

Chapter 16

CALL OF GOD 2 ***HEARING GOD'S VOICE***

The story of the birth and childhood of Samuel and his development into a prophet of God and a leader of the nation is found in the first three chapters of the book of 1 Samuel. Samuel was the last of the Judges who ruled Israel for nearly 400 years after the death of the generation who entered the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. Samuel was also the first of the Prophets, who advised kings and called the nation of Israel back to God. Samuel was Israel's king maker. After a life dedicated to faithfully leading and judging Israel, Samuel anointed Israel's first two kings, Saul and David. (1 Samuel 1-3)

In this lesson we will look at some of the characteristics of Samuel and how he developed in hearing and recognizing the voice and the call of God in his life.

- I. Samuel was dedicated to the Lord. Samuel's mother dedicated him to God's service from before he was born. An important step in preparing ourselves to hear and understand the call of God on our lives is to unconditionally dedicate ourselves to God and His purpose for our lives. (1 Samuel 1:27-28; 1 Samuel 10; 1 Samuel 16)
 - A. Samuel was a gift from God, an answer to prayer. Our new life as a believer is a gift of God's grace.
 - B. Samuel was dedicated to the Lord unconditionally, even before he was born. Many people want to know every detail of God's plan before they will accept it or dedicate themselves to God. Dedication comes first, then revelation.
 - C. Have you dedicated yourself to the Lord? Is your commitment unconditional? Have you put conditions or set limits on your dedication to God?
- II. Samuel was a worshiper. Samuel's mother brought him to the Tabernacle, to God's house and there he learned to simply worship God and enjoy being in God's presence long before he learned specific tasks or acts of service to perform. (1 Samuel 1:28)
 - A. You've got to minister "to the Lord" before you can minister "for the Lord." Ministry and service grows out of love for God and relationship with Him.
 - B. Your ministry cannot just be something you do - professionalism. If our ministry or service doesn't proceed from love for God and relationship with God, it is merely performance and bears little or no lasting fruit.
- III. Samuel served (ministered) before the Lord in the Tabernacle. He was a doorkeeper and janitor and performed many routine and even menial tasks of service. (1 Samuel 2:18; 1 Samuel 3:1)
 - A. Samuel was a servant. He served in the house of God. He served the man of God. Even though his destiny was to be a Prophet and King maker, his preparation and development

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required practical service.

- B. Samuel served in natural ways as a servant before he served in spiritual ways as a prophet.
- C. Samuel's service was "before or unto the Lord," even though he was involved in natural things. We must serve "as unto the Lord."

IV. Samuel was under authority. (1 Samuel 2:11; 1 Samuel 3:1)

- A. Samuel was under Eli's authority. Even though Samuel was dedicated to God, his dedication and submission had to be worked out in practical ways. He was dedicated to God, but he was submitted to Eli the priest.
- B. Samuel was in submission, under authority, being trained. God's plan was to give Samuel a great deal of both spiritual and natural authority in the nation of Israel. The preparation for being in authority is to be under authority.
- C. Eli was not a good leader. He allowed things to go on that were sinful and in violation of God's laws. Yet God put Samuel under Eli's authority during his growth and development. Can I be "under" leadership that isn't perfect? Can I submit even when there is obviously a problem?

V. Samuel was growing and maturing. Learning to hear God's voice and recognize the call of God takes time. It is a process, not merely an experience. (1 Samuel 2:21,26)

- A. Time must be allowed for growth in natural and practical ways as well as for spiritual growth.
- B. Samuel's period of growth and development can be compared with the account of Jesus' growth and development in His early years. (Luke 2:40,52)
- C. We are not to be "men-pleasers," but we are to be in right relationship with others, to be looked on with favor and as a good example.

VI. Samuel was "in the temple (tabernacle) - where the Ark of God was." He learned to be at home - in the presence of the Lord, in God's house. (1 Samuel 3:3)

- A. Samuel developed an ability to "rest" and just be himself in the presence of the Lord. He didn't have one personality for church and another for everyday life.
- B. Samuel didn't compartmentalize his life into "natural" and "spiritual." He remained in the presence of the Lord day and night.
- C. This can be compared with the account of Joshua in training under Moses. Joshua "did not leave the tent" but remained in the presence of the Lord. (Exodus 33:11)

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- VII. Samuel was sensitive to the voice of God even though he did not fully understand it. When Samuel first began to hear God speak, he didn't understand who was speaking to him or how to respond. But he responded by opening his heart to God. (1 Samuel 3:4-8)
- A. Samuel sensed the calling, even though he didn't understand what was happening. (1 Samuel 3:7)
 - B. Have you felt, sensed, heard, but don't fully understand? How do I begin? What do I do?
- VIII. Samuel sought and received counsel concerning his call. He went to Eli and Eli was able to instruct him in how to respond more fully to hear from God. (1 Samuel 3:8-9)
- A. Samuel responded immediately to the call in the context he already understood of submission and obedience.
 - B. He went to Eli, who represented God's authority in his life both naturally and spiritually. (1 Samuel 3:5)
- IX. Samuel was obedient to instruction. When Eli told him how to respond to God's voice, he simply obeyed and did as he was instructed. (1 Samuel 3:9-10)
- A. We must learn to simply obey - not interpret - not have a better idea or an improvement on God's plan.
 - B. Don't put pre-conditions on your obedience: "I will do this, but not that."
- X. Samuel felt fear and humility at the seriousness of the call and task. When he actually did receive the message from God, it was challenging and even caused him to be afraid of the responsibility. (1 Samuel 3:15)
- A. Samuel recognized that the call of God was beyond his own ability and was not designed to make him popular.
 - B. If it doesn't challenge and stretch you, it's not God's call and will. We must know the difference between our own desire or ambition and the call and purpose of God.
 - C. If there is not a sense of awe and inadequacy at the call of God we must examine our heart attitude.
- XI. He acted in faith even though it put him at risk of disfavor. For Samuel to deliver to Eli the message from God put him at risk. (1 Samuel 3:17-18)
- A. He had to confront the man under whose authority he was serving. Eli held the authority over Samuel and his disfavor could have been serious trouble for Samuel.
 - B. If you want to hear from God, you must be willing to obey Him and act on what He tells you, no matter what the cost.

- XII. He allowed his call and gift to develop in his appointed place of service. Even though Samuel had received his first prophecy, he didn't "let it go to his head!" (1 Samuel 3:19)
 - A. He remained in Shiloh, under Eli's authority. He continued to serve where God had placed him and waited for God's timing for his future.
 - B. He recognized that he still needed growth and development. Even though he had a clear prophetic gift, he was still a young man and he recognized his need for time to mature.
- XIII. He allowed God to promote him. Samuel's prophetic gift could have caused him to feel that he was superior to Eli or the other priests who did not get prophetic messages from God. He resisted the temptation to begin to promote himself. (1 Samuel 3:19-21)
 - A. God didn't let Samuel's words fall to the ground. This was not the only time God spoke to Samuel. As he heard from God and faithfully declared to the people what God told him, his reputation spread.
 - B. All Israel recognized the call and gift God had given Samuel. Instead of having to promote himself, people began to look to him for the Word of the Lord.
 - C. God revealed himself to Samuel through His Word. The prophetic gift became the characteristic mark of God's call for Samuel. He had served in many practical ways, but the call of God was validated by the Word of the Lord that came to and through him.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

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1. What do you find most difficult in desiring to hear God's voice and to know God's will for your life? How do you feel you can best overcome that difficulty?
2. Do you think that most or all Christians should have an experience like Samuel had when he heard God speak directly to him? How do you think God usually speaks and communicates His will to believers?