SESSION 2

Calling

GOD CALLED SAMUEL TO BE A PROPHET.

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** [D] was located. 4 Then **the
LORD called Samuel**, [E] and he answered, "Here I am." 5 He
ran to Eli [F] 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** [G]
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**.'" [H] So Samuel went and lay down in
his place. 10 The LORD came, **stood there**, [I] 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**. [J] 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**: [K] 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."

Exploring Key Words

A "Child" (KJV). The Hebrew word can be used for any season between infancy and early adulthood. 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 (Ex. 27:20-21; Lev. 24:1-4). Priests would make sure it kept burning through the night.

D This gold-covered box represented God's presence among His people.

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

F Samuel had not learned how to discern God's voice yet (v. 7), so he naturally thought his mentor, Eli, was calling to him. This happened three times in the text.

G After three times, Eli finally grasped that God was calling Samuel. This could point to the priest's lack of spiritual discernment.

H 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.

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

J "Tingle" (KJV; ESV; NIV). The word also can be translated "quiver." The word often describes God's intervention into human affairs.

K 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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NOTES

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

- One night as Samuel served in the temple under Eli's leadership, God called out to him. Hearing this, Samuel ran to Eli, responding "Here I am; you called me" (v. 5).
- Eli assured Samuel that he hadn't called him and instructed him to return to where he had been lying. Once again, God called Samuel, who again went to the priest, Eli.
- Again, Eli told him to return to his bed.

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

- God called Samuel for a third time. When Samuel approached Eli, the priest understood God was calling the boy.
- The older priest instructed Samuel, if he heard the voice again, to say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (v. 9).
- When God called Samuel the fourth time, he responded as Eli had taught him. He was ready to listen.

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

- God told Samuel He was about to do something that would make everyone who heard about it shudder.
- God gave Samuel a prophecy against Eli and his sons. God would destroy Eli's lineage, and no amount of sacrifice or offering could make atonement for the sins of Eli's family.

Summary Statements

God called Samuel to be a prophet.

- 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.

Memory Verse

1 Samuel 3:10

Key Doctrine

God

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

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at **goExploreTheBible.com.**

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ENGAGE

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***)

- 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 calls out her child's name and says it's time to go home. Not every child stops—only the one who was called. Even in a crowd, children know the voice of their parents. They listen and they respond.

Bonus: When have you experienced God calling to you? How did you know it was Him and how did you respond?

EXPLORE

A PERSISTENT CALL (1 SAM. 3:1-7)

Bonus: When has a strange noise woke you up at night? How did that make you feel?

- In Samuel 3, Samuel was still young. The Hebrew wording does not refer to a specific age, but Jewish tradition puts Samuel's age at twelve. Some biblical scholars think Samuel worked to assist Eli in his advanced age.
- "In those days" refers to the closing days of the period of the judges. Because leaders were corrupt and the people were idolatrous, God was not speaking to His people very often. Even in the temple at Shiloh, Eli's physical blindness matched his spiritual insensitivity as a leader.
- In this spiritual context, "the LORD called Samuel" by name. While Samuel heard God, he had not yet learned to discern His voice. So, he assumed Eli was calling him.
- Eli assured Samuel he had not called the boy and told him to go back to bed. The Lord repeated His call to Samuel, who again thought he was hearing Eli call him.

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

AN ATTENTIVE EAR (1 SAM. 3:8-10)

Bonus: Why are hearing tests important? When can faulty hearing put people in danger?

- On Samuel's third trip to his bedside, Eli realized that God was speaking to the boy and changed his instructions. He directed Samuel to respond to God's voice: "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."
- Earlier, an anonymous prophet had pronounced God's judgment on Eli and his sons. Eli may have understood that Samuel was the new leader God was raising up. If so, he wanted Samuel to grasp the importance of being God's servant and listening to what the Lord had to say.
- The almighty God of the universe again came and stood near Samuel. This time when the Lord called, Samuel responded as Eli had instructed. It was the first step in a lifetime of faithful service for Samuel.

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

A DIRE MESSAGE (1 SAM. 3:11-14)

Bonus: How do you feel about having difficult conversations with people? Why?

- God told Samuel He was about to do something that would make people "shudder." The Hebrew wording emphasizes God's judgment. He repeated the message He had shared through the prophet. Eli and his house would fall because of their sin—and no sacrifice or offering could keep God from carrying out His words.
- While God's judgment might seem harsh, Eli's sons had desecrated the priesthood. Eli had known about their sin and had done nothing to stop them. The family had cursed God with their actions, so God was cursing them.
- Samuel did not want to share the Lord's message with Eli. Still, the boy told his mentor all that God had said to him (1 Sam. 3:15-18). This was not going to be the last time Samuel had a challenging word from God to deliver.

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

CHALLENGE

As a group, think about the mentors who helped you grow in your relationship with God as a child.

Looking at this story, what can Christian parents do to make sure they are handling the spiritual growth of their children well? (***PSG, p. 27***)

Encourage adults to reflect on the voices they hear and why they respond to them.

What keeps us from hearing God's voice? What changes do we need to make to prepare ourselves to hear a message from God? (***PSG, p. 27***)

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

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BONUS IDEAS

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 26)

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. Encourage adults to work in pairs to read the passages below and to compare the call of God to Samuel, Abraham, and Moses. Debrief by discussing these questions: ***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):

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?*** Discuss responses. Affirm that it's possible to miss an important call because we're trying to avoid the annoying calls we don't want to take.

Explain that Samuel was still young and relatively inexperienced in 1 Samuel 3. God wasn't speaking to people very often, so he needed to learn how to recognize His voice. As he grew closer to God, though, he was able to hear and obey in a way that made an impact on the entire nation.

Lead the group to list some common distractions that might make it harder to hear God's voice in our world. Encourage adults to discuss how believers can discern whether or not something we hear is from God. Challenge them to listen for God's voice in their lives and to become servants who hear and obey.

DIG DEEPER

PRIESTLY MINISTRY

Samuel and Eli served as priests in the temple/tabernacle. By considering the work and experience of these men, we can gain a deeper appreciation for other Old Testament leaders who served the Lord.

While many priests later served in the temple at Jerusalem, Samuel and Eli served at Shiloh. We know from comparing the dimensions of the pre-monarchy tabernacle (Ex. 25–27; 36–40) and those of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6–7) that the temple was significantly larger and would have required more work to maintain. We also know the structure at Shiloh was more like the tabernacle (Josh. 18:1). So, the experiences of Samuel and Eli would have been different from those of many other Old Testament priests.

However, the duties of priests were the same throughout the Old Testament. Many of these men lived near—or possibly in—the temple and were "on call" for ministry.

The priests performed both occasional and regular tasks. The occasional duties included things like overseeing the various offerings (Lev. 1–5) as people brought their gifts to the temple. The temple priests also performed purification rituals for those who had become defiled and needed to be restored to covenant purity (Lev. 11–15; Mark 1:44).

The priest's duties also involved many regular tasks, such as guarding the sanctuary (Num. 18:5), overseeing the financial contributions given to the Lord (18:8-32), and ensuring a lamp was always burning inside the temple (Ex. 27:20-21). Men could not become priests until they turned twenty-five and were allowed to serve until their mandatory retirement age of fifty (Num. 8:23-26).

As we reflect on the perpetual service of Old Testament priests, we can appreciate their extensive commitment. No matter the location or structure, the priests of Israel were men deeply dedicated to serving God by serving His people.

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