

HOW TO RESPOND WHEN GOD CALLS

As we discussed last time, the 350 year period of the Judges was a tragic sequel in comparison with the time of Joshua. After the death of Samson the nation as a whole drifted further and further from the Lord in disobedience. In fact, **Judges 17:6 (NIV)** best describes the spiritual condition of the people when it says, *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."* Whenever we start doing what we want based on what we think is right in our own eyes we are in deep trouble. As a result of this dark period in Israel's history, the voice of God became quiet and His revelation and guidance of Israel's leaders became nonexistent. **Btw, if we ignore what God is trying to say to us long enough eventually He will stop trying to talk to us.** I mean think about it! How many of us would keep trying to have a conversation with someone who wasn't listening to us? Over time that is exactly what happened between Israel and God. **1 Samuel 3:1 (NIV)** *The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.*

So, this morning as we look at God's call on Samuel's life I want us to see how God communicates with His people so that when He calls you, you can recognize His voice and prepare yourself to obey. As you are turning to **1 Samuel 3** let me PRAY for us as we begin.

Just to set the context, Israel is in a period of deep spiritual decay where there are some people who are declaring themselves to be priests, offering up sacrifices to idols and where men have become unloving and extremely violent. Part of the problem is that there is a great void of spiritual leadership and the people are doing what is right in their own eyes. (Sounds kinda like today?!?)

During this time there was a young woman named Hannah who has been unable to have any children and in her anguish she cries out to the Lord and pleads with Him to give her a son. Her pledge to the Lord is that if He will give her a son she would dedicate him back to the Lord. I want you to know that these were not just spiritual words designed to try and manipulate God into giving her what she wanted, but they were the true intentions of her heart. The Lord grants her request and as an authentic act of worship she literally gives her son Samuel to serve in the house of God.

1 Samuel 1:21-22 *When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, 22 Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always."*

Most children were weaned between the ages of 2 to 3 years of age. This means the child would be a little toddler when she would take him to the tabernacle and leave him. Ladies, do you feel this woman's dedication to the Lord? She is going to take her precious little baby boy whom she had been waiting patiently to have and then offer him up to the priest so he could live

with him and be trained by him thus serving the Lord with his whole life. Here's what the Bible says in case you don't believe me.

1 Samuel 2:18-21 (NIV) But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod. **19** Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. She would only get to see her baby boy once a year when she and her husband would go up to the tabernacle to worship the Lord. I think it is safe to say that she honored her pledge to the Lord. **20** Eli (The priest) **would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.” Then they would go home.** (Now watch how God honored her sacrifice) **21** **And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.**

Just a little side note here: YOU CANNOT OUTGIVE GOD! Whatever you think is a sacrifice to God, God will always return to you more than what you gave up! One of our CORE VALUES here at Vertical Church is YOU CANNOT OUTGIVE GOD! It is why we preach about and believe in generosity! I have experienced this in my personal life and we have experienced this as a church! This is especially true when you do so with a true heart of worship knowing God is worth it and He is trustworthy with what you are giving Him. God ended up giving this barren woman three more sons and two daughters in addition to Samuel! Meanwhile, Samuel is going to serve as a priest and he is going to become a great prophet where God is going to use him as His mouthpiece in order to speak to Israel during this next phase of their history. Samuel is a glimmer of light in a very dark time when there were not very many who had a heart for God.

As we look at God's interaction with Samuel I want you to notice three truths about God's voice based on the way that God spoke to Samuel. First of all, I want you to notice that **God's silence doesn't mean His absence.**

1 Samuel 3:1-3 (NIV) The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. Right here in this first verse I want you to see that God is PRESENT with His people! There might be periods of silence, but God is still WITH them! He is THERE! He has not LEFT the building!! His voice may be RARE but it isn't nonexistent. There might not be MANY visions but at least there are SOME visions! Anybody with me this morning!

2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. **3** The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

All throughout Israel's history, even though there were periods when God was silent, He never left His people. He was always working on their behalf. He was always making provision for them and He was always guiding them and preparing them for what He had for them next. And the same is true for us. In God's word He promises us that He will never leave us nor forsake

us! (Share an example from your own life where this was true for you. Maybe a time when you felt like God was silent but as you look back you can see God's presence in His provision and how He worked through the situation)

What are some reasons as to why God may be silent in your life?

- 1) You are ignoring what he has already said so why give you new instructions
- 2) To test your faith to see if you will seek after Him or if you will look elsewhere
- 3) He speaks in whispers so maybe you have the noise of your flesh turned up too loud and it is drowning Him out
- 4) Sin has separated you from the ear of the Lord

Even though God may have been silent, God was very much near to His people in this moment and Samuel is a testimony to that fact! After all, He did answer Hannah's prayer regarding a son! God is providing Eli the priest with a disciple to train up seeing how his sons were not very interested in the things of God. Samuel is going to become a vehicle by which God is going to speak to Israel especially as they begin to long for a king to rule over them. **God's silence doesn't mean His absence.**

Secondly, **God's voice can come when you least expect it.**

How many times do you and I get overwhelmed with life or maybe get too busy doing our own thing that we are not prepared to hear from the Lord? Maybe we are frustrated with life and discouraged so we are just mailing it in rather than being intentional in our relationship with God. As a result, we grow apathetic and just end up going through the motions therefore we are not in the place to hear God speak. I believe that is exactly what we see here with Eli the priest.

4 Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." **5** And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. **6** Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." **7** Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. **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.

Eli may have been just mailing it in regarding his duties as a priest. After all, It took him three times before he realized that it might be God who was trying to speak to Samuel. Eli was getting old and he had been doing this priest thing for a while. He was obviously worn down by the evil going on in Israel and by the disobedience of his own sons. I believe Eli had grown apathetic in his service to the Lord and to his role as a father. Eli was obviously teaching Samuel the mechanics of what it meant to be a priest but it is clear by what verse 7 says that he was not teaching Samuel the heart of what it meant to have a relationship with God. **7** Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. This would be

the equivalent of me training someone up to be a pastor but never having a conversation about the person's relationship with Jesus and not even teaching them how to study God's word and apply it to their life. So after the third time Eli finally gives Samuel some of the best instruction he has ever given him.

- 1) He instructs Samuel to **BE STILL**. He encouraged him to make himself available to God by telling him to **Go, lie down**. If we want to hear from God, being still is a prerequisite. Too often we are distracted by busy minds and active hands. As a result, we crowd God out of our lives not giving Him room or opportunities to speak to us. We need to stop and listen!
- 2) He instructs Samuel to **NOT PUT WORDS IN GOD'S MOUTH**. He encouraged him to not force the situation by saying, **If He calls you**. In other words, don't put words in God's mouth and call it a word from GOD. We must hear from God Himself. The preacher may speak, our parents may speak, our friends may speak, our teachers may speak, those on the radio or television may speak. That is all fine, but their voices mean nothing unless God speaks through them. It also can't be the desires of our fleshly heart either. We need to hear directly from God untainted by the world and our flesh.
- 3) He instructs Samuel to **HEAR and be ready to OBEY**. He encouraged him to respond with the intent to obey what God says. **Speak, LORD, Your servant is listening**. It's one thing to listen. It is a whole other thing to do so with the intent of acting on it!

In order to recognize the Lord's voice we have to KNOW the Lord in a personal way. What's interesting is that Eli was rather slow in recognizing it was God who was trying to speak to Samuel. In order to hear God's voice we need to be EXPECTANT and we need to get to KNOW the Lord. First of all the Lord wants you to know Him and He wants you to have a relationship with Him. This is cultivated by spending time in His word and obviously in prayer talking with Him. It is not enough to know the word of God. That's part of it, but at the end of the day we must be ready to act on the word of God by faith. It is only through faith steps that we will be able to get to know God more intimately. When it comes to a word from God you can always know it is God because 1) He will never violate His written word. 2) He will always call you to a step of faith. And, 3) He will always seek to bring Himself glory in the process.

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.'"

Nothing clogs the lines of communication with God like sin. Acts of disobedience must be confessed and turned from before we can hear God clearly. It is probably why God isn't calling to Eli even though He is the senior priest. Eli's disobedience has apparently choked out God's ability to communicate with him clearly. Let's prepare ourselves to hear from God. **God's silence doesn't mean His absence. God's voice can come when you least expect it.**

Lastly, God's call demands our obedience.

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." Eli knew a thing or two about not doing exactly what God had said. Part of the spiritual deprivation in Eli's life as well as in Israel was the result of a lack of obedience. Eli gives Samuel another vital piece of instruction and that is OBEY COMPLETELY! When it comes to what God has said we need to make sure we do all that God has said, holding nothing back. **Partial obedience is still disobedience!**

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. May this be the desire and prayer of our heart! First of all, may we approach the life of faith with this kind of attitude, "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes." And secondly, may our relationship with God be such that what we pray may comes to pass and not one word we speak falls to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. **21** The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

Obedience only opens us up to further communication with God. When we are obedient we show ourselves trustworthy and God gives us more to be responsible with. That is why it is imperative for us to be obedient to what God reveals to us. (LET'S PRAY)

Worship Team Comes Back Up

Invitation:

The first way God speaks to us that demands our immediate response is HIS call SALVATION. If you are here today and you don't have a relationship with Jesus, He is calling you today! Are

you listening? And are you ready to respond by CONFESSING YOUR SIN, TURNING FROM YOUR OLD LIFE and TURNING TO JESUS?

If you have a relationship with Jesus God is still calling you. The question is are you intune with Him and are you listening with the intent to do what it is He is calling you to? REPENTANCE concerning a lifestyle choice, Your NEXT STEP (BAPTISM, CHURCH PARTNERSHIP, SERVICE), WITNESSING TO YOUR FRIENDS and NEIGHBORS, a MINISTRY ENDEAVOR where God wants to use you to help others utilizing your unique giftedness.

Maybe you have been struggling to HEAR God's voice. Can I encourage you to start by BEING STILL. Secondly, expect Him to speak but do NOT PUT WORDS IN GOD'S MOUTH. Make sure it is God and the only way to do that is to spend time in God's word and seek godly counsel. Finally, when He does speak, LISTEN and be ready to OBEY. When God calls, our first response should be to OBEY immediately! God is not as interested in your capability as He is your AVAILABILITY because God is the one who equips those He calls.