



# God Calls Samuel

## *Called by God*

### About the Story

Just like many superhero movies, the Book of 1 Samuel begins with the title character's origin story. Elkanah and Hannah did not have any children. Hannah went to the holy site at Shiloh, and, in tears, asked God for a son, promising that if she were to bear a child, she would dedicate him to the Lord. This led to a confrontation with Eli, the high priest, who initially thought she was drunk. However, when Hannah explained herself and her request to the Lord, Eli blessed Hannah and told her that the Lord had heard her request. It was not long after that Hannah became pregnant, and when her son was born, she named him Samuel and fulfilled her promise to God by sending Samuel to live with Eli.

### The Point:

**God blesses and equips us to do great things.**

Samuel was just a young boy when God called him to be a prophet. God often calls the person we would least expect, but God always equips the person with the skills to follow God's calling. God calls us to do great things, too, and provides us with the talents and skills we need to accomplish God's mission in the world.

Eli, on the other hand, had two sons. His sons would often misbehave and steal the temple meat that was meant to be reserved as a sacrifice for God. Eli turned a blind eye to his sons' actions—it was only when the people who worship at this holy site notice the behavior that Eli was forced to act. Eli rebuked his sons' behavior, but it was too late. An unnamed man from God told Eli that he and his decedents were to be cursed for disobeying God's commandments.

It is here that our story begins. Samuel, now a young boy, wakes up to a voice in the night calling his name. He thinks it is Eli at first, so he asks Eli why he summoned him. Eli says that he did not summon Samuel and sends him back to bed. This exchange happens a few times before Eli realizes that it is God calling Samuel by name, so he tells Samuel to go back to bed, but this time, when God calls his name, Samuel should respond, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Samuel does as he is told, and God tells Samuel of Eli's fate. The passage ends by telling us that Samuel will go on to become a great prophet.

As we learn about Samuel's origin story, we can reflect on how God calls us to do God's mission in the world. Our call story might not be as flashy as Samuel's, full of visions, voices, and miracles. Even so, we can learn from Samuel's example to respond to God's call by saying "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we learned that God provided bread from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness. Today, we learn about God calling Samuel to be a prophet, providing him with a mysterious vision. Next week, we will learn about God calling David to be king of Israel.

Opening Prayer

God of love, you call each of us to be your servants. Open our ears so that we may hear your call, and open our hearts that we may serve one another with love. Give us courage to respond to your call like Samuel: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” We pray all of this through the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Into the Story

Think of a time when you felt God was speaking to you. Perhaps God spoke to you through another person, or, maybe God spoke to you through Scripture or a song. Perhaps it was a strong feeling or intuition. What did God say and how did you respond? Go around the group and share your reflections.

Learning the Story

*The Lord calls Samuel, a young boy, into service as a prophet. For his first act of prophesy, he must tell his mentor, Eli, that the Lord would deliver punishment for Eli's family's sins. Samuel obeys, and is rewarded by the Lord.*

**Read 1 Samuel 3:1-9 – Voices in the Night**

- ❓ How does Eli ask Samuel to respond to God's call?
- ❓ How would you feel if you heard a voice calling out to you in the middle of the night? How would you react?
- ❓ The passage states that Samuel “did not yet know the LORD.” What do you think that means?

**Read 1 Samuel 3:10-14 – Samuel's Vision**

- ❓ What is different between the first few times Samuel heard his name and the final time in verse 10, both in Samuel's response and in the description of how God called for Samuel?
- ❓ Do you think God's punishment of Eli is fair, considering the fact that it was Eli's sons who were directly responsible for blaspheming God?
- ❓ Have you ever had to be the bearer of bad news? How did it feel?

**Read 1 Samuel 3:15-21 – Eli's Response**

- ❓ Why do you think Samuel was afraid to tell his vision to Eli?
- ❓ How did Eli respond to Samuel's vision?
- ❓ What, if anything, can we learn from Eli's response to Samuel's vision?

## Living the Story: Service

God calls us, just as God called Samuel. How is God calling us to serve the world? Split into three groups. Each group will be assigned one of the following three categories: Church, Local Community, and World.

For five to seven minutes, each group will brainstorm specific needs in each category (for instance, in the Local Community group, one might write “people experiencing homelessness” if one lives in a large urban area). Then, for another five to seven minutes, each group will brainstorm tangible ways that they can help, even if it is a small solution to a big problem (for instance, in the World group, one might identify climate change as a problem and write “buy recycling bins for the church” as a solution—buying recycling bins will not fix the problem, but it is a small way to help).

After the groups have finished brainstorming their ideas, come together as a large group and share what each group came up with. If you have time, try to figure out as a large group one or two solutions from each category that you can get started on right away, and figure out a plan on how to do it!

## Closing Prayer

The song “Here I am, Lord” by Dan Schutte is a popular song that ties in very well with today’s theme. Do an Internet search for the song lyrics (maybe your church’s hymnal or song collection even has this song in it!) If your group knows the song, sing or read it as a closing prayer. You can also easily find the song on YouTube if your group wishes to hear it.

## Bible Connections

- ✝ Isaiah is called to be a prophet of God (Isaiah 6:6-10).
- ✝ An angel calls Mary for a very special task (Luke 1:26-38).
- ✝ Jesus gives his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-23).

## Bible Nuts & Bolts: Ancient History

Ancient history is a genre in the Bible that provides a history of the Israelite people. Both 1 and 2 Samuel are considered to be a part of this genre.

The emphasis in ancient history is not as much on “did this really happen?” as concerns arising out of a more recent understanding of history. Instead, ancient history in the Bible is better understood as theological interpretation of historical events. In other words, the focus is on interpreting historical events through the lens of how God interacts with humanity. When reading stories like this one, a good question to have in mind is, “What is this story telling me about how God is interacting with God’s people?”

At Home

- ✝ Spend sometime this week trying to implement in both your church and home some of the solutions for the problems the groups identified in the Living the Story Activity.
- ✝ Spend five to ten minutes in quiet meditation every night before you go to bed.
- ✝ End your personal prayers every day this week by saying, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Reflect on what saying that phrase makes you feel.

Daily Readings**Sunday—Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21**

A voice calls to Samuel in the night, calling him to a very important task. Reflect on what God is calling you to do.

**Monday—Read 1 Samuel 7:3-17**

God thwarts the plans of would-be conquerors, rescuing God’s people. Samuel raises a “stone of help” to commemorate God helping God’s people. What or who has been a “stone of help” in your life—a friend, a Bible passage, a song? Say a prayer of thanksgiving for your “stone of help.”

**Tuesday—Read 1 Samuel 8:1-22**

The people of Israel demand a king to rule them, not realizing that God is already their king! Think of someone you know who is having a hard time and give them a surprise note or phone call letting them know you are praying for them.

**Wednesday—Read 1 Samuel 10:17-27**

Saul is declared to be king of Israel. Have you ever had disagreement with someone over how to proceed with a special task? Reflect on what you learned from that experience.

**Thursday—Read 1 Samuel 12:1-25**

Now that Israel has a king to lead them, Samuel feels he is not needed by the people and says goodbye. Think of someone going through a time of transition in their life and pray for them by name.

**Friday—Read 1 Samuel 13:1-15**

Saul is not king for long before he starts making mistakes! Being a leader is tough—pray for someone who is in a leadership role—it could be your pastor, an elected official, or even your boss—and ask that God continues to strengthen and guide them.

**Saturday—Read 1 Samuel 15:1-35**

Saul messed up one too many times, and so his reign as king is coming to an end. Rejection is tough. Think of a time you have been rejected for something. Reflect on the good news that God loves you, no matter what!