THE PROPHET IS CALLED

Charmaine arrived at the hotel along with the other conference attendees and got the key to her room. As she made her way up to her floor, she prayed. She had registered at the last minute and didn't get to choose her roommate. Her pastor assigned her to stay with a complete stranger, a woman he had briefly met some weeks back.

When Charmaine got to her room, her roommate was already there. They exchanged introductions, and quickly began bonding. Over the course of the conference, the two women were vulnerable and got to know each other well. Charmaine's roommate had recently been hurt by a negative experience at her church, and as a result she had felt discouraged and disregarded.

Charmaine ached for her roommate, but she could feel that the Spirit was prompting her to walk alongside her. Charmaine had experienced church hurt as well, and could offer an arm of support.

The week was not long enough, of course, and by the end, Charmaine felt that her job was not finished. She was determined to keep in touch with this woman. She had grown to love her new companion and wanted to live as a reminder of the good that can come from Christian fellowship.

1 How and when does God speak to us?

2 Why is it important to heed a message from God?

3 Can you recall a time when God placed a *holy discontent* on you?

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me.
And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. 9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.
10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.
11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. 12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. 13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. 14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

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."
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.'"

Hear and Obey the Word

As a young boy, Samuel was set apart by God to serve in the tabernacle of Shiloh, which was led by an older priest named Eli. In the days that Eli and his sons served, "the word of the LORD was rare" (1 Sam. 3:1). But Samuel is special, promised to God and a child of a miraculous birth (1 Sam. 1:19–20).

One night, something unexpected happens. A voice calls out to Samuel; but since Samuel had never heard God in this way before, he is confused. Eli had laid down for the night when Samuel heard someone call his name. Before the beginning of our reading, this actually happens twice—and each time that Samuel comes, Eli sends him back to bed. Finally, Eli, who is old and blind, realizes "the LORD [is] calling the boy" (1 Sam. 3:8). Eli gives Samuel directions to return to bed and to respond to the voice by saying, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (v. 9).

Samuel obeys and waits for the Lord to speak his name again. The text even says, "The LORD came and stood there, calling" (v. 10). We could interpret this as a unique appearance of God, or perhaps as a vision (compare 1 Sam. 3:1).

Either way, Samuel replies this time. And at Samuel's invitation, God shares astonishing news that would alter his world. As with most prophecies, the words give Samuel direct access to what God is thinking and planning to do. This news will cause the ringing of ears, as in Jeremiah 19:3—which means that this is hard news that will spread quickly. God is about to do a new thing that will bring judgment to the family of Eli (1 Sam. 3:12–13). Moreover, nothing that Eli or his household can do will change God's resolve. There is no sacrifice or offering that would cover their behavior.

Now, remembering that Samuel is a young boy who is learning and training under Eli, what is Samuel to do? The test for Samuel is laid bare. He will either keep silent about what he has heard, or he will share what God has told him—despite the awkwardness and potential fallout it may cause.

1 Why didn't Samuel recognize that God was speaking to him?

2 What was the message that God disclosed?

3 Why do you think God sent this message to a young boy like Samuel?

15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.
16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son.
And he answered, Here am I.
17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.
18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.
19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

15 Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, 16 but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."
Samuel answered, "Here I am."
17 "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." 18 So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."
19 The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD.

God's Word Will Come to Pass

The prophet Ezekiel says that what the Lord predicts *will* happen (Ezek. 12:25). So as Samuel lies in the darkness, the young boy faces his first test as a prophet. Eli was previously warned that his judgment was coming, but now Samuel must share that the pronouncement is final. Instead of bounding up to tell Eli immediately, Samuel waits for the morning. Perhaps he struggled to sleep as he processed this message for his caretaker.

Samuel's day probably began by opening the tabernacle for worshipers to offer sacrifices. Knowing the Lord spoke to Samuel in a way no one had experienced in ages, Eli asks the young boy to share the message with him. What had God wakened them both to say? Eli wants a full report, saying that nothing should be hidden from him (1 Sam. 3:17). He may expect some resistance, so Eli utters a curse to try to compel the young prophet to speak it all or face consequences.

Samuel responds with obedience and shares everything. Like future prophets, he is called to "uproot and tear down, . . . to build and to plant" by sharing what is true (Jer. 1:10). Samuel shares the hard words and the pronouncement of unalterable consequences for Eli's disobedience. But Eli accepts this message from God, since clearly this would not be something the young boy would invent (1 Sam. 3:18).

Eli may have realized in this moment that Samuel was his successor. The text does not say whether Eli was contrite or acted to confess his sin. But as he and his family passes from leadership, God has chosen Samuel to be judge, priest, and prophet. Instead of refusing to obey God, Samuel would be zealous in his obedience. One day he would say, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

God was with Samuel and did not allow any of these words to go unfulfilled (1 Sam. 3:19). From "Dan to Beersheba," or north to south, all of the Israelites would come to recognize Samuel's unique role as the one chosen to speak for God (v. 20). God would use him to bring spiritual revival to the nation.

1 What would make Samuel fearful to tell Eli what God said to him?

2 What is the hardest news you have ever had to share?

3 How did God ensure that all of Israel knew that Samuel was a prophet?



The ancient site of Shiloh was the central place where Joshua had apportioned the land to each tribe. As 1 Samuel begins, it holds the tabernacle. Archaeological evidence points to a destruction by fire in the eleventh century BC, which matches the timeline of 1 Samuel 4 (next lesson).
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Answer the Call

I remember feeling excited when the phone rang. Before the days of caller ID, we couldn't screen our calls. A ringing phone was like a mystery: "Who is trying to reach us?" But later as mobile took over and became the norm that it is today, we no longer answer most calls from unknown numbers. We're more likely to get a call from a scammer than an unknown person with important news.

God desires us to listen and to answer His call. The Lord, by His grace, liberally pours out wisdom and direction through His Word and by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Early in my walk with the Lord I desired to hear God speak audibly, as Samuel experienced. What I truly desired was to hear the voice of the Lord giving me step-by-step directions for my whole life. Wouldn't it be nice to have all the right answers from heaven?

I discovered that God does lead and guide in many ways. We can listen to God through His Word, which discloses timeless wisdom and direction (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The Holy Spirit also gives us discernment and leads us through struggles, to help know His perfect will (1 Peter 1:6–7).

Recently my wife and I sought direction for our next step of ministry with prayer and fasting. We were not sure what God was calling us to do, but by faith we believed the Lord would order our steps. We listened for whatever God might say. As we fasted and prayed, the Lord began to clarify our direction. One day, while reading Jesus' words, "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19), it was as if God had shown a spotlight on my heart. While I didn't hear an audible voice, God placed a burden on me to make disciples in one particular community of New Orleans.

Is God calling you today, and are you listening intently? God is good, and we don't have to screen His calls. Where He leads, He will not let us falter.

1 What are some ways God speaks to us today?

2 Share a time where you "answered God's call."

3 How does knowing the Word of God help us listen to God even better?

Speak, Lord

This week, let's take some time to heed Eli's advice and to ask for God to speak. Are you at a crossroads in life, wondering which way to turn? Are you feeling spiritually dry and seeking a new level of connection with God? Is there a worry plaguing you? Bring these before the Lord with a listening spirit. Specifically, if you are not in the habit of praying before bedtime, try the following simple prayer as you lie down.

Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.

Key Text

Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.
—1 Samuel 3:9a KJV

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" —1 Samuel 3:9a NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of November 2 through November 7

Mon. Revelation 21:1–4, 9–27—The Holy City.
Tue. Ezekiel 10:1–7—The Glory of the Lord.
Wed. Ezekiel 10:15–19; 11:22–25—A Vision of God's Glory.
Thu. Galatians 6:1–10—We Reap What We Sow.
Fri. 1 Samuel 4:12–22—When All Is Lost.
Sat. 2 Corinthians 5:1–10—Promise of A New Body.

Next Week: 1 Samuel 4:12–22
What risks do we run when we try to make God follow our plans, instead of being devoted to His?