

# “Answering God’s Call”

1 Samuel 3:1-14

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God calls each and every one of us. How should we listen for the call? Some people close all their senses to God and refuse to hear God’s call. They have turned the ringer off. Some people hear God’s call and put God on hold deciding to answer at a later more convenient time. Then there are those who try to return God’s call collect - making God pay for calling them by only agreeing to follow the call after God has provided them with their needs or satisfied their agenda or given them the details and the future steps to God's call. Still others hear God’s call but forward it on to someone else. Still others use call-waiting and take other calls first. Others listen for God’s call and live it.

**1 Samuel 3:1-14** “Meanwhile, the boy Samuel served the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon. One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. Suddenly the Lord called out, “Samuel!” “Yes?” Samuel replied. “What is it?” He got up and ran to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?” “I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go back to bed.” So he did. Then the Lord called out again, “Samuel!” Again Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?” “I didn’t call you, my son,” Eli said. “Go back to bed.” Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before. So the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call ME?” Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, “Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went back to bed. And the Lord came and called as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel replied, “Speak, your servant is listening.” Then the Lord said to Samuel, “I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel. I am going to carry out all my threats against Eli and his family, from beginning to end. I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn’t disciplined them. So I have vowed that the sins of Eli and his sons will never be forgiven by sacrifices or offerings.”

Samuel’s call is the story of each of us for God speaks to each of us. The key is knowing how to tune into God’s voice. Samuel shows us how with a prayer. “Speak, Lord your servant is listening.” God has a special call for every person. God personally reveals a plan for each of our lives. The first aspect to hearing God’s call is to always be expecting God to speak to us.

Initially this is why Samuel mistook God’s call for that of Eli’s voice. Scripture says that Samuel did not yet know God. Certainly Samuel knew about God for his parents were deeply spiritual and he spent most of his time serving in the Temple. Samuel was familiar with the Biblical stories and how to worship God. What scripture is pointing out is that Samuel did not know God in a personal relationship. Samuel was not expecting God to personally speak to him a young youth. Our ability to hear God’s call begins when we constantly expect God to speak to us.

Growing our ability to hear God is similar to other relationships. The more time we spend with someone, the more time we speak and actively listen to another, the easier it is to understand them and hear their voice.

Samuel's call reminds us that God's voice is often mediated through human words. In our efforts to discern God's voice we see in Samuel's call the need for community. If it were not for Eli perceiving that God was speaking to Samuel and then teaching him how to answer God's call then Samuel would still be roaming around in the dark. Our scripture encourages us to seek the advice and wisdom of others who can help us discern God's call. God speaks to me through numerous people sometimes in places I least expect.

God speaks to each of us in a way that we can understand. To Samuel, the voice of God sounded like the voice of Eli. It was a familiar and comforting voice. God may speak to you in the words of a parent, child, close friend, or through the church. Of course ears are not required. God may whisper to our hearts and minds as we read scripture, drive our cars, make art, surf the web, exercise, sit by a shady lakeside, work, sing, enjoy a meal, sport or book, or lie awake in the still of the night. God created all of creation. God uses the entire cosmos to speak to us. God speaks in a unique way to each person. God often uses our favorite things, activities, and people to speak to us.

To hear God's voice, try to filter out the noise in your life and listen with your heart and soul. Try to become transparent and invite others to view your relationship with God. Have you ever been unable to hear someone because your surroundings were too noisy? You may have perfectly good hearing but in the midst of too much noise be unable to hear a particular voice. All of us have a spiritual inner ear which God speaks to us through, but sometimes we have difficulty filtering out the worldly, secular, or selfish noise. In these situations Eli tells us to respond with "Speak Lord your servant is listening" It is a prayer for God to help you hear what God has to say – to hear God's still, small voice among the many other competing voices in a sound-saturated society. It is a prayer asking for God to help us tune out the many distracts that flash across our minds, to quiet our selfish desires so we can tune into God.

C. S. Lewis said. "The real problem of the Christian life comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning is just shoving them back; just listening to that other voice; taking that other point of view; letting that other, stronger quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day."

Twelve years ago I was talking to my spiritual director in Ohio. One of many people I talk with to help me hear God's call for my life. I told her of what I thought I heard God saying to me through various mediums then went on to say I was unsure because of a list of thoughts I rattled off. I still remember and try to live her advice. She challenged me to quiet my mind and listen to God through my heart. She said the heart is like the home plate in baseball and the mind is sometimes like the dirt. Worries, commitments, goals, plans etc. from the routine and doings of life pile up and clutter up the heart just like the dirt clutters home plate. Every so often I need to be like the umpire who brushes the dirt off the plate. I need to make space to hear God. I need to let go of my thoughts. The dirt is still there and there is nothing wrong with the dirt. The dirt will keep coming back and clutter the plate, but I need to keep clearing the plate. I need to keep making space in my heart to hear God's voice. If you are following God's call, then your heart will likely be filled with an unexplainable peace.

Everybody can hear God's voice, but not everyone chooses to listen. It takes time, concentration and focus to be a good listener. The prayer "Speak Lord your servant is listening" stresses the importance of listening. At times all of us are poor listeners. The story is told of a

couple who came to see the pastor for marriage counseling. The lady said the trouble with my husband is that he seldom listens to me; and when he does he doesn't hear, and when he does hear he hears wrong, and even when he hears right he changes his understanding so fast that it's never the same." I suspect all of us have listened to others and God like that at times.

Samuel throughout his life kept praying "Speak Lord your servant is listening" Even when the message was undesirable and to fulfill the call was very difficult, Samuel strived to faithfully carry out God's call. Samuel's first call was very difficult for he was to tell his mentor Eli that God was going to punish his sons for their refusal to repent of their many sins. Even more difficult was that God was going to punish Eli for his failure to discipline his sons. Samuel was to tell Eli that doing evil or failure to love your children enough to do the hard work of disciplining them cannot be forgiven with a mere burnt offering. God is already foreshadowing the new covenant; forgiveness comes from God's grace by Jesus' atonement. That is a whole other sermon for a different time.

Samuel proved himself faithful in delivering a small but difficult message. The more Samuel lived God's call, served and listened to God the more he heard God speak to him. God then entrusted Samuel with greater and greater things which made Samuel even better at perceiving God's call. The relationship grew. Hearing God is often an ever-expanding spiral.

A key word in "Speak Lord for your servant is listening" is servant. A servant is a person that serves or carries out the wishes of another. If we sincerely pray this prayer, it means that we will serve God even if our own wishes or the wishes of those around us are in conflict with God's calling. Sometimes we strive to hear God's call but fail to give up our goals. We want to follow God's call but only if it will help us get to where we want to go. To be God's servant we need to give up the control and destination of our lives to God.

God keeps calling us to new and different things throughout our life. Samuel was first called to deliver a message to his mentor but later on God called him to be a judge, priest, prophet, counselor and God's voice at a turning point in the history of Israel. I suspect that if God would have given the entire call to Samuel as a young youth he would have been overwhelmed and left not knowing where to start or what to do.

Looking back over my life I can see how God was guiding me for the next call. Some of the most bewildering and difficult experiences God used to prepare me for God's next call. God even took some tragedies and later taught me some good through them. Again this could be another sermon. I believe that God never causes tragedy to teach or test us; however, once tragedy happens to us God can bring some good and healing out of it. Looking back I can see how God was calling me, but often at the time the experience made no sense. God has called me in some directions I did not want to go but once there I found an unexpected joy.

There are as many ways to listen to God as there are people from the beginning of time through eternity. God honors your uniqueness by speaking to you in the best way for your personality. This week try listening to God in a new way.

**Silence**—spend five minutes of your day in silence. Relax, let go, and let God. Start by becoming aware of your breath. God is Spirit, Air, and Breath. Imagine you are breathing in God's love. Say, "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me." Visualize spending time with Jesus in your favorite place with your favorite people. Draw or write down in a journal what comes to you as you picture Jesus talking to you.

**Recognize God in Your story**—God said you are my beloved child and I am fully pleased with you. Think back over the past 24 hours. When did you feel wonder, love, delight, joy, peace, laughter, gratitude, hope, peace, belonging, connected, accepted, and loved?

**Read God's love letter to You**—spend time everyday reading the Bible. Scripture guides us in the best way to live our life and explains God's wonderful plan for us.

**Receive nourishment**—God has filled your life with spiritual nourishment such as the bread and juice of communion, music, literature, movies, the beauty of nature, your favorite things, tastes, smells, sounds, feelings, sights, worship, games, hugs, family, and friends. What is God inviting you to do or be through these blessings?

**Serve**—share God's love with others. Spend time doing that which brings you joy and is needed by others. Everyday ask, what is wildly important for me to do today?

**Community**—God speaks to us through those around us who love us. Listen to and cherish your family and friends.

God is calling all of us. May we all respond “Speak Lord your servant is listening”. Every day this week spend an additional 5 minutes listening to God. Next Sunday share with someone what you heard. Amen