SESSION 2

Calling

1 SAMUEL 3:1-14

GOD CALLED SAMUEL TO BE A PROPHET.



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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.

DID ONE OF YOUR PARENTS HAVE A DISTINCTIVE WAY OF CALLING YOU THAT YOU IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZED? DID DIFFERENT TONES CONVEY DIFFERENT MESSAGES?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Any good saga is a story of contrasts, and 1 Samuel is rich with them. Last week, we looked at the two wives of Elkanah—Hannah, who was barren, and Peninnah, who was seemingly ever-fruitful. In a few weeks, we will look at probably the best-known opposites—two whose names have become synonymous with the powerful versus the weak: David and Goliath.

Chapters 1–2 showed the contrast between two families. First was Elkanah's family, specifically Hannah, who was both righteous and humble. She dedicated her son, Samuel, to God. She made sure he was raised in the service of Eli, the high priest at the tabernacle in Shiloh. The second family was Eli's. Rather than live righteously, Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, treated the tabernacle with contempt.

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 "grew in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people" (v. 26). The text also says, "Samuel grew. The LORD was with him, and he fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied" (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, "So the servants' sin was very severe in the presence of the LORD, because the men treated the LORD's offering with contempt" (2:17). The word translated "severe" derives from the same Hebrew root meaning "grew" in the above passages.

Hannah and Elkanah's son grew in godliness. Hophni and Phinehas grew into great sinners. Eli's sons expected they would follow in their father's role as servants in the tabernacle. That, though, would not be the case. God's message to Eli was that his "two sons Hophni and Phinehas: both of them will die on the same day" (2:34). And they did (4:11).

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1 Samuel 3:1-14

1 The **boy** [A] Samuel served the LORD in Eli's presence. In those days
the word of the LORD was **rare** [B] and prophetic visions were not
widespread. **2** One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in
his usual place. **3** Before **the lamp of God** [C] had gone out, Samuel
was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was
located. **4** Then **the LORD called Samuel**, [D] and he answered, "Here
I am." **5** He **ran to Eli** [E] and said, "Here I am; you called me." "I didn't
call," Eli replied. "Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.
6 Once again the LORD called, "Samuel!" Samuel got up, went to
Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me." "I didn't call, my son," he
replied. "Go back and lie down." **7** Now Samuel did not yet know the
LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.
8 Once again, for the third time, the LORD called Samuel. He
got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me." **Then Eli
understood** [F] that the LORD was calling the boy. **9** He told Samuel,
"Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for **your servant
is listening**.'" [G] So Samuel went and lay down in his place. **10** The
LORD came, **stood there**, [H] and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel!"
Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening." **11** The LORD
said to Samuel, "I am about to do something in Israel that will cause
everyone who hears about it to shudder. **12** On that day I will carry out
against Eli everything I said about his family, from beginning to end.
13 I told him that I am going to judge his family forever because of the
iniquity **he knows about**: [I] his sons are cursing God, and he has not
stopped them. **14** Therefore, I have sworn to Eli's family: The iniquity
of Eli's family will never be wiped out by either sacrifice or offering."

Key Words

A. Some scholars believe Samuel was around twelve at this point.

B. In the days of the judges, Israel's leaders were corrupt, and the people were idolatrous. This made hearing God's voice unlikely.

C. A large lamp (*menorah*) stood in the tabernacle. Priests would make sure it kept burning through the night.

D. God called Samuel by name. In a time when His words were rare, He had identified a prophet.

E. Samuel had not learned how to discern God's voice yet (v. 7), so he naturally thought his mentor, Eli, was calling to him.

F. After three times, Eli finally grasped that God was calling Samuel. This could point to his lack of spiritual discernment.

G. Samuel had said "Here I am" to Eli. Now, Eli challenged him to be open to God. The Hebrew indicates more than auditory perception. It implies hearing that leads to active obedience.

H. Nowhere else in Scripture is God said to have stood. The writer implies the Lord's physical presence with Samuel.

I. Eli's sons would be judged for their sin, while Eli would be judged for not stepping in to correct them. The punishment was set and would not be forgiven (v. 14).

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EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. A Persistent Call

(1 Sam. 3:1-7)

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

- **Why do you think Samuel thought it was Eli he heard calling him?**
- **How does being known by God influence your faith?**

2. An Attentive Ear

(1 Sam. 3:8-10)

Believers should be attentive to God's call.

- **How was Eli's response in these verses different from what he had told Samuel the other times?**
- **What practices can we cultivate to help us to hear God better?**

3. A Dire Message

(1 Sam. 3:11-14)

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

- **How should the people of Israel have expected Eli and his sons to behave? Why?**
- **When has following God required you to do a difficult thing?**

Apply the Text

Looking at this passage, what can Christian parents do to make sure they are handling the spiritual growth of their children well? Discuss your thoughts with your Bible study group.

KEY DOCTRINE:
God

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

BIBLE SKILL:
Create a chart to better understand a biblical concept.

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?

Abraham (Gen. 22:1,11-14):

Moses (Ex. 3:1-13):

Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10-21):

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TALK IT OUT

Focus on 1 Samuel 3:10. When has God spoken to you in a way you didn't expect?

Samuel was serving under Eli in the temple when God called to him. Three times Samuel thought Eli was calling, but on the third time Eli realized it was the Lord and told Samuel to respond, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (v. 9). When God called again, Samuel answered as instructed.

What does it mean today to say to God, "Speak, for your servant is listening"? Why is listening to God just as important as speaking to Him?

Eli was the one who first realized God was speaking and helped Samuel know how to respond. In the same way, God often uses people in our lives to help us hear Him. But ultimately, hearing God starts with a surrendered heart—one that is ready to listen and willing to do whatever He says. This means we have to be intentional about creating space to actually listen to Him.

What are the things that tend to distract you from hearing God clearly? What specific step could you take this week to remove or reduce one of those distractions?

Place "Speak for your servant is listening" on your phones as a daily reminder this week to listen to God.

Prayer Requests / Notes

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DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: 1 Samuel 3:1-6

Note God's personal call of Samuel.

Eli, at this point, "was very old" (1 Sam. 2:22), thus his "eyesight was failing." He was on his way to becoming completely blind (4:15). He was in his usual place, which had evidently also become the usual place for his young apprentice, Samuel—"in the temple." The phrase refers to the tabernacle. The "lamp of God" referred to a lampstand that was to burn continually. That it had not yet gone out indicated these events likely occurred just prior to dawn when the lampstand would be refilled with oil (see Lev. 24:1-4).

We can easily read over verse 4 without focusing on the enormity of the statement: "the LORD called Samuel." The Creator of the universe was calling Samuel. Samuel heard God's voice so clearly that he responded audibly, "Here I am." Samuel assumed, however, that it was Eli's voice. That Samuel "ran to Eli" indicated he believed his mentor had an urgent need. God called out to Samuel again. That Samuel "went to Eli," rather than ran to him (1 Sam. 3:5), indicated Samuel realized Eli was not having an urgent crisis.

Eli called Samuel "my son." This was an endearing term. He had grown fond of his young apprentice. Probably as Samuel returned to his bed, both he and Eli wondered what was occurring. An explanation was likely percolating in Eli's mind; in Samuel's, not so much—yet.

How does being known by God influence your faith?



Day 2: 1 Samuel 3:7

Note the connection between knowing God and knowing God's Word.

The narrator of the story included an explanation about why Samuel did not understand what was occurring. He "did not yet know the LORD." The same had been said of Eli's sons. The contrast is clear. Hophni and Phinehas did not know God; Samuel did not *yet* know the Lord. What a difference that word "yet" makes!

First Samuel 2:12 explains why Hophni and Phinehas did not know God: they were wicked. Samuel, though, was merely inexperienced. He had not heard God's voice until now. Receiving a divine revelation was a new experience for Samuel.

Verse 7 draws an important theological parallel. It connects knowing God with receiving His revealed word. If we want to know God better, we must spend time in His Word, meaning Scripture. The principle is true: When we get in God's Word, we find that God's Word gets in us. At that point, it becomes the well from which we draw instructions, principles, answers, and encouragement for life.

Do not miss the fact that God called young Samuel by name. These verses remind believers that God knows us personally and chooses to use His people for His plans.

Why is studying God's Word vital to knowing Him and hearing His voice?

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Day 3: 1 Samuel 3:8-10

Circle God's actions in 1 Samuel 3:10.

Samuel had no explanation for what had been happening except that Eli must have been calling him. Eli, though, came to understand what was happening. The Lord was calling and speaking to his young protégé. In the previous two occurrences, Eli had simply told Samuel to "go back and lie down" (vv. 5,6). This occurrence was different. Because Eli came to understand that Samuel was hearing the voice of God, his instructions changed.

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.

Notice the verbs: God "came," "stood," and "called." The great and almighty God of the universe came and stood near Samuel. What a demonstration of God's patience, grace, and restraint!

God called, "Samuel, Samuel!" This reflected how the Lord had earlier called, "Abraham, Abraham!" (Gen. 22:11); "Jacob, Jacob!" (46:2); and "Moses, Moses!" (Ex. 3:4). With each of these, God was either intervening in a current situation or preparing His servant for what was coming next.

What practices can you cultivate to help you to hear God better?

Day 4: 1 Samuel 3:11-12

Pay attention to why the priesthood would not continue through Eli's sons.

God told Samuel He was "about to do something in Israel." His actions were in response to Eli's sons desecrating the Lord's house and dishonoring the people's sacrifices. The phrase "everyone who hears about it [will] shudder" appears twice later in Scripture, as God pronounced judgment on the nations of Israel and Judah (2 Kings 21:12; Jer. 19:3). Every time this phrase appears, God pronounced His punishment due to willful and flagrant sin. Here, God was reiterating that He would carry out judgment against Eli and his family.

Why was God going to carry out His judgment against Eli when his family, meaning his sons, had been the ones who behaved immorally? The reason was tied to Eli's being the high priest. As such, he was held to a higher level of spiritual responsibility.

God used the phrase, "from beginning to end." The beginning would come when Eli's two sons would die on the same day (1 Sam. 2:34; 4:10-11). The end referred to the fact that none of Eli's family would serve as priests in the future. The entire priestly line, which—beginning with Aaron—had previously been passed down generationally, was about to be derailed.

What in your life is displeasing to God and needs to be removed?

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Day 5: 1 Samuel 3:13-14

Recognize the bravery required by Samuel to obey the Lord.

God gave a further explanation about what He meant by "from beginning to end" by focusing on the long-term outcome for Eli's family. God said He was "going to judge his (meaning Eli's) family forever."

Eli knew about and had spoken to his sons about their immoral and wicked behavior (2:22-25). Their behavior, however, did not change. The fact that Hophni and Phinehas were descendants of the high priest, lived in the tabernacle, and worked with holy things did not erase or negate the effects of their behavior. Despite their proximity to holy activities, in the eyes of God, they were still cursing Him.

The phrase "he has not stopped them" is actually stronger in the Hebrew. It states that Eli should have made his sons weak and rendered them essentially powerless. He should have stripped them of their duties and positions.

God made His message 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 worshipers had brought to the tabernacle. The punishment was directly related to their sin.

Samuel did not want to share the Lord's message with Eli. Despite this, the young apprentice told his mentor what God had said (3:15-18).

When has following God required you to do a difficult thing?

APPLY THE TEXT

What keeps us from hearing God's voice? What changes do we need to make to prepare ourselves to hear a message from God?

JOURNAL

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