

## A Message from Robin+

*Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

*Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."*

*Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him." As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.      1 Samuel 3:1-20*

The story of God calling Samuel in the temple is one that many of us know. It's one of the very first Bible stories I remember, because it happened to me when I was three. There are bits and pieces of it hovering around the edges of my earliest memories. I have a vague memory of going into my parents' room in the middle of the night and asking my mother if she was calling me. She did not wait for me to experience this as many times as Samuel, but right away told me to get back in bed and if I heard someone calling me again to say, "here I am, God." That was the end of the story, because I was probably too afraid it might be God and I guess I was not ready for that!

How often are we just not ready to listen to God and why is that?

There are two sentences in this scripture passage that stand out for me. The first is, “The word of the Lord was rare in those days.” The other one is, “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” It seems strange to me that Samuel would not yet know the Lord, since he had been living in the temple all of his life, but we can only guess as to why. I can admit that there have been periods in my earlier life when I attended church but was not really listening to God.

You may remember that Samuel was given to God by his mother Hannah in thanksgiving for God’s gift of bearing a child in her old age. You can read that story in 1 Samuel chapters 1-2. While the story begins in sadness for Hannah and moves to regret and consequences for Eli and his family, Samuel becomes God’s prophet and judge, that is, until the Israelites will not listen to God through the prophet Samuel. They reject him and demand a king.

Samuel’s relationship with God began and deepened throughout his life because he was intentional about listening to God. This is in contrast to the people of Israel, who would not listen and so to them the word of the Lord was rare.

We can probably come up with all sorts of reasons why we are not intentional about listening to God. I suspect that one of the main reasons we have difficulty getting still and quiet with God is that we might actually hear God. And when we hear God, we are going to have to make a decision about our response.

This week, I invite you to take time to be still and listen to God. Find a quiet place to sit comfortably in a supportive chair with your feet on the floor and your hands in your lap, palms up. Light a candle if you like, and if it’s helpful you can set a timer. Start small, maybe 3 or 5 or 10 minutes. Close your eyes, breath in and out slowly and deeply a few times, letting go of your thoughts and concerns. Choose a word to keep your focus, perhaps a word like peace, love, or Jesus. When you notice your attention wandering, return to your word. And listen, just listen. There is no wrong way to do this and you may not ever hear a voice as Samuel did. Just enjoy being in God’s presence for a few minutes. May you receive God’s peace.