

# God Calls Samuel

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1 Samuel 3:1-9

**Sermon Series:**  
**Calling People to**  
**Faith**

***Children are simply on loan to us. They were God's before they were ours and they will be God's after we're gone!***

**W**hen I have a choice of seats on an airplane, I request the exit row. The reason is rather simple: I like the extra leg room.

I was seated on the exit row of a flight recently. A flight attendant leaned over and asked me, "Sir, have you read the instruction card located in the seat pocket in front of you that tells you how to open that door in case of an emergency? I need an affirmative answer."

I nodded yes, but if you really want to know the truth, I hadn't read it. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know how to operate the exit door. You just swivel the handle, push the door out and over to the side. How hard is that? So I lied. I told her I had read the card when, in truth, I hadn't.

She was a cagey flight attendant. She must have had experience with people like me because she said, "Sir, if an emergency happens, I'll be depending on you to open that door. And hundreds of other people will be relying on you, too. I hope you know what's on that card."

She didn't wait for my answer; she smiled a knowing smile and walked away. She got inside my head. Hundreds of people are relying on me to know what's on that card. What if there really is an emergency and I need to know

how the door works? So I read the instruction card.

Our focus this fall is God's call. How is God calling you? Are you listening for God's call? Are you reading the instructions?

I read earlier the story of Samuel's call. Some background is in order here to appreciate this story. The book of 1st Samuel begins with the story of Elkanah, the man with two wives. Now, why a man would want two wives is beyond me.

One of Elkanah's wives, Peninnah, is able to have children, lots of them! His other wife, Hannah, struggles with infertility. To make matters worse, Peninnah flaunts her fertility prowess by rubbing it in.

Hannah pleads to God for a son (1:9-11). She vows if God will give her a son, she will give him back to the Lord. English translations miss the original play on words in the Hebrew. To give also means to loan to someone. Hannah vows if you give (or loan) me a son, I will give him back to you.

There's a lesson here for those among us who are parents, who like to think of our children as ours. They aren't ours in a possessive sense, they are God's. Children are simply on loan to us. They were God's before they were ours and they will be God's after we're gone!

***There is no calling without a caller.***

Eli, the high priest, witnesses Hannah's prayer for a son and assures her that God will answer her prayer. When Samuel is born and weaned, Hannah makes good on her promise and offers Samuel to be Eli's apprentice (3:1).

We're told in chapter three that visions are not common in Samuel's day (3:1). It's a spiritual wasteland in Israel. Temple attendance is down, and there is a lack of good preaching. Eli's two sons serve as temple priests, but they are really bums. They sleep with women in the synagogue and extort people's offerings. Eli yells at them a few times but generally turns a blind eye.

It's a time when people are not listening, and God is not speaking. I mean, what's the use of speaking, if people are not listening. It's as if God says, "All right, since you aren't listening, I won't speak." God grants them the horrible freedom they crave. From now on, the only voice they will hear will be their own.

One night, as Samuel sleeps in the temple, he is awakened by a voice calling his name. "Samuel. Samuel." He assumes it to be Eli, so he rushes to Eli's room. "Here I am, for you called me."

"I didn't call you," Eli says, "lie down again."

A second time, he hears a voice calling his name, and again Samuel appears at Eli's bedside, "Here I am, for you called me." Once more, Eli tells him to go back to bed. (Some of you with jumping bean kids at bedtime can relate!)

The same voice appears to Samuel a third time, and he runs to Eli, "Here I am, for you called me." Eli puts two and two together and realizes the Lord is calling Samuel, so he instructs him: "Go lie down. If the Lord calls you, you shall say, 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.'" When Samuel answers in the manner Eli has told him, God reveals that judgment is about to fall on Eli's house. The following morning, Eli wants to know what God has said. Samuel swallows hard. How do you tell your mentor and father figure the awful truth?

We read in verse 19, "None of Samuel's words fall to the ground." It's another way of saying all his words will come true. And so they do. By the end of chapter 4, Eli and his two sons meet their Maker.

Let me return to something I said several Sundays ago about God's call, utilizing once more Os Guinness's book entitled *The Call*. These comments are offered for any people among us who are confused about "the call."

Guinness writes that our primary calling is to someone (namely God) rather than to do something or to go somewhere. There is no calling without a caller. First and foremost, God calls people into relationship through Jesus Christ. This singular calling (to God) results in multiple callings (to know what we are here to do and why). These multiple callings may include raising children, teaching, accounting, you name it. These two callings fit together and must be kept in the right order.

It's a cardinal rule of preaching that every good sermon should

## ***How do we know which voice is ours and which is God's?***

include three points and end with a poem. I'm pushing the envelope today, knowing this sermon has five points.

My first observation harkens back to something I have said in earlier sermons. God's call often comes to unsuspecting people. Abraham was living as a unsuspecting nomadic Bedouin when God called him "...to a land I will show you" (Genesis 12:3). Moses was tending sheep for his father-in-law when God called him from a burning bush to tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go" (Exodus 3:10). Gideon was threshing wheat incognito when God called him to do battle with ruthless Midianites (Judges 6:11).

Such stories are replicated countless times in people's lives. I was minding my own business in college, having a good time, when God's call redirected my life.

Second observation: God's call persists until answered. God's call persists three times until Samuel answers.

Someone asked me recently, if God calls you and you don't answer, what happens? Do you miss the call?

It's not as though God has everyone on speed dial and the first person to pick up gets the call. God persists! If you miss the call, God will dial again.

Have you noticed thus far in this sermon series that most of the people God calls initially resist? God calls, people resist, yet God persists?

Third observation: God's call sometimes requires other people's

input. Samuel initially doesn't recognize God's call. He needs Eli's help in interpreting it.

The story is told of a farmer who was out in his field one day when he looked up at the summer sky and saw the most unusual cloud formation. As clear as day he saw white puffy clouds in the shape of the letters "G" and "P" and "C." The first thought that crossed his mind was that this must be some sort of sign from God. He interpreted the letters as God's call to "Go preach Christ." The farmer announced to the elders of his church that he was being called to preach. So they invited him to preach the sermon a few weeks later. His sermon that Sunday was long and tedious, virtually incoherent. When it finally ends, the leaders sit in stunned silence. Finally, a wise old elder says to the would-be preacher, "Seems to me the clouds were saying "Go plant corn."

How do we know which voice is ours and which is God's? Suppose I am convinced that God is calling me to go to Texas. Now, is God really calling me to Texas or is it just me talking to myself? Sometimes, ministerial colleagues tell me, "I'll go anywhere God wants me to go, so long as the climate is warm and the cost of housing is affordable and there is a professional sports team in the area." Are you sure you are listening for God's call? The honest counsel of trusted friends can help discriminate God's voice from our speech. Identify people in your life who can give you honest feedback about God's call in your life. They must be

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speaking.”***

people who are able to recognize God’s call. Do they interpret this voice as God speaking to you or as you talking to yourself?

Fourth observation: God’s call often challenges us to go beyond our comfort zone. Certainly Samuel’s confrontation of Eli ranks up there as a classic example of someone going well beyond his comfort zone.

Most of us have a spiritual comfort zone where we feel secure trusting God. But when God calls us to go beyond our spiritual comfort zone, we become nervous and uncomfortable. You might feel comfortable talking about God with your church friends, but talking about God with people outside church extends beyond your spiritual comfort zone. You might be comfortable with your current job but become anxious when you sense God is calling you to undergo vocational realignment.

Fifth observation: God’s call requires us to listen. “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Some of us have it the other way around: “Listen Lord, for your servant is speaking.”

Assume a posture of listening. If we are going to hear God speak, we must assume a posture of receptivity.

God is speaking. Are we listening?