2-8 June 2024 Being open to God

1 Samuel 3:1-!0

### The Lord Calls Samuel

**3**The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

**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. **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.

**10**The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

**Bible notes**

The desolate state of Israel is highlighted at the beginning of this chapter: the word of the Lord was rare. By the end, the word of the Lord is abundant through the prophetic ministry of Samuel, and Israel is back on course as a people in close relationship with their God.

What caused this turn to the good? This story is set in the old temple at Shiloh, where the Lord chose to speak to the boy Samuel. In the first place, Samuel’s inexperience meant that he did not realise this. Eli, the old, disgraced priest, played a key role in helping him to respond to the Lord. The previous chapter (2:27-36) recounted the words of an unnamed prophet who pronounced God’s doom on Eli and his sons for corruption, and Eli’s poor sight (v.2) symbolises his failure to recognise the responsibilities of his role. Despite this, he gave Samuel the insight to respond appropriately to God.

The repeated visits to Eli highlight Samuel’s uncritical enthusiasm to obey the old priest’s call, and Eli’s dismissal would have been confusing for him. The boy’s life as a prophet began with equally enthusiastic acceptance of the Lord’s call – other prophets showed greater reluctance (see Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:6). When Samuel realised that he was hearing the word of the Lord, he named himself as ‘your servant’. Yet he quickly discovered the challenges of his new role and the ways in which it would change his relationship with Eli. The Lord’s ear-tingling word focused on the disaster coming upon Eli, and Samuel was afraid to pass this on (v.15). As a young boy, dependent on Eli for his place in the temple, he was vulnerable to Eli’s anger. He did not yet have the trust in God’s faithfulness that would allow him to take risks in proclaiming the Lord’s word. Again, it was Eli’s encouragement that gave him the confidence to speak out, and Eli found the resources to accept God’s hard words to him, coming from one he called ‘my son’. Samuel was no longer the child Hannah had left in the temple; he was on the way to becoming the prophet and king-maker God intended him to be.

**Reflection**

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

Our name – our personal identity – is so important to us. It allows us to hear someone calling us. In the hymn ‘I, the Lord of sea and sky’, the response ‘Here I am, Lord’ is followed by a question, ‘Is it I?’. That stage probably comes for most of us before we say ‘yes’ to God. Understanding our calling may be a long, drawn-out process, and a decision comes only after testing. We have to be open to the prayerful counsel of those in whom we trust. We have to be open to the possibility that God’s call may not lead where we expect or desire. It may demand hard things of us. But sometimes hearing hard things can move us out of our comfort zone, and that may be exactly what we need.

Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* In what ways might God speak to you?
* How did Jesus show openness to listening to God in his ministry?
* What might God want to say or do in your life?

## Prayer

 Adapt to your local context.

Lord God, we thank you for speaking to Samuel;
and for speaking to us.
We thank you for the Elis in our lives; how they point us to God and
listen even when the message is uncomfortable.
Thank you for each one of us here in church today; as we are
open to you and each other, we can do great things in your name.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Go in the name of the Lord
to your homes, your neighbours, your communities.
Go and make a difference.
Raise up those who are disheartened.
Tell others about the risen Christ.
Visit those who are lonely,
and may your heart and mind be open
to receive all that God gives to you and asks of you.
**Amen.**