

Made for More: Samuel - Listening to God

1 Samuel 1-3; Psalm 46:10; Proverbs 8:34; Jeremiah 33:3; John 10:27, 14:15; Romans 10:17; Revelation 3:20

Voices:

Imagine with me. You are at Cline park and kids are everywhere. They're yelling and laughing, somebody's crying over by the swings because someone plowed them. It's absolute chaos. And in the middle of all that noise, one little voice calls out — "DAD?" Then one Dad turns around.

Out of all that chaos, he knew. He didn't have to think about it. He didn't ask, "Was that mine?" He just *knew*, because he has lived with that voice. He heard it at two in the morning calling out because of a bad dream. He heard it from the back seat a thousand times. That voice is woven into his life.

Think about this sentence: *You only recognize the voices you live with.*

We live in the noisiest generation in human history. Notifications. Opinions. Entertainment. News that's designed to scare you. Schedules that never stop. Everybody and everything is talking at us...all day long. And in the middle of all of that noise, I believe one of the most important questions a follower of Jesus can ever ask is this: *Am I listening to God?* Not "Do I believe in God?" Most of us in this room would say yes to that. Not even "Do I talk to God?" A lot of us pray. The question is *am I listening?*

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells the story of a God who speaks. God has always wanted a relationship with His people and you cannot have a relationship without communication. He speaks through His Word. He speaks through prayer. He speaks through the Holy Spirit, through conviction, and through encounters we never saw coming.

Hearing God's voice is *not* mostly about your ears. It's about your heart. It's about becoming the kind of person who is *sensitive* to Him.

Hannah Dedicates Samuel to God:

Let's look at one of the most famous "listening" stories in all of Scripture: a little boy named Samuel, lying in the dark in the house of God and hearing a voice call his name.

Before we talk about Samuel, let me give you a little background information. Samuel was the son of Elkanah and Hannah. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Pininnah. Pininnah had children, but Hannah did not.

Hannah was super sad that she did not have a child and while she was at the tabernacle of the Lord, she struck a deal with God. Read 1 Samuel 1:11.

God answered and Hannah kept her word. When Samuel was just a little boy, probably around three years old (the age children were weaned in that culture), she brought him to the tabernacle and left him there in Eli's care.

Read 1 Samuel 1:28. That means Samuel grew up *in the house of God*. He woke up there. He fell asleep there. The presence of God surrounded Samuel 24/7.

In that day, people had to go to the temple or the tabernacle of the Lord and see a priest to be in God's presence. In this case the priest was Eli. Samuel grew up in the tabernacle (which means that Samuel grew up in God's presence) before he ever recognized God's voice. He was *near* God long before he could *hear* God.

So many of us want to hear God clearly without spending any time near Him consistently. We want a playground moment. We want to recognize His voice instantly in the middle of the noise, but we haven't lived with the voice. We give God ten rushed minutes on a Tuesday and then wonder why heaven feels silent.

You only recognize the voices you live with. Closeness comes before clarity.

Set Apart as a Child:

Look back at Hannah's vow in 1 Samuel 1:11. She dedicates Samuel as a Nazarite when she says, "no razor shall ever touch his head." In the Old Testament, a Nazarite was someone who took a vow to be visibly and intentionally consecrated to God. Usually it was voluntary although sometimes, like Samuel and Samson, it was made by the parents. There were three big restrictions for Nazarites: no wine or fermented drink, no cutting your hair, and no contact with dead bodies.

It sounds strange to us, but the point was simple: a Nazarite's *life looked different* because their life *belonged to God*. The long hair wasn't a fashion statement, it was a flag. It said, "I am set apart."

You cannot live completely consumed by the world and expect to hear God clearly.

I'm not saying you have to take a vow and grow your hair out. I'm saying a consecrated life creates spiritual sensitivity. If everything in your life is tuned to the world's frequency (its entertainment, values, pace, and preferences) don't be surprised when God's frequency sounds like static. Set-apart living turns the dial.

Serving Faithfully in Ordinary Things:

There is yet one more thing about Samuel's preparation to hear God. 1 Samuel 2:11 says Samuel "ministered before the Lord" under Eli.

That sounds impressive until you ask what a little boy's ministry actually looked like. Samuel's job was opening the tabernacle doors every morning. Sweeping floors. Cleaning furniture. Helping old man Eli whose eyesight was failing. Errands. Chores.

Nobody writes worship songs about sweeping floors but Scripture says he was ministering *before the Lord*. Because when you serve people, even in the most ordinary tasks, you are serving God. Every job has dignity when it's done to Him.

Before Samuel became a prophet, he became a servant.

Faithfulness in small things prepares us for greater spiritual sensitivity. Some of us are asking God for a calling while ignoring the broom He's already handed us. Pick up the broom. The voice often comes to people who are already serving.

God Speaks in a Spiritually Dark Time:

Now we come to chapter 3 — the night everything changed. The very first verse sets the scene, and honestly, it's a heartbreaking one. Read 1 Samuel 3:1. Rare. Think about that. The God who spoke the universe into existence had gone quiet over Israel. Why?

Look at the spiritual leadership of the day. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests — and they were corrupt. Chapter 2 tells us they were stealing the best portions of the sacrifices for themselves, eating the meat before the fat was even offered to God, treating the offerings of the Lord with open contempt. And it gets worse — they were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance of the tabernacle.

These were the men standing between God and His people. The very offerings meant to honor God were being used to feed their greed. And Eli? Eli *knew*. He knew what his boys were doing, and he gave them a lecture, but he never actually stopped them. He wouldn't confront it. His passivity let his sons ruin their own lives and damage the faith of a whole nation.

When leadership grows corrupt and people stop caring, the Word of the Lord grows *rare*. Not because God lost His voice but because nobody was positioned to hear it.

Sin and distraction make God's voice harder to hear. Spiritual compromise dulls the hearing. It did then. It does now. But threaded all through this story, even in the darkest seasons, God is looking for *one listening heart*. That night, He found one lying on a mat near the ark of God.

The Calling of Samuel:

Read 1 Samuel 3:2-18. Samuel hears his name three times and each time runs to the wrong voice.

Verse 7 tells us Samuel "did not yet know the Lord" — he'd grown up around God's house, but he'd never personally heard God's voice. *Spiritual discernment develops over time.*

Even sincere believers struggle to recognize God's voice. We feel a conviction and call it guilt. We sense a prompting of the Holy Spirit and call it a random thought. We hear God calling our name and we run to a friend, a podcast, or our own reasoning. Recognizing God's voice is not a light switch; it's a relationship. It grows. So if you've ever said, "I'm just not sure if that was God or just me" you're not a failure. You're a Samuel. Keep listening.

The third time, old Eli finally realizes what's happening. To his credit, whatever his failures as a father, Eli gives Samuel the single best piece of advice in this whole passage. "*Go, lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'*"

God is looking for every one of us. *Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.* That's humility. That's availability. That's surrender. That's readiness.

Notice what Samuel did *not* say: Speak, Lord — if I agree. Speak, Lord — if it's convenient. Speak, Lord — if it fits my plans.

A lot of us pray a different prayer. We say, "Listen, Lord, for your servant *speaks*." We come to God with the agenda already written, asking Him to sign off on it. But Samuel's prayer hands God a blank page. "Speak, Lord. Whatever it is. I'm your servant. I'm listening."

One more thing to think about... Who was in that tabernacle that night? Eli, the high priest with decades of experience, the proper position. But who did God speak to? The child. God's chain of command runs on faith, not on age or position. He is not limited to the oldest, the most educated, or the most experienced. He may use the most unexpected channels at any place, at any time, through anyone He chooses.

So if you've ever thought, "God wouldn't speak to somebody like me, I'm too young, too new, too ordinary, my past is too messy," Samuel's story says otherwise. God speaks to hearts that are willing and listening. Period. That's the whole qualification list.

What Keeps Us From Hearing God?:

So if God is still speaking, and He is, why do so many of us feel like the line has gone dead? Let me give you five things that clog our spiritual ears.

Sin: Sin dulls spiritual sensitivity. It always has. Every time we choose sin, we turn the volume of heaven down a notch. Not because God walks away, but because we do.

Distraction: Too much noise leaves no room for reflection. You can drown out the voice of God without ever committing a scandal by just filling every silent moment with a screen. We don't have a hearing problem so much as we have a *noise* problem.

Pride: Some of us aren't listening because we've already decided. We already know what we want, and we're not really asking God to speak. We're asking Him to agree.

Disobedience: Conviction that gets ignored eventually hardens the heart. If God has already told you something and you've been sitting on it. God doesn't usually give chapter two to people who threw away chapter one. Get up and get moving on what God has already called you to do.

Worldliness: Comfort and pleasure can slowly replace hunger for God. Nobody decides to drift; we just get comfortable.

Read Revelation 3:20. We love that verse. We put it on paintings. This was not written to unbelievers but to a church: a wealthy, comfortable, self-satisfied church that had everything it wanted but didn't have Christ's presence. They were so busy enjoying the good life that they never noticed Jesus standing outside knocking and trying to get into His own church.

That's the danger of comfort. Money, security, and possessions offer just enough temporary satisfaction to make us indifferent to lasting satisfaction. If you've found yourself feeling indifferent lately toward church, toward the Word, or toward God Himself, that's not nothing. That's the sound of a door slowly closing. Leave the door of your heart open, and you'll never have to strain to hear Him knock.

How Can We Hear God More Clearly?:

How do we tune back in? Here are five habits that sharpen our hearing. These aren't complicated but they will change your life.

Spend time daily in Scripture. God's primary way of speaking is His Word. If you want to hear God's voice today, open the Book where He's already speaking. Jesus said it in John

10:27. “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*” Sheep recognize the shepherd because they live with the shepherd. Romans 10:17 tells us faith itself comes from hearing through the word of Christ. Every page you read is tuning your ear.

Develop a real prayer life. Prayer is not just talking. Prayer is *listening*. Most of us treat prayer like a voicemail we leave for God. But God says in Jeremiah 33:3, “*Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.*” That's a two-way promise. Call and I will answer. When's the last time you stayed on the line long enough for the answer?

Create quiet moments. You cannot hear clearly if your life is constantly loud. Remember Elijah on the mountain in 1 Kings 19 — God wasn't in the windstorm, the earthquake, or in the fire. After all of it came a gentle whisper. A still, small voice. God can shout, but he usually whispers and you have to get close and get quiet to hear a whisper.

Read Psalm 46:10. Some of us need to schedule silence this week like we schedule meetings.

Obey quickly. Obedience increases sensitivity. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “*If you love me, keep my commandments.*” Every time you obey what God has already said, your ears get sharper for what He'll say next. Delayed obedience dulls the hearing; quick obedience tunes it.

Stay close to Him consistently. Not in bursts. Not in crisis mode. *Consistently.* Read Proverbs 8:34. Daily waiting at the door. Because *you only recognize the voices you live with.*

Wrap-up:

The goal of this message is not for you to hear God. The goal is for you to obey Him.

So let me bring it all the way back to where we started — that crowded playground, all that noise, and one dad who turned around at one little voice. He recognized it because he lived with it.

God has not gone quiet. The word of the Lord was rare in Samuel's day, and Samuel still heard God's voice because he had a prepared heart in a noisy, compromised generation. The same is true for you. God is not hard of speaking. We are hard of hearing.

God is still speaking. The question is: *Are we listening?*

Reflection Questions:

- Are you making room to hear God or is every corner of your life already full?
- Have you become distracted or has the noise quietly taken over?
- Is there something God has already spoken to you that you have been ignoring?
- Are you truly available to Him...blank page, no conditions?