

The Suitcase

Calling

Week 1

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21.

In many Bibles, this passage is titled “The Lord Calls Samuel.” One reason is because the word “call” occurs 12 different times in this passage. This passage is about calling.

The passage starts by saying “The word of the Lord was rare.” Samuel was born into the time period of the Judges; for several hundred years, these heroes ruled Israel and protected them from enemies. During those years, we have almost no record of any prophet. There are very few references to people who regularly “heard” God calling them.

Samuel heard God’s voice calling.

Notice *who* God chooses to speak to in this passage. One main character, Eli, is the leader of Israel. He is the high priest, who is in charge of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, and the general spiritual life of the nation. Eli is extremely wise, experienced, and is recognized as a true spiritual authority. But he isn’t the one God speaks to.

God chooses Samuel. He was a boy who, since his infancy, had lived in God’s house. He was young, inexperienced, with much less wisdom and clout than Eli.

God called a young person.

Pause for Discussion:

- 1) Why is it significant that hearing from God was “rare” in Samuel’s time?
- 2) Why do you think God chose to call Samuel?

The pattern of this story is as follows: God calls but Samuel doesn’t understand. Each time, Samuel clearly hears a voice yet fails to realize it is God. This occurs three times.

Eventually, Eli helps Samuel determine that this is Yahweh speaking to Him.

Pause for discussion:

- 1) Do you think it is difficult to know God’s voice? Why?

1 Samuel 3:7 says, “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.”

Essentially, this was Samuel’s first “God-moment.” He had never clearly experienced the voice of God before. God’s voice was specific and noticeable, but it took time to understand.

God’s voice is clear. But we need to “attune” our lives to hearing His voice.

The rest of the passage seems to happen “quickly.” Once Samuel accurately hears God’s voice, the remainder of the events follow. He rapidly gets a word of judgment against Eli’s house, shares the vision with Eli, and hears Eli receive it.

As readers, we cannot help but feel that the main “point” of this passage has little to do with Eli. Although God wants to communicate judgment against his house, God is also communicating *favor* to Samuel. This passage is about more than *the end* of Eli’s priesthood; it’s about *the beginning* of Samuel’s ministry. **It’s a ministry that started by hearing a calling.**

Pause for discussion:

- 1) What do you think life would be like *if* you heard God’s voice clearly?
- 2) What do you think prevents you from hearing him clearly?

Life is a lot like this story. Most of the “struggle” in life seems to be actually hearing the voice of God. After we clearly understand, we usually do quite well in following His voice.

But why is it so difficult to hear?

Think about Samuel’s life. He spent each moment in God’s house. Every breath he took was inside the tabernacle. Everyday life was lived next to the ark of the covenant, the lampstand, the sacrifices, and the other holy things. **Samuel was immersed in God’s presence.**

Is that why he heard God? Maybe the miracle of this story isn’t really someone actually hearing God, but instead the miracle is the simple reality that someone *devoted their life* to constantly living in God’s presence. **That is what makes Samuel unique.**

Pause for prayer.

Ask God to meet you. Pray for His presence to fill the room where you’re meeting. Even wait for a few moments. Allow the silence and calm to settle in.

(Once your group feels peace, move on)

My Life’s Calling

The topic of a “life calling” is extremely prevalent across society. To some degree, our culture is obsessed with it. The church is constantly telling us to “discover” our calling, to find our purpose, to seize the opportunities God gives us to impact the world.

To some degree, that is ok.

But on the other hand, this can also be extremely devastating.

How do I discover my life’s calling? How do I really *know*, without a doubt, what God is calling me to spend my life upon? (I mean, isn’t that sort of an important question to “get right??”)

Here’s the truth: You discover your calling by knowing God’s voice. By listening to His heart so regularly, so intimately, so deeply that you’re certain. You *know* God’s heart.

God's calling doesn't begin with realizing your life's purpose, it begins with realizing God is *always* calling. He is always beckoning me to one place, one position, one posture in my life:

He is always calling me into His presence.

This is the first "layer" of calling. And it's the most important.

Pause for Discussion:

- 1) Does our culture's conversation about "life calling" encourage or discourage you? Why?
- 2) How does the idea of being "called" to God's presence shift your understanding of this topic?

We are called to God's presence. We are commanded to be a people who intensely, passionately, desperately run to God. He desires us to plant our lives firmly in the soil of His presence, by rooting ourselves in the word, prayer, and in His church.

We are called to be Samuels.

Without this, we lose the "focus" of calling. We become people who think that God cares about the overarching direction of our lives, but isn't interested in the daily pursuit of His heart. **Can you see how this twists our view of God??**

Earlier, I made the claim that our society's focus on calling was "devastating." Here is why:

Practically, the church has "burdened" Christians with the unbearable pressure of discovering their life's calling, without equipping them to actually seize that calling by training them to seek God's presence. *That is wrong.*

I will take this one step further: without being faithful to God's call to His presence, my desire to understand His call on my entire life becomes a hindrance. It starts to hinder me from hearing God's voice. **Because I've stopped looking for God's voice, and started looking for a calling.**

My "life calling" becomes an idol.

Here's the summary for our first week's lesson: Your first calling is to the presence of God. Without establishing this, all other aspects of my calling become "fuzzy." Confusion, fear, and anxiety cloud my vision of calling when I forget to put God's presence *first* in my life.

Take time to pray together. Ask God to bless your decision to "be a Samuel" today. Pray for the grace to "release" focusing on your life's calling. Ask for a fresh hunger, desire, and thirst for His presence. Be encouraged by the grace God has for us each moment!!