

"God Calls"

May 13, 2018

Scripture: 1st Samuel 3: 1-10

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" And he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So, he went and lay down. ⁶ The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

**God Calls**

Pastor John

Today we begin our new sermon series. Over the next six weeks we will look at how God is at work in our lives. We will look at how God calls, responds, sees, leads, saves, and unites

us. Today we will look at several call stories, some from the Bible, some from right here amongst us. Let us pray.

Our first call story comes from 1st Samuel 3. But the call of God upon Samuel's life began long before chapter three. We first meet Samuel's mother Hannah at the beginning of 1st Samuel. She is one wife of Elkanah. The other wife is named Peninnah. Peninnah had children and Hannah had none. The inability to bear children was a great disgrace and Peninnah was not shy about reminding Hannah of her barrenness. In 1st Samuel 1 we read, *"Her rival used to provoke her severely"* and *"it went on year after year"*. Each year Hannah would go up to the temple to beg God for a male child. One year, when she was deeply distraught in her prayer, Eli saw her and assumed she was drunk. But Hannah was praying silently to God, just moving her lips. However, Hannah told Eli her plight and he blessed her and asked that God hear her prayer. Hannah's prayer was like a prayer that maybe you have prayed: "If you will do such and such God, then I will do this or that". Have you ever prayed this kind of prayer? Well, Hannah said God, give me a child and I will give him back to you until the day of his death. It was quite the deal. Samuel is born to Hannah and Elkanah and as soon as he is able to begin serving in the temple, Hannah brings Samuel to Eli. This is where our story begins today with *"Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli"*.





Most people's call story does not begin like this, parent making a deal with God that seals the unborn child's fate to a life of service to God in the temple. I do not know about you, but God's call upon my life did not begin with such a deal. As a matter of fact, God's calling on my life was more like a tug of war than something so straight forward as Hannah's deal with God. Samuel seemed to live into this calling from day one. As a young boy, perhaps as young as two or three, he began serving in the temple as Eli's assistant. We suspect that Samuel was about twelve at the time of God calling out to him. Over the eight to ten years, Eli and Samuel have grown quite close. During the course of these years, Eli would have taught Samuel many things. Eli would have taught Samuel the scriptures and how to live a holy life. He would have taught him all the duties and responsibilities that needed to be carried out by the priest. Eli would also have been the main prophet for the nation of Israel during this time. Samuel would have observed what that meant too so that one day when he assumed the role of spiritual leader of Israel, he would be prepared to take on the role that Eli had filled for many years.

As we continue in verse one, we read that visions were not widespread in those days. It seemed as if God had gone a little quiet. We also know from verse two that Eli was getting old, as we read that Eli's *"eyesight had begun to grow dim"*.



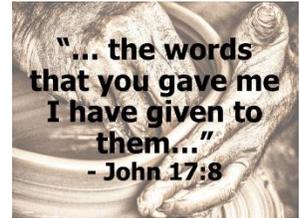
Into this scenario, God calls out to Samuel one evening. Thinking it to be Eli calling, Samuel ran to Eli and said, *"Here I am, for you called me"*. But Eli did not call so he sends Samuel back to bed. Three more times, God would call.



Up to this point, it would seem like Samuel was destined to become the new Eli. He would seem to have been chosen by his mother, trained by the great prophet himself, and now God was calling him by name. It follows other things we read in the Bible. In Psalm One, we read about how those who "*delight in the law of the Lord*" and who "*meditate day and night on His law*" will be rewarded. This Psalm tells us that "*in all they do, they prosper*" and "*the Lord watches over the way of the righteous*". This would match up very well with Samuel's life to this point. He has studied diligently under Eli and he has walked upright with the Lord. It would seem that now is the time for Samuel to prosper. God himself is calling out to Samuel. Perhaps this is how Hannah sees things unfolding too. She was faithful to God and prayed and prayed for a son. God answered her prayer and now her son is serving in the temple. It may be true for Eli too. He has faithfully served God all his life, enduring much persecution and hardship along the way. But Eli remained faithful and now God is blessing him with a wonderful successor.

Samuel's call was clear. But more often than not, the call is not clear. And some of the time, from our perspective, it comes out of nowhere. That's how it happened for the original disciples. They were sitting in a boat mending their nets or they were in their tax collector's booth, waiting for the next customer. They were just there and Jesus came along and called them to "come and follow". For each of these disciples, Jesus acted much like Eli did for Samuel. Just as Eli had done with Samuel, Jesus invested years teaching and training the disciples to take up the torch and to go out to be like Jesus. He prepared them

to be the next people to go out and share the good news. In John 17, we see how this worked. In verse 8, Jesus says, *"the words that you gave me I have given to them"*. Eli did the same thing as he taught Samuel the scriptures and passed along all that God had given to him. In this passage from John 17, Jesus prays for God's protection to go with the disciples as He sends them *"into the world"*. I would imagine that Eli prayed a similar prayer over Samuel after he realized that God was now calling Samuel to follow in his footsteps. Eli, the devout prophet of God, would certainly ask for God's blessing and protection to continue to be with Samuel as he assumed the role of prophet of Israel.



The calling that God gave to Samuel and to the disciples was a life call. For some of us, maybe for you, God will make a similar life call upon your life. Shortly after moving to Rapid City and beginning to attend the church there, a new group formed for the young couples of the church. Kristin and I felt God calling us to become a part of this group that would help us grow in our faith together and in our marriage as well. The group was called "Marriage Makers". Over the course of the next few years we felt the call to be a part of starting a contemporary worship service at the church. Shortly thereafter I was asked to help teach the high school Sunday school class. And that call led to this and to that and here we are today. Each time I was called, someone asked me to be involved. First it was our next-door neighbors asking us to join this couple's group and then it was another couple from the Marriage Makers group asking us to be a part of the praise team and then it was the youth director asking if I would teach Sunday School.

It was someone seeing something in us or in me and then them asking if perhaps God was calling me or us in this way. This is how a lot of people hear God's call on their lives. A friend or a colleague or a mentor says, "Have you ever considered....?" They are helping God to plant seeds in our lives.

Sometimes other people see things in us that we do not see ourselves. In the New Testament, this was the case with Jesus and the disciples. He saw something in them and He called them to ministry. Looking at the church today, Jesus must have known that what He saw in each of them would be sufficient for building the church. In 2010, I was happily living life. We were connected to our church and were active there, I was teaching and coaching and really enjoying both. Our kids were busy and growing up. And then there was an opening for the youth director's job at the church. I felt God calling me to apply. It would mean giving up the coaching that I so loved. It would impact my summers too. After some prayer and soul searching, I applied and was hired for the part time position. Not too long into that I felt God calling for more. The lead pastor, Doug, also began to ask if I had ever considered going into full-time ministry. He encouraged me to think about it. Doug told me that he saw gifts in me that he thought God had blessed me with that God could use in our church. He planted the seed.

For most Christians, though, the call is simply a call to do something for God. In the big scope of things, God does not ask very many Christians to go out and change the whole world. God simply calls us to make a difference in one

person's life, one person at a time. In our passage from 1st Samuel 3, Samuel responds to the call that God is speaking into his life. But in our passage today, Samuel did not recognize the audible call as God's voice. He thought it was Eli calling him. Not until Eli realized that it was God calling did Samuel realize that it was God calling. It took his mentor and teacher to see God's call upon his young friend's life. It was then that Eli told Samuel to lie back down and to say,



"Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening". At times, we will find ourselves in the role of Eli, encouraging a fellow brother or sister in Christ to see the way that God has gifted and blessed them to be in ministry. And at times, we will be Samuel as another speaks God's call into our lives.

Eli did tell Samuel that it was God calling. Before you get the idea that you can just idly sit around and wait for someone to come and tell you about how they see God's call upon your life, let us also consider Samuel's readiness to hear and be used by God. It is a readiness and willingness that we all need to practice as well. Samuel was attentive and was listening for a call. He eagerly responded right away to what he thought was Eli's call. Had Samuel not been actively listening and had he not had a servant's heart, he would have missed God's call. We also need to be actively listening and to have a servant's heart. For an example of what it means to actively listen for God's call in our lives, please turn your attention to the video screens. Hear the story of Brody's call that he received from God one night at college. Listen to the call story and to his story of how God went to work in Brody's life. Enjoy Brody's story.



Brody heard God's call and has yielded his life to God. Like Samuel, Brody said,



"Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening". Just as he did

with Brody, God is calling each and every one of us to something, whether it is our life's vocation or a new thing God has for us to do. God is calling. It does not matter if the call

is to full time ministry or if it is visiting our next-door neighbor. God's voice can be hard to discern, but there are Eli's out there to each of our Samuel's, out there listening with us and helping us to hear God's call. By listening for God in community, together we can discern the ways that God is moving in our midst. However we each hear God's call upon our lives, whether from one another or from the Holy Spirit or from the voice of God himself, may we each respond as Samuel did, faithfully saying, *"Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening"*. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) How have other people been a part of God's call on your life? How have you been a part of another person's call?
- 2) God is calling us all to something. Who or what is God currently calling you to? Spend some time in prayer discerning God's call.
- 3) The church and many community organizations provide opportunities for you to answer God's call to service. Where can you serve this week?