

LESSON 5

Samuel: Hearing God's Call

1 Samuel 3:1–21

“The Lord came, stood there, and called as before, ‘Samuel, Samuel!’ Samuel responded, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’”

(1 Samuel 3:10)

Class Overview: In the quiet of the night, a young boy named Samuel heard his name called—once, twice, and then a third time. At first, he thought it was Eli, the aging priest, but it was God speaking. In that moment, Samuel’s life changed forever. His story reminds us that hearing God’s call starts with a heart that listens. This lesson explores how God speaks to those willing to hear, how He prepares His servants through obedience, and how a single voice of faith can bring renewal to a generation that has drifted from Him.

Class Objectives: By the end of this class, you should be able to—

1. Describe the spiritual condition of Israel during the time of Eli and Samuel.
2. Understand how Samuel learned to recognize and respond to God’s voice.
3. Identify key principles for listening to and obeying God’s word today.
4. Recognize the relationship between a receptive heart and faithful service.
5. Commit to developing a habit of listening for God through Scripture and prayer.

Introduction

THE STORY OF SAMUEL’S CALL is one of the most touching scenes in Scripture. It occurs in the quiet of the night, well before dawn, when a young boy serving in the tabernacle hears his name called by God.

At first, Samuel doesn't recognize the voice; he thinks Eli, the priest, is calling him. But as the story develops, the voice becomes unmistakable. The Lord Himself is speaking.

Samuel's calling reminds us that God often speaks in quiet moments, not through thunder or noise but through a still and personal word. The boy who once ran to Eli would now speak for God to an entire nation. His willingness to listen marked the beginning of a life of faithful service. Samuel's story teaches that spiritual maturity starts with a simple response: *"Speak, for your servant is listening."*

During a time when few people listened to or obeyed God's word, Samuel's attentive heart stood out. God's call was not just about hearing, it was about obeying. What started as a child's voice responding in the night grew into the steady leadership of a prophet who led Israel for many years. His life challenges us to make space for God's voice, listen when He speaks, and respond with faith.

Historical Background

The events of 1 Samuel 3 take place late in the period of the judges, a time marked by spiritual decline and confusion in Israel. The book begins with the words, *"In those days the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread"* (1 Samuel 3:1). The people had largely turned away from God, and even the priesthood was corrupt. Eli, the high priest, was old and tired. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests in title only, lacking true conviction. They used their position for personal gain and dishonored the sanctuary (1 Samuel 2:12–17).

Amid this moral decline, God started a new work. Hannah, a humble and prayerful woman, had dedicated her son Samuel to the Lord's service at Shiloh. Samuel grew up serving under Eli, likely helping in the tabernacle—opening its doors, tending lamps, and doing small tasks. Though young, his heart was tender toward God. The spiritual silence that had marked Israel's condition was about to be broken through this child.

The tabernacle at Shiloh remained the main place of worship, housing the ark of the covenant. However, Israel's spiritual condition was dim,

much like the lamp of God that “had not yet gone out” (3:3). This small detail reflects both the time of night and the state of the nation—the light of God’s word was faint but still burning. In this setting, God spoke to Samuel for the first time. His call marked a turning point in Israel’s history. Through Samuel, God would restore His word, judge corruption, and prepare the way for David’s kingship.

Even in dark times, God is never silent. He stirs hearts that are willing to listen. The message that began with a young servant in the temple serves as a reminder to all of Israel that God still speaks and continues to call those who are ready to listen.

God Speaks in the Silence

The story of Samuel’s call begins with a vivid description of the times: *“In those days the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread”* (1 Samuel 3:1). That single sentence captures the spiritual drought of Israel. God had not stopped speaking; His people had stopped listening. The priests were corrupt, the people were complacent, and reverence for God’s word had faded. Yet even in that silence, God was preparing to speak again.

Samuel was still a boy, serving under Eli in the tabernacle at Shiloh. He was not yet a prophet or leader—just a servant performing ordinary duties. But the Lord saw something in Samuel that He did not see in many others: a heart willing to listen. When the text says, *“Samuel did not yet know the Lord; the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him”* (v. 7), it means he had not yet experienced personal revelation. He was faithful in service, but his relationship with God was about to deepen.

It was during the night, while the lamp of God was still burning, that the Lord called. The setting is both literal and symbolic. Darkness covered the tabernacle, but the light had not gone out. The silence was about to be broken. God called Samuel by name, “Samuel! Samuel!” but the boy, unfamiliar with the voice, ran to Eli. This happened three times. Samuel was eager to respond, but he mistook the source. Finally, the aged priest realized what was happening and instructed him, *“Go and lie down. If He calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’”* (v. 9).

Those words reflect a heart ready to hear God. It's simple, humble, and willing. Samuel didn't yet know what God would say, but he was prepared to listen. That is the first step of true discipleship: making ourselves available before knowing the assignment. Many want God to speak, but few are quiet enough to listen. Samuel teaches that God's voice is best heard in stillness and obedience.

There's a clear contrast between Samuel and Eli's sons. Hophni and Phinehas were priests who ignored God's voice; Samuel was a child who listened. The difference wasn't in age or education, it was in the heart. God bypassed corrupt leadership to speak to a faithful servant. That same principle still applies. God speaks to the humble, not the proud; to those who are open, not indifferent.

When the Lord came and "stood there" (v. 10), calling Samuel by name again, it marked the end of silence. God's word was returning to Israel. The voice that had been quiet for years was now shaping the future through a willing boy. Samuel's simple response, *"Speak, for your servant is listening"* became the defining attitude of his life.

God still speaks in silence today. We live in a world full of noise, distraction, and confusion, yet God's voice remains the same. It still comes through His Word, His Spirit, and quiet moments of conviction. The question is not if God is speaking, but if we're listening. Like Samuel, we must make space for silence, humility, and readiness to hear. Spiritual renewal always starts when God's people say, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening."

God Calls Those Who Are Willing to Listen

When God spoke to Samuel, He didn't choose a seasoned prophet or an influential leader. He chose a boy willing to listen. The difference between Samuel and the rest of Israel wasn't knowledge; it was posture. Eli's sons had hardened hearts and deafened ears. They treated holy things as common and ignored God's commands. In contrast, Samuel's heart was soft toward the Lord. Even before he recognized the voice, he responded to it.

The key to understanding this part of the story is Samuel's availability. Every time he heard his name, he ran to Eli and said, *"Here I am."* Those words, spoken three times before Samuel even knew it was God, show a spirit of readiness. When Eli finally realized what was happening and instructed Samuel to answer, *"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening,"* Samuel obeyed. That simple response captures the essence of faithful service. God speaks to those who are ready to hear and respond without conditions.

When God called Samuel's name, He was doing more than awakening a child from sleep; He was awakening a nation from silence. Israel's leaders had failed to hear, but God found a heart that would. The Lord often begins His greatest works through those who seem least qualified but most willing. It was true of Moses, Gideon, Mary, and the apostles, and it is true here. God is not looking for perfection; He is looking for attentiveness.

Samuel's willingness to listen positioned him to become a voice for God. The message he received that night was not an easy one. It was a word of judgment against Eli's household. Yet Samuel listened carefully and delivered it faithfully. When morning came, he was afraid to share it, but when Eli pressed him, Samuel told him everything. His obedience, though difficult, confirmed his calling. Hearing God's voice means being ready to obey even when the message is hard.

This part of Samuel's story teaches an important truth for every believer: God reveals His will to those who are ready to do it. He doesn't speak to satisfy curiosity or pride. He speaks to guide obedience. Many people want to hear from God but on their own terms, hoping for affirmation rather than instruction. Samuel's example shows that a servant's heart says, *"Speak, Lord,"* not *"Explain, Lord."* God calls those who are willing to respond without debate.

Notice, too, that Samuel's first act of obedience was rooted in humility. He didn't rush to proclaim that God had spoken to him. Instead, he waited until Eli asked. His restraint demonstrated maturity beyond his years. Even as God's chosen messenger, Samuel remained a servant. That humility would define his entire ministry. From this first encounter to

his final days as Israel's prophet, he continued to listen before he led.

God still calls people with hearts like Samuel's. He speaks through His Word to those who are quiet enough to hear and obedient enough to act. His voice may not come audibly in the night, but it speaks clearly through Scripture, conviction, and the guidance of His Spirit. The real question isn't whether we can hear Him, it's whether we're willing to listen and obey. Samuel's story challenges us to keep our hearts tender and our ears open, ready to say each day, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening."

God's Word Shapes His Servants

When Samuel finally heard God's message, it was not the comforting word he might have expected. The Lord revealed that judgment was coming on Eli's household because of his sons' corruption and Eli's failure to restrain them (1 Samuel 3:11–14). For a young boy serving under Eli's care, that must have been a heavy burden to bear. God's first revelation to Samuel was not about glory or greatness; it was about obedience to a difficult truth. This shows that God's word not only calls us into service but also shapes our hearts for it.

Samuel's reaction shows his humility. Verse 15 states, "*Samuel lay down until the morning; then he opened the doors of the Lord's house.*" He continued with his regular tasks even after hearing such important news. There was no boastful tone, no rush to share what God had said. Instead, he quietly waited. When Eli called him and asked what the Lord had spoken, Samuel hesitated, unsure whether to tell him. But when asked again, he faithfully relayed the entire message, nothing more and nothing less. That moment was the true test of his calling. God's messenger must speak truth even when it's uncomfortable.

From that day on, Samuel's life became a model of faithfulness to God's word. The text states, "*Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and He fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied*" (1 Samuel 3:19). This indicates that God confirmed Samuel's words with His own authority. The young boy who once said, "Speak, Lord," became a prophet whose voice carried the weight of heaven. Everyone from Dan to Beersheba recognized that God had made him His spokesman.

Spiritual maturity depends on how responsive you are to God's word, not on age or experience. Every time Samuel listened and obeyed, his understanding grew. God's voice shaped his heart, and obedience built his faith. By the time he anointed Israel's first king, Samuel had spent years learning how to listen, speak, and act according to God's commands.

For us, the process remains the same. God shapes His servants through His word. The more we listen, the more we change. His word exposes sin, corrects our motives, and guides our steps. It teaches patience, endurance, and trust. As Hebrews 4:12 states, *"The word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword."* It pierces our hearts so that our lives align with His will.

Samuel's story also teaches us that listening to God often comes with responsibility. Hearing His word means sharing it with others, even when the message is unpopular or hard to hear. Faithful servants don't change or tone down what God says, they deliver it with humility and love. Samuel's courage to speak truth to Eli opened the way for his role as a prophet who would later confront kings.

In every generation, God raises up people like Samuel: men and women who hear His word and let it shape their lives. Today, the church doesn't need louder voices; it requires listening hearts. Samuel's first response, "Speak, for your servant is listening," should remain our daily prayer. When we allow God's word to dwell in us richly, He transforms us into servants who can speak, lead, and live for His glory.

Lesson Summary and Reflection

Samuel's call shows how God works in every generation. During a time when His word was rare and visions were few, God broke the silence through a boy who was willing to listen. Samuel's life reminds us that hearing God's voice starts with a heart that is attentive, humble, and obedient.

Samuel's experience teaches three key lessons. First, *God speaks in the silence*. When the nation was spiritually deaf, God called in the quiet of the night. His voice came not to the powerful or the proud but to

one who was ready to hear. God's silence is never absence; it is often preparation. He still speaks through His Word and Spirit today, but we must slow down enough to listen.

Second, *God calls those who are willing to listen*. Samuel's readiness, his repeated "Here I am," demonstrates a servant's attitude. Before knowing the message, he made himself available. True faith says "yes" before understanding the full picture. That same willingness opens the door for God to work in us and through us. When He speaks, He expects obedience, not negotiation.

Third, *God's word shapes His servants*. The first message Samuel heard was one of judgment: a difficult message, not an easy one. Still, he listened attentively and delivered it faithfully. From that day on, God's presence and word influenced every part of Samuel's ministry. He learned that God's voice isn't given for curiosity but for obedience. The servant who listens must also act.

Samuel's story reminds us that spiritual maturity is not about age or position; it's about having a responsive heart. God is still calling His people to listen. The question is not whether He is speaking, but whether we are attentive. The same God who spoke to Samuel in the night now speaks through His written Word. He calls us to read, reflect, and respond with the same prayer Samuel spoke long ago: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Key Truths

- God still speaks in times of silence and spiritual darkness.
- A listening heart is more valuable to God than talent or position.
- True obedience begins with availability: "Here I am."
- God's word transforms those who receive and obey it.
- Hearing God's call carries the responsibility to speak and live His truth.

Conclusion

We need to become better listeners. We live in a noisy world that values talking more than hearing and reaction over reflection. But God still speaks in silence, through His Word and providence. Those who pause

to listen will hear His guidance, His correction, and His encouragement.

Samuel's response is the prayer every Christian should repeat: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." That prayer transforms everything. It quiets fear, enhances discernment, and draws us into deeper fellowship with God. When our hearts are tuned to His voice, our lives will carry His message. The God who spoke to Samuel in the night still calls His people today: those who will listen and obey.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

The Lord came, stood there, and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

1 Samuel 3:10 (CSB)

Weekly Challenge

1. Create Space for Silence.

Set aside ten minutes each day to read a short passage of Scripture and sit quietly before God. Ask Him to speak through His Word and give you wisdom for the day.

2. Pray Samuel's Prayer.

Begin each morning with the words, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Keep your heart open to opportunities where God may be calling you to act or speak.

3. Listen Before You Speak.

In conversations this week, practice patience and attentiveness. Listening to others often prepares us to hear God more clearly.

4. Obey Promptly.

When you sense a nudge to serve, encourage, or forgive, don't delay. Samuel's story reminds us that obedience is the proper response to God's call.

5. Encourage Another Listener.

Share Samuel's story with someone who feels distant from God. Remind them that God still speaks and that He often begins with hearts that are willing to hear.

For Discussion

1. What distractions or “noise” most often keep you from hearing God’s voice?

2. How does Samuel’s readiness to answer, “*Here I am,*” challenge your own attitude toward serving God?

3. Why do you think God chose to speak to Samuel instead of Eli or his sons?

4. What does this story teach us about how God’s Word should shape our daily decisions?

5. What practical steps can you take this week to develop a more listening, responsive heart toward God?
