



**JANUARY 14/15, 2023**

**ALFRED STREET BAPTIST CHURCH**

# **SPEAK, LORD,** **YOUR SERVANT IS** **LISTENING**

**1 SAMUEL 3:1-18 (NIV)**

**A SERMON BY REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY  
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**REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY, SENIOR PASTOR**



**Date:** January 14th and 15th

**Preacher:** Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley

**Sermon Title:** 'Speak Lord, For Your Servant Is Listening'

**Scripture:** I Samuel 3: 1 - 18 NIV

*The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 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. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 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.*

*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." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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.*

*The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God,<sup>[a]</sup> and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, "The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'" Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am." "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes."*

#### **SERMON SUMMARY**

The story of Samuel proves powerfully instructive as we enter our text for this weekend. The story of this great prophet of Israel begins in the first chapter of I Samuel. Hannah, Samuel's mother, prays for a child, and though Eli, the priest, mocks her, God hears her prayer and grants her a son. In return for God's

goodness, Hannah names the child Samuel, which means *God has placed*. She dedicates him as a Nazarite and requests that Eli take him under his tutelage and raise him in the Lord's House. Eli agrees, and the just-weaned child, Samuel, goes to live with Eli, the priest, and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

One night, as Samuel lay near the Ark of the Covenant, he heard a voice calling to him. He hears the voice three times, believing it is Eli calling. The third time Samuel goes to Eli, Eli realizes it is God speaking to the boy, and he instructs Samuel to reply to the voice with these words: "*Speak, Lord, for your servant, is listening.*"

In this sermon, we learn that Samuel struggles to hear, discern, and obey the will of God. The four obstacles which prevent him from hearing God's voice are:

1. Samuel has become dependent on a third party, Eli, the priest, to discern the voice of God.
2. Samuel does not know the Lord.
3. The word of God has not been revealed to Samuel.
4. Samuel hears a hard word from God, creating the need for a hard conversation with Eli.

Pastor Wesley connects the story and struggle of Samuel to each of us.

1. We sometimes become dependent on clergy and other church leaders when God intends to speak to us directly.
2. There are those among us who have not received Jesus as Lord and Savior, which means we do not have the Lord in our hearts. Without Jesus in our hearts, we cannot fully receive God's word.
3. Additionally, some do not study and know God's word for themselves and have not (as we learned last week) hidden it in their hearts.
4. Finally, when we open ourselves to God and truly seek God, we open ourselves to a radical life-changing call that may cause us to speak truth, even if it is hard for others to hear.

And yet, as we move to the end of the sermon, we are reminded that if we seek God, we will hear from God, and once we hear from God, there are three possible responses: *no*, *let's negotiate*, and *yes*. The sermon urges us to respond with *yes* to God in all things.

### **KEY POINTS**

1. One of the primary reasons to seek God is to distinguish the voice of God from all others, and once hearing God's voice, choose to obey.
2. Like the good sheep of John 10, we must know God's voice and follow it. One way to know God's voice is to study the Bible.
3. Samuel, though born to be a great prophet, could not discern the voice of God at the beginning of his life.
4. We are meant to hear and depend on God's word, not on the word of others. In fact, we are called to remember that God's revelation will come to the one who seeks God and is confirmed secondarily by others.
5. Just like you need a receiver to pick up radio signals, we need Jesus in our hearts as our receiver to truly hear and discern God's voice.
6. There are times when we will not open ourselves to the full power of prayer because we have an inkling that God's likely response is not the one we desire. This makes it hard for God to reveal his will when we have decided we do not want to hear.
7. When we call God 'Lord', which Samuel did not do in verse 10, we rightly position God as Lord of our lives and ourselves as one under God's lordship.

***Village Members and Facilitators,***

***The Curriculum Team does not expect you to cover all the questions, and we ask the facilitators to choose the best questions, in each section, for your Village.***

***GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS***

1. We learned the meaning of Samuel's name in today's sermon. Do you know the meaning of your name? Were you named after someone? Share with your Village what you know about your name.
2. What is the easiest thing you believe God has asked you to do? What is the most difficult thing God has asked you to do?

***INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS***

1. Hannah dedicated Samuel as a Nazarite, one who is dedicated to the Lord. The first mention of the Nazarites is in Numbers 6:1-21. The Bible names both Sampson and Samuel as Nazarites. The Nazarite vow could be taken for a time, as opposed to being a lifelong vow (see Numbers 6:4). How does a designated period of abstaining and being consecrated for the Lord as a Nazarite compare to 40 days of seeking God? Are there any similarities? What might be obtained from this period of consecration?
2. The Gospel of John (8:47) says, "Whoever is of God hears the words of God." Pastor Wesley said Christ is like a radio receiver, functioning in the hearts of believers, allowing us to pick up the messages God is sending. Describe the circumstances under which you hear from God most clearly. Do you ever hear interference? If so, from who/what/where?

***LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS***

1. Have you ever received a clear direction for your life that you believed was from God? Did you respond with obedience, or did you negotiate or say no? What was the result of the choice you made?

2. Over and over, we speak about the “Will of God.” How would you describe the “Will of God”? What does it mean for your life?
3. Pastor Wesley said obeying God can sometimes bring radical change to your life. How has your life changed as a result of obeying God? Did the radical change require any difficult conversations with others? If so, how did you navigate those conversations if you chose to have them?
4. Hannah trusted Eli to raise her son Samuel, but he failed to discipline his own children. Can the pursuit of and commitment to excellence in one area of our lives lead us to neglect other areas? If so, how can we avoid this?
5. Tell us about a time when you DID NOT pray about a situation because you did not want to hear God’s answer. What was the result? And what do you wish you might have done differently?

***“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS***

1. In this sermon, we see instances of failure. Eli fails, and Samuel fails. Where have you seen the church fail? How would you like to see it change, and what is your role?
2. Many of us have mentors and people of status in our lives. Looking back, was there ever a time that you could not distinguish their voice from the voice of God? If so, what was the consequence of mistaking a human voice for the voice of God?
3. This week’s sermon included this quote: “Often when God tells you something hard to hear, it will require a conversation with something difficult to say.” How would you translate this, and what does this mean to you?

## **ACTIVITY**

Life allows us to examine our daily routines for opportunities to tune into God's "broadcast." From the time we wake up until we sleep, what activities do we engage in without even thinking about them? What spiritual practices do we want to have as we build our devotional habits? What would it look like if we began to attach spiritual practices, such as greeting God and reading scripture, to our physical ones, such as making breakfast and brushing our teeth? Share a few ideas of how we might connect to God's voice in our everyday routines with your Village to build our spiritual receiver.

## **SPIRIT WORK**

This sermon invites us to say "yes" even before God offers us an assignment. And yet, sometimes, it is very hard to say yes to God. However, each time we say the word amen, we are saying "yes." The word amen means, *so be it*. When you or I say amen, we are saying, Lord, I agree with you; yes, so be it. As an activity, listen to the song written by Andrae Crouch and sung by Marvin Winans, *Let the Church Say Amen*. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZKA2iY9ATA>)

After listening, list three things to which it is easy to say amen and three things that are hard (you may find examples in the song lyrics). In your prayer time, thank God for your ability to say "yes"/amen to some things, and pray for strength to say a more robust "yes"/amen to the things God calls you to do that are more difficult.

## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

*Within the structure of Village, there are various affinity groups. Each week the team creates questions, especially for the individual groups. However, any village may draw from the questions listed below if the Spirit moves.*

### **For Married Couples**

1. Samuel had a hard word to deliver to Eli. Has God ever prompted you to deliver a hard word to your spouse? Did you share the hard word? How did you prepare? What did you learn?
2. The title of this sermon has much to do with listening. In your marriage, how do you know when your spouse is listening? What are the signs? What occurs in you when you know your spouse is really listening? Finish this sentence for your spouse: **"When you truly listen to me . . ."**

### **For Young Adults**

1. A sign that you are maturing in your faith is when you can hear a sermon and say, "That does not sound right." When something does not sound right, what do you do? How do you check out your suspicion? What sources seem good and useful to you to verify your questions?



2. The sermon says that the two positions ('Lord over God,' 'equal to God') align with telling God no, and negotiating with God. Have you ever done either? What was the outcome? If you could go back and redo that moment, is there anything you would do differently?
3. There are many voices in today's society, from friends to social media to news outlets. How do you ensure you are following the voice of God rather than the voices of society? What do you do in situations where the voices of society are louder than or do not align with the voice of God?

### ***For Parents***

1. We learn in I Samuel 2 that Eli's sons are wretched and (in the vernacular) ratchet. Eli would not discipline them. Have you ever struggled to discipline your children? What helped you learn to discipline your children? What do you still desire to learn?
2. Samuel was a child when Hannah gave Eli responsibility for his training in the things of God. Pastor Wesley told us he was called to full-time ministry at age 16. As our children develop their relationship with God, how and when do we, as parents, make room for God to guide and direct our children's lives?

### ***For Seniors***

1. This sermon asks us to come to God with a "whatsoever you ask; I will" heart and an "all on the altar" willingness. However, Eli complied with neither by refusing to discipline his sons properly. What things have you kept off the altar of God? What could God ask of you, to which you would say a clear "NO"? Why do you think this is?
2. Eli was Samuel's teacher and mentor in the things of God, but there came a time when God called the student to take the lead. How can we know when to pass the torch to a new generation of laborers in God's vineyard?

### ***For Women***

1. Eli continues to run to Samuel as God's voice speaks to him. Is there anyone whose voice has great power in your life? How has that power served or not served you? Are there boundaries around that voice that would be helpful? Does that voice have more power or frequency in your life than God's?
2. Bearing children during this period was a status symbol. Hannah was provoked by her rival wife, Peninah, for her lack of childbearing. Where do you see status dynamics or rivalry between women still playing out in the church?

### ***For Men***

1. We learn that Eli has the post of a priest, but like all others, he is fallible and a sinner. Have you ever looked up to someone who, in time, disappointed you? What did you learn from that experience? Have you ever been the one who disappointed another? What did you learn from this experience?
2. "Stop allowing other people to be the source of revelation in your life." This is a quote from this weekend's sermon. Pastor Wesley goes on to say, "God uses [others] . . . as a source of confirmation." What do you think about this statement? Who has served as a revelatory source or a source of confirmation in your life?

### ***For Returning Citizens***

1. What does it mean for God to be Lord over your life? How do you exercise this declaration?
2. We learn in this sermon that "Whenever we open ourselves up to what God is saying in your life, it may cause some radical change." The etymology of the word 'radical' means *change at the root*. What radical changes has God brought about in your life through prayer and opening up to God?



3. This sermon asks us to come to God with a “whatsoever you ask; I will” heart and an “all on the altar” willingness. However, Eli complied with neither by refusing to discipline his sons properly. What things have you kept off the altar of God? What could God ask of you, to which you would say a clear “NO”? Why do you think this is?

***For Differently-Abled Persons/People***

1. Samuel trusted Eli, but Eli could have been a better role model. What are some emotional tools you use when someone you trust disappoints you?
  
2. The title of this sermon has much to do with listening. How do you know when you are being listened to in your primary relationships? What are the signs? What occurs in you when you know these people are listening? Finish this sentence, “When someone truly listens to me, I . . .”