

## LIFE LESSONS – 1 SAMUEL: Learning to Hear God Speak<sup>i</sup>

### 1 Samuel 3

#### INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you here this morning. If you are a guest with us, thanks for joining us on this Lord's Day. We would love the opportunity to get to know you more. You can help us connect with you by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a short form. When you submit that form, it notifies me, and I look forward to following up with you.

Or feel free to swing by our information center located in the fellowship area. There we have a gift we would love to put in your hands as a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. We are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

#### SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are in the middle of a teaching series we've called, "Life Lessons." We are studying the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. So far, we have looked at Hannah, Samuel's mother, and her prayer for a child. God blessed Hannah and gave her Samuel. As a part of her prayer, Hannah vowed to give Samuel back to The Lord for His service. We saw where she did that. Last Sunday we paused to celebrate our church's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but the previous Sunday we looked at Eli and his two sons and learned what happens when we choose not to listen to God.

Today, we are going to look at one of the most famous stories in 1 Samuel as we look at the calling of Samuel. I have entitled this message, "Learning to Hear from God." Turn with me to 1 Samuel, chapter 3 this morning.

I think one of the questions every human has in common is, "How can I hear God speak to me?" We've most likely all heard testimonies from others about how God speaks to them, and maybe we've even had someone come up to us and say, "God told me to tell you..." and fill in the blank. How do they know that? Have you ever wanted to hear God speak to you about a situation, a circumstance, or a decision you've had to make? Of course. We all have.

#### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Hearing Your Family**

Have you ever been in a noisy place with your family? You know, a place where the noise is so loud and distracting, yet you are able to hear your children say, "Daddy?"

I can remember a few years ago, we went on a family vacation to the Ark. If you haven't been there, you need to plan a trip to see it. It was awesome. But on our way home, we took a detour and met up with some friends in St. Louis. We wanted to see the arch, but we also heard about the City Museum. It is a multi-story children's playground. It is a parent's dream and nightmare all in one.

Our kids were at the age where you had to watch them like a hawk, but they also were old enough where they could easily wander off. I remember the place being packed. We got split up as a family. Having four kids is like cover 2 defense, you cover 2 and I'll cover 2. I was calling out one of our kid's names and even in that crowded place, I heard, "I'm right here, Dad."

How are we able to screen out all other voices and noises and hear those we want to hear? I believe it is focus. We give our attention to the voice that is most important even in the midst of other distractions.<sup>ii</sup>

In our study this morning, we are going to examine how Samuel learned to hear God's voice, see how he responded to God's voice, and how he continued to tune into God's voice. Then I want to draw some practical application points, some life lessons, in how we can learn to hear God speak.

#### MESSAGE:

So, let's first begin by looking at...

#### **1) Samuel Learning to Hear God's Voice.**

In verses 1-10, Samuel had to learn to hear God speak. Look at verse 1.

***<sup>1</sup>Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.***

At this point Samuel is no longer a toddler, he's a boy. Most scholars believe he is about 12 to 17 years old at this point. We also see that this is a dark time in Israel. Because of the terrible sin of the people and Eli's sons, the word of The Lord was rare, and visions from God did not occur much. Verse 2.

<sup>2</sup>At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. <sup>3</sup>The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

This is great background information but also full of symbolism.<sup>iii</sup> Eli was losing his eyesight, He's old. I think this is both physical and spiritual, by the way. He was not only having difficulty seeing, but he struggled seeing spiritually. We also learn that the lamp of God is still burning. This tells us the time-of-day Samuel's experience occurred, predawn hours. But it also symbolizes that even though it was a spiritually dark time, hope was not gone. God was going to do something new. He hadn't given up! And then we see Samuel was sleeping in close proximity to where the ark of God was. Samuel was most likely there to assist Eli in the event that he was needed. But being positioned close to what represented the presence of God is important in hearing from God.

Let's keep reading. Verse 4. <sup>4</sup>Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" <sup>5</sup>and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. <sup>6</sup>And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

Some people, here, suggest that Samuel didn't have a relationship with God, therefore, Samuel did not yet know the Lord. But I think this is in reference to Samuel never having had a prophetic word given to him. I think that's why there is the clarification that the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

I think it is very possible that this was an audible voice Samuel heard. It was enough to wake him up and cause him to believe Eli was calling him. I would think Samuel would have been used to that being the case. I'm sure Eli, blind and old in age, often called out to Samuel for help in the middle of the night.<sup>iv</sup>

Verse 8. <sup>8</sup>And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. [It took Eli, the priest, multiple tries to realize what was happening as well]. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went

and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup>And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

I like the fact that God says Samuel's name twice here. This calls attention to the similar way God called Abraham and Moses.<sup>v</sup> This was a very important moment in Samuel's life. So, we have Samuel learning to hear God's voice.

The second section of this story is...

## 2) Samuel Responding to God's Voice.

After hearing God, Samuel responded to God's call on his life. Let's look at that beginning in verse 11.

<sup>11</sup>Then the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. [In the Old Testament, ears would "tingle" when people receive news of coming punishment. Punishment was coming to Samuel but to Eli and his sons.] <sup>12</sup>On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. <sup>13</sup>And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. <sup>14</sup>Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." This is God announcing that He was going to make good on what He said he would do in chapter 2.

Verse 15. <sup>15</sup>Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. [Again, more symbolism here. Not only was Samuel performing his regular duties, but God was opening the doors to a new age of revelation to the nation of Israel through Samuel.] *And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.* <sup>16</sup>But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." <sup>17</sup>And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." <sup>18</sup>So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him."

Samuel responded and was obedient to God's voice even when it was hard. Talk about a tough first sermon. My very first sermon, I was 20, was tough. Not because it was a hard message, but because it was tough to listen to. Samuel's first sermon was telling his mentor that God's judgment was coming on him.

Moving quickly to get to a few life lessons, the third section of this chapter is...

### 3) Samuel continued listening to God's Voice.

Not only did Samuel learn to hear God's voice, but he continued to be tuned into what The Lord was speaking to him. Verses 19 through chapter 4 verse 1.

*<sup>19</sup>And **Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.** [That is that as Samuel heard from God and spoke His Word in prophecies, they all came to pass]. <sup>20</sup>**And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.** [His godly reputation was made known to all of Israel, even the outmost parts.] <sup>21</sup>**And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. <sup>4:1</sup>And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.***

Samuel continued hearing God's voice from that point on setting the stage for him to be the voice of God to God's people. Samuel learned to hear God's voice, responded to God's voice, and continued to tune into God's voice.

#### LIFE LESSONS:<sup>vi</sup>

Now, I want to talk very practically as we consider three life lessons from our study this morning. First lesson, ...

#### 1) God Still Speaks Today.

God wants to speak to you. We often jump to conclusions when we feel as though we can't hear God speak to us. Have I offended God? Does God not care? Does God even exist? We want God to speak to us in a very clear and unmistakable way. We look for handwriting in the sky, special message in our coffee, or even specific signs. We look for some strange phenomena to show us what we need to do next. But here's the deal, God more often than not, does not speak to us in those ways.<sup>vii</sup>

While Samuel may have heard an audible voice here. And let alone the fact that God came in and, quote, "stood," before Samuel. While that might be the case in this one circumstance, it is not the norm in the Scriptures. God most often spoke through prophets.

I have only had one time in my life, that I can remember, where I believe God spoke directly to me. It wasn't in an audible voice, but it was obviously from The

Lord. It surrounded my call into ministry. I was on a mission trip when I was in college, and we were doing ministry with high school students. I distinctly remember a feeling of God saying, "Chris, this is what I want you to do with your life." And God has, since, proven my calling time and time again.

But I know that hasn't been the only time God, quote, "spoke," to me. He has more often than not used other means by which to guide and direct me. For me to say that I haven't heard God "speak" since that day would be an untrue statement. Perhaps that day was more obvious than other ways God has spoken to me, but He continues to speak.

My point is that God still speaks to us today. We cannot say that if we aren't hearing an audible voice from Heaven that God isn't speaking. Nor can we jump to conclusions because we don't hear something like that. Listen, like in the days of Samuel, the God of the universe wants to walk into the rooms of ordinary people and speak to them. That hasn't changed. So, the question is how does God speak today? I want to mention 5 ways God speaks<sup>viii</sup>. First, ...

#### A) Through the Holy Spirit.

In John chapter 16, Jesus teaches that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to speak to God's people. John 16:12-13 Jesus says, *<sup>12</sup>I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, **he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.*** God speaks through the promptings, the urgings, of The Holy Spirit. God also speaks...

#### B) Through The Scriptures.

The Bible is God's Word in which He has already spoken. This is the primary way that God speaks to us. Psalm 119, verse 105 says, *<sup>105</sup>**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*** I think sometimes when we say to God, "Why are you not speaking to me?" I think He is saying, "I've already spoken in my Word. Get into my Word." God speaks through the promptings of the Holy Spirit and through the Scriptures. Thirdly, ...

#### C) Through The Church.

When I say that God speaks through the church, I am referring to the people of God. There are probably some of us that have some church hurt because of some leader that speaks on behalf of God. But remember, when we come to

Christ, we become the church. So, when I say church, I'm talking about the church being believers that know, love, and follow Jesus. There are posers in the church. Folks that think they represent God and do not. So, when I say God speaks through the church, I mean through genuine followers of Jesus Christ.

In the story of Samuel, Eli gave godly advice. Granted, it took him too long to give that advice, but he eventually told him to respond to The Lord. That's God using others in our lives to speak to us.

Colossians 3:16 says, *"<sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, **teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom**, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."* I have found that God confirms His word to us through the lives of other believers.

Now, it is important to know that there are two types of wisdom, earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. Godly people, truly following Jesus, dispense heavenly wisdom and those not following Jesus give earthly wisdom. If you want to hear God speak through His people, seek the wisdom of people following Him.

God speaks through the Holy Spirit, through The Scriptures, and through The Church. The fourth way God speaks is...

#### D) Through Creation.

Now, hear me out. When I say God speaks through creation, I am not saying that creation is God. This is not pantheism. What I mean is that God has revealed Himself generally through creation. Romans 1:19-20 says, *"<sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."*

God speaks through the Holy Spirit, through The Scriptures, through The Church, and through Creation. Finally, God speaks...

#### E) Through Jesus.

In the opening chapter of John's gospel, we learn that in the beginning was The Word and that Word became flesh. That flesh being Jesus. Jesus is God's Word revealed in the flesh.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, *"<sup>1</sup>Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* Jesus is the manifest Word by which we are to follow in every way.

So, God still speaks today. Life lesson number 2...

#### 2) Hearing God Requires Intentionality.

One of the reasons we don't hear God speak to us is because we are not intentional in positioning ourselves to hear Him. Samuel heard God when he was sleeping in close proximity to the ark of the covenant. In his day, the ark represented the very presence of God. In addition to that, Samuel positioned himself to hear from God when on the fourth time he heard his name called, Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." He invited God to speak.

Now, we don't have to sleep in the church to hear God speak to us. No, if we are in Christ, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, and Jesus is our High Priest mediator. We have a direct line to God. But the point is that we must position our hearts to hear from God, to surrender to His Word to us.

If we are honest, there are obstacles to us intentionally positioning ourselves to hear from God. That's a problem. I want to mention 4 obstacles to hearing God.

#### A) Inexperience

Samuel was young and didn't have experience with God speaking to him. This was the first time that had happened. And Samuel hadn't learned to hear God yet. Isn't it comforting to know that Samuel had to learn how to hear from God?

We, too, have to learn to hear God's voice. That is a process of faith and seeking His voice. So, the first obstacle to hearing God speak is inexperience. The second obstacle is...

#### B) Expectation

The byproduct of God's Word being rare in those days was a lack in expecting Him to speak. Eli certainly had grown complacent. It took 4 times to even register that God speaking was a possibility. Samuel's inexperience put him in a position to not expect that God would speak that way.



I'm convinced that one of the major reasons we don't hear God speak in our lives is because we don't expect Him to. Maybe it's our inexperience in hearing God's voice, but I think most often, if we're honest, we just don't expect God to interrupt our busy schedules to speak to our hearts. So, inexperience and expectation are obstacles. Number 3...

### C) Sin

Sin is an obstacle to hearing God speak. Eli and his sons' sin had blinded and deafened their ability to hear God. Their sin became a barrier.

Sin affects our ability to hear God as well. I bet if we were all honest, we don't really want to hear God speak because we don't want to hear what we are doing is wrong.

Sin also taints our view of what God wants to speak to us. When Adam and Eve were in the garden, they enjoyed a perfect relationship with God. Hearing God was a constant thing. However, what happened after they sinned? When they heard God walking through the garden they hid. They were afraid of God's voice.

Listen, sin not only keeps us from hearing God, but it also distorts what we think we will hear God say. As a result, we really don't want to hear what He has to say. And what I would say to that is, aren't you looking forward to the day when you stand before God and He says, "Well done good and faithful servant?" It is sin in our lives that leads us to believe that God only wants to speak judgment on us. But that's not true! God wants to speak life to you. Yes, The Holy Spirit will convict us of sin, but God wants to lead us to the abundant life that is found in Him. Hearing God's voice is necessary in finding that.

Barriers to hearing God speak are inexperience, lack of expectation, sin, and fourthly...

### D) Unwillingness

Eli and his sons were not willing to hear God speak, let alone be obedient to Him. Samuel, on the other hand, willingly listened to God and obeyed even when it was hard. Why would God speak if we didn't really want to hear it? God still speaks today, but it requires intentionality on our part to hear it.

I want to mention one other life lesson from this story.

### 3) Hearing God Brings Clarity.

When we learn to hear God's voice in our lives it brings clarity. Our purpose is to glorify God in all that we do. The best way we can bring glory to God is by hearing Him speak. Verse 19 of 1 Samuel 3 says, *"<sup>19</sup>And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground."* Learning to hear God speak allowed Samuel to know his calling and thereby Samuel glorified The Lord in and through his life. The same is true for us today. When we learn to hear God speak, we will be able to follow Him in what He has for us.

But another way hearing God bring clarity comes in the ability to see brokenness and minister to those that are hurting. When we have learned to hear from God, we begin to gain the heart and eyes of God. That affords us the opportunity to be the hands and feet of God to a hurting and broken world.

God still speaks today, hearing him requires intentionality, and when we hear Him it brings clarity.

### CONCLUSION:

So, here is the question for us this morning. How is God speaking to you today?

For some of you, He is leading you to Himself. The bible says that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. However, God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. For some of you here today, God is calling you to salvation. To trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you have questions about what that looks like, you come this morning. Our elders will be here at the front ready to receive you. All you have to say is, "I need Jesus." It would thrill us to share with you how to have a relationship with Jesus.

Others in the room, you are struggling to hear God speak to you. You want so badly to hear Him speak to the storm in your life. Perhaps you need to begin today by allowing our elders to pray with you and over you.

I trust The Lord is speaking. Let's listen and respond. [PRAY]

## ENDNOTES:

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- <sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation for this message: Robert D. Bergen, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel, Vol. 7*, B&H Publishing: Nashville, 1996; Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel*, Holman: Nashville, 2016; Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2003; Troy Rackliffe, "Life Lessons Message 2," sermon preached at Glade Community Church, Daniels, WV; Enduring Word Commentary, "1 Samuel 3 – God Speaks to Samuel," accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-samuel-3/>; Ray Fowler, "Can You Hear Me Now?" published by Ray Fowler Ministries, accessed online: <http://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/1-samuel/can-you-hear-me-now/>; J.D. Greear, "Abusive Leaders and Faithful Shepherds – The Call of Samuel," sermon preached at Summit Church on July 10, 2022, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/abusive-leaders-and-faithful-shepherds/>; Skip Heitzig, "Expound: 1 Samuel 2:22-4:22," message taught at Calvary Church on Wednesday, May 19, 2021, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/314/sermon/4571>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel*, Holman: Nashville, 2016, page 61.
- <sup>iii</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel, Vol. 7*, B&H Publishing: Nashville, 1996, page 86.
- <sup>iv</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2003, page 81.
- <sup>v</sup> Bergen, 86.
- <sup>vi</sup> This section was shaped mostly by the commentary by Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, pages 62-73.
- <sup>vii</sup> Examples given by Thomas and Greear.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid.