

1 Sam. 3:1–10
(11–20)

Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18

1 Cor. 6:12–20

John 1:43–51

Discerning God’s Call

**Goal for
the Session**

*While seeking to understand Samuel’s call, adults will
wrestle with God’s call in their lives.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on 1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” Richard Boyce

Human speaking and hearing now become one of the main means by which the light of God’s revelation breaks into the affairs of this world. Here, at this point in the story, when words from the Lord are rare, this listening and hearing becomes a communal affair, dependent on both the hearing and the speaking of the community together. As the stories of Saul and David spin on in 1 and 2 Samuel, there will be times when the Lord seems absent from the scene. All we will hear are words of human beings, on the one hand, counterpoised with actions of human beings, on the other. And yet even here we will learn that the Lord is at work. Indeed the Lord has drawn as near as the words and actions of our fellow human beings, attuned or not attuned to the voice of their God.

WHERE is God in these words?

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Throughout the ages persons have perceived their call into ministry in a variety of ways—from the blinding experience of Paul on the road to Damascus, to the visionary perception by Ezekiel, to the intensifying sense of moral compulsion that Jeremiah increasingly discerned. Here we discern another distinct means of a call, so clear in its articulation that it is recognized as a call, a voice. The story of Samuel’s call establishes his authority, empowering his transfer of priestly leadership from Eli to Saul, and reinforcing hope in God—that God will refresh and renew.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,” Donna Schaper

Eli and Samuel’s encounter with God has a dramatic motion. An old man and a young man collaborate to hear God’s vision for a new Israel. When was the last time you felt a “tingle” about the word of God to you? When was the last time you experienced hope kicking into high gear, forgiveness writ loud, pins and needles all over your body because you were so excited? With its promise of “pins and needles,” this passage is a kind of spiritual acupuncture. It brings us by way of thrilling news to a time of renewal and forgiveness.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,” Lawrence Wood

This comic, tender, tragic story really does come from modern life. In an age of divine reticence and the all-too-human failings of religious leaders, it speaks to every servant weighed down with fatigue or regret. Are we Samuel? Are we Eli? Can we really be sure which? And what shall we do if the living God comes into our troubled temple? It is Eli, ironically enough, who tells us what to say: “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.”

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 3:1–10
(11–20)

Focus on Your Teaching

Most Christians believe that God is active in the world, but they may hesitate if asked just how and where God is active. They may have heard other Christians talking about being led or called by God, but cannot imagine God calling them. All too often those who are sure to have seen and heard God turn out to be self-serving or just a little crazy. The story of Samuel's call invites participants to consider God's concrete call in their own lives.

O God of revelation, open my ears that I may hear your words and my heart that I might be receptive to them. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

YOU WILL NEED

- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- Bibles
- pens
- paper
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 24, 2021

For Responding

- option 1: prepared newsprint, pens, paper
- option 3: pens, paper, copies of Resource Sheet 1

GATHERING

Before the session, if using option 1 in Responding, write the questions for reflection on a piece of newsprint to be posted during the activity. If using option 2 in Responding, invite a pastor or church leader to participate in the session. If that is not possible, ask if he or she would be willing to describe his or her call to a particular ministry in written form or be available by phone during the session. Remember, this leader does not need to be a person ordained to ministry. All Christians are called to ministry.

Welcome the participants and introduce any visitors.

Ask the participants to briefly tell what they, as children, wanted to be when they grew up and why. After everyone has had a chance to talk, tell them that today's session focuses on a young boy who probably never dreamed he would become the person he became.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

O Guiding Spirit, take our hands, walk with us and guide us through life, so that even our wanderings may have purpose and our lives may bear fruit for your realm on earth. Amen.

Samuel lived during a period of great change in Israel's history. Israel had been a loose confederation of tribes. The people demanded a king, however, and under Samuel's leadership the monarchy was born.

EXPLORING

Tell participants that today's focus scripture is about the call of Samuel to the ministry. Remind them that Samuel was the priest who eventually selected Saul to be king. Saul was then followed by David and Solomon.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Context of Samuel's Call) and have people read it in silence. After a few minutes ask:

- ✪ Why did Hannah suffer so much for being childless?
- ✪ If you were Eli, how would you have reacted to the stranger's vision that Eli's priestly lineage would end?

Have four volunteers read 1 Samuel 3:1–20. The four will take the parts of the narrator, Samuel, God, and Eli.

Form groups of three or four. If your group has six or fewer participants, remain as one group. Have the groups prepare a news story about the event. They should create a headline and write an article about the events of that night or they can plan a news broadcast or interview for a television news program. After they have had enough time to complete the assignment, bring the groups together and have them read their story or perform their broadcast.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Samuel 3:1–10, [11–20]). Have a volunteer read the "Where?" excerpt. With the participants still in a large group ask:

- ✪ What is the importance of the call?
- ✪ What is the role of the human who receives the call?

Have the participants silently read the "So What?" excerpt. Ask:

- ✪ What role does the community play in a call?
- ✪ What is exciting about the story?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Lord Speak to Me** It is difficult to read the story of Samuel's call and not take time to reflect on God's call to each Christian. Have the participants sit comfortably and prepare for a time of meditation. Remind them that when the Lord spoke to Samuel, Samuel responded, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Instruct the group to meditate on Samuel's words and to ask God to speak to them. Allow a few minutes of silence. Distribute pens and paper. Post the sheet of newsprint with the following questions and ask the participants to reflect on their time of silence and answer these questions:

- ✪ When has the Lord spoken to you?
- ✪ How has the Lord spoken to you?
- ✪ What did the Lord say to you? Would you identify it as a call?
- ✪ How have you responded to what was spoken to you?
- ✪ What is one action you can do this week to be open to God's call?

EASY
PREP

The idea of a personal call from God may be so foreign to some participants that they cannot accept it. Be accepting of their struggle and encourage them to be open to new possibilities.

- 2. The Leader's Call** Have the pastor or a church leader tell your group about his or her call to the ministry. Allow enough time after the presentation for the participants to respond and ask questions. When the leader has left, ask:
 - ✪ What impressed you about the story?
 - ✪ What did you learn about God's call?

Identify one idea that they can apply to their lives. If they have questions you cannot answer, encourage them to seek out the leader and arrange for a personal conversation.

- 3. A Conversation with God** Have the participants read the "Now What?" excerpt from Resource Sheet 1, in silence. Distribute pens and paper. Have the participants write an imaginary conversation between themselves and God beginning with Eli's statement, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Ask a few volunteers to read what they have written. Encourage the participants to take their conversations with them and to continue to think about the call in the coming weeks.

CLOSING

Invite the group to summarize the main ideas of this session in a short phrase. After the main ideas have been identified, ask the participants what they are going to take with them from the session that will help them to live out their call. When everyone has had a chance to speak, ask the participants to form a circle and join hands.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

O God of all creation, we are amazed and humbled that you are so intimately involved in our lives that, like Samuel, you call us by name. Help us to hear you above the noisy chatter of our lives. Create within us receptive hearts for your words and empower us to respond to what you say in words and actions. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 24, 2021, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and resource sheet before the next session.

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The Context of Samuel's Call

A woman named Hannah was childless and suffered for it. She went to the temple and cried bitterly to God. She made a vow to God that, if given a child, she would give the child to the service of the Lord.

Eli the temple priest overheard her wailing prayer and accused her of being drunk. She explained the situation to him and how she suffered. Eli then changed his tone and told her he hoped her prayer would be answered.

Indeed, she had a child and named him Samuel. When he was old enough, she gave him to Eli to serve God. She later had three more sons and two daughters.

The tradition at that time was for the priestly lineage to continue through Eli's family. But Eli's sons were corrupt. Right before our story today a man came to Eli and told him the Lord had revealed that because of the corruption of the priesthood, Eli's line would end and a faithful priest would be chosen, not from Eli's lineage.

