized in this moment.

> *Eli knew Samuel's ministry focus was about to change. Earlier, a man of God had come to Eli with a word of foreknowledge. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, would not inherit the priestly role and responsibilities from their father. Instead, God was raising up another (1 Sam. 2:35). Doubtless, Eli understood God was fulfilling that promise. He knew Samuel was to be the Lord's servant. He also knew that as God spoke to young Samuel, his responsibility would be to listen to what God had to say.* (PSG, p. 24)

BIBLE SKILL: Direct attention the Bible Skill activity below. Allow the enlisted volunteer to review the chart and to lead adults through the activity:

> The call of God to Samuel would have major ramifications in the history of God's dealing with His chosen people. In Samuel's call can be found parallels with the calling of both Abraham and Moses. In the space below, compare the call of God to Samuel, Abraham, and Moses. **What did God ask them to do? How did they respond? What significance did their response have for the people of God?** (PSG, p. 26)
>
> •Abraham (Gen. 22:1,11-14):
>
> •Moses (Ex. 3:1-13):
>
> •Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10-21):

ASK: **What practices can we cultivate to help us to hear God better?** (PSG, p. 24)

SAY: *As Samuel listened, the Lord had a startling message for him about Eli's family.*

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A Dire Message (1 Sam. 3:11-14)

11 And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. 12 At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. 13 For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. 14 Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

(v. 11) God's message to Samuel was really for Eli, a scathing denunciation of the priest and his family for their wickedness and spiritual lethargy. This was the same message the Lord had sent through the man of God in 1 Samuel 2:27-36.

This message was not warning Eli to "repent or else." Rather, it announced judgment that was certain. By repeating this message through Samuel, God emphasized the seriousness and absolute nature of His judgment. God was ***about to do something in Israel*** that would send shock waves across the nation. It would cause the people to ***tingle.*** The Hebrew wording suggests an involuntary shaking or a ringing in the ears. God was condemning Eli and offering a severe warning to the nation against abandoning Him.

(v. 12) To reinforce the message, God affirmed that He would pour out ***everything I spoke against*** Eli and his sons through the man of God. The Lord was handing down an indictment regarding the wickedness and corruption of the priesthood. Specifically, Eli had failed to correct his sons when they violated the sacrificial laws, bullied the worshipers, practiced sexual immorality, and showed no reverence to the Lord.

God would bring an ***end*** to this priestly family. The law of Moses specified that individuals were responsible for their own sin (Deut. 24:15; Jer. 31:29-30; Ezek. 18:20). However, Eli was complicit in the sin of his sons by sharing in the meat taken from the worshipers. In addition, he did nothing to correct them. He cared more about his sons than about honoring God (1 Sam. 2:29). Now, he and his family were going to pay the price for their rebellion and apathy.

(v. 13) The Lord said that Eli's sons had ***blasphemed God*** through their behavior. Their disdain for the holy things of God demonstrated an absolute lack of reverence for Him and for His commands regarding worship. Their actions amounted to smearing the name of God. Blaspheming God was a capital offense according to the law: "anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death" (Lev. 24:16).

The Old Testament law emphasizes the holiness of God and the sacred nature of worship. His ministers, the priests and the Levites, were instructed in the law of Moses not to treat the things of God in a trivial manner. This crucial understanding is seen in the death of the two sons of Aaron who presented "unauthorized fire" (improper incense) before the Lord (Lev. 10:1-3).

Centuries earlier, God had struck Nadab and Abihu dead for their flippant approach to Him and His altar. Now, two more sons and priests were facing divine death sentences because of their carelessness with the holiness of God. These are important examples for all who worship God even today.

(v. 14) God had sworn His judgment on Eli's house and left no room for repentance. The family's sins could not be ***atoned for by sacrifice or offering***. Instead, it was a direct statement from God that He would punish the house of Eli with death. This was fulfilled over the next years, as all three died on the same day.

As recorded in 1 Samuel 4, Hophni and Phinehas were killed in battle against the Philistines. In one final act of irreverence, they had carried the ark of the covenant into battle like a good luck charm. As a result, they died, and the Philistines captured the ark (1 Sam. 4:1-11).

Later, when Eli heard his sons were dead and that the ark had been taken, he fell over backward and broke his neck (4:12-18). Years later the last member of Eli's priestly line, Abiathar, was removed from his position by King Solomon (1 Kings 2:27).

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APPLICATION POINT: God calls believers to deliver His message even when it is difficult to hear.

READ: **Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 3:11-14** while adults listen for God's message to Samuel about Eli and his family.

DISCUSS: Review the content related to priests and prophets on **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Prophets, Priests, Kings*). Point out the distinctions between Eli's role as priest and the role God was preparing Samuel to take as priest and prophet.



ASK: **How should the people of Israel have expected Eli and his sons to behave? Why?**

SHARE: Explain the serious nature of God's words to Samuel regarding Eli and his sons.

> *The Hebrew word translated "swore" means to take an oath. The fact that God swore this message to Eli's family meant His words and this vow were irrevocably established. He would never go back on His word. God's message was clear. Not even presenting a sacrifice or offering would restrain His divine judgment. While this may seem harsh, recall that Hophni and Phinehas had desecrated and stolen the sacrificial offerings that worshipers had brought to the tabernacle. The punishment was directly related to their sin.* (PSG, p. 26)

ASK: **When has following God required you to do a difficult thing?** (PSG, p. 26)

RECAP: Summarize verses 15-18, noting that Samuel didn't want to share the message, but Eli made him tell the truth. Explain that over time Samuel continued to grow closer to God and developed a reputation as a solid godly leader and prophet.

Group Activity Option

Compare with the New Testament

Prior to the session review Matthew 21:12-13; 23:1-46. Overview the message that Jesus delivered to those selling in the temple and to the religious leaders of His day. Compare their actions with Eli's sons and the judgments promised for them. Guide adults to discuss the following question: ***Do you think God still holds those who lead in worship to a higher standard? Why or why not?***

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CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from Apply the Text on page 27 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers can be assured that God knows us personally and chooses to use His people for His plans.*
- *Believers should be attentive to God's call.*
- *God calls believers to deliver His message even when it is difficult to hear.*

DISCUSS: Guide adults to read and reflect on the first set of questions on page 27 of the PSG. Invite volunteers to share how they are investing in the lives of others as a spiritual mentor.

ASK: **What can Christian parents do to make sure they are handling the spiritual growth of their children well?** (PSG, p. 27)

CHALLENGE: Encourage a volunteer to read the second set of questions from page 27 of the PSG: **What keeps us from hearing God's voice? What changes do we need to make to prepare ourselves to hear a message from God?** Lead a brief discussion on how to eliminate spiritual distractions so we can focus on God's voice.

PRAY: Close in prayer, reminding adults to be intentional in being still and making space for God in their lives during the week. Encourage adults to use Samuel's words as a prayer prompt: "Speak, for your servant is listening."

AFTER THE SESSION

Encourage adults to participate in a worship experience today or in the week ahead. Remind them how significant worship is to the Lord. Follow up this session with an email or text sharing how you responded to a message from the Lord during your personal Bible study or in a worship service. Let adults know that you will be praying for them as they seek to hear from the Lord.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study? *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages. (Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

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