

“Lean In, Listen Up, Look Out”

1 Samuel 3:1-11

Series: The Voice, Tuning Your Heart to Hear God

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One day God was looking down at Earth and saw all of the evil that was going on. He decided to send an angel down to Earth to check it out. When she returned she told God, yes it is bad on Earth, 95% is bad and 5% is good.

Well, he thought for a moment and said, maybe I had better send down a second angel to get another point of view.

So God called another angel and sent her to Earth for a time too.

And she confirmed, the Earth was in decline, 95% was bad and 5% was good.

God said this was not good. So He decided He was going to send a message to the 5% that were good. Words to encourage them and inspire them. To give them a little something to help them know they were on the right path.

Do you know what the message said????

Oh. God didn't speak to you either?

The Voice of God. Have you ever audibly heard God's voice? I hear people say things like: The Lord told me to do this. God spoke to me about going here. God showed me this or God revealed this me. I think we all desire to hear the voice of God. And that is what we are going to explore throughout this message series “The Voice”. We know when we look at the Bible and study scripture that God spoke to people. A lot. In the NIV version of the Bible it says over 300 times: “The Lord said...” Is he still speaking to us today?

Because there are a lot of other voices speaking to us all the time aren't there? Our world, our lives, our homes are noisy with voices. Television is noisy. Did you know in the US there are almost 1,800 channels to choose from? Radio is even noisier: in the US we have over 15,000 stations to tune in. Thanks to smart phones we need never be away from noise. We are entrenched in noise pollution. Trouble is when we are surrounded by so much noise an interesting phenomenon takes place...we find ourselves needing to talk louder in order to be heard. It's called the Lombard effect. We talk louder, over noise, in order to be heard, essentially ratcheting the volume of everything.

For years the volume control in my house was set to maximum. 3 kids, 2 dogs, a bunny and 4 t.v.s will do that. In a futile attempt to be heard above this domestic noise pollution I adopted the following coping strategy: If at first you don't succeed, yell a little louder.

And then, I lost it. I could feel it happening. Thanks to a bad case of laryngitis my voice became at best a hushed whisper. And an amazing thing happened. My house got quiet.

My kids who preferred to bellow MOM from wherever they were in the house, kids actually came looking for me when I didn't bellow back. And then they realized the only way to hear me was to get quiet themselves, lean in close to me. And listen. What's even more amazing is they started to whisper too!

The people of Israel in the Old Testament were experiencing a noisy, chaotic time. Constantly under attack from the outside by army after army and undermining themselves from inside...destroying themselves by turning away from God, loudly worshiping idols of stone and wood and physically and audibly breaking the 10 commandments. It's the last of the days of Judges. Samuel is a young boy about 12 who is working in what Scripture here calls a Temple but is actually a Tabernacle or Tent, not a building. He is serving with Eli, the Judge, and the High Priest. And Samuel is the person God is going to use to transition the people of Israel from the rule of Judges to Kingship.

We read:

“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.”

1 Samuel 3:1-2

Samuel served the Lord under the direction of Eli where the Ark of the Covenant is. Eli would perform sacrifices outside the temple while people gathered around to worship the Lord. But remember, I said this was an evil time for Israel. The scripture doesn't say the Lord was silent but that the word of the Lord was “rare.” The people were not listening to Him. They were tuning into other gods and idols. Eli is an old man. His eyes are weak and he is nearly blind. And his sons, who were supposed to take over the priesthood after him are wicked and corrupt. Eli is experiencing a weakening of his physical eyesight as well as his spiritual insight. He's become complacent about his immoral sons. All he wants to do now is lie down at night and forget the whole thing.

Until Samuel, who is lying in the Temple near the Ark, rouses him from sleep:

“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, 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.”

1 Samuel 3:3-5

I imagine Eli is grumpy about being woken up in the middle of the night. When one of my kids would show up at my bedside in the middle of the night and want to climb in bed with me I deployed an alternate strategy. I would escort them back to their bed and climb in with them. It

took just a minute or two of me scrunching in with them for them to say: It's okay Mom...please go back to your own bed!"

Again Samuel hears a voice calling his name and runs to Eli's bed and says "Here I am!" And Eli sends him back to bed. The third time Samuel runs to Eli, Eli has a thought: Samuel is sleeping next to the Holy of Holies, next to the Ark of the Covenant. Could it be the Lord is speaking to Samuel? "Go and lie down, Samuel" Eli advises him, "and if he calls you say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:9) So Samuel laid down on his bed near the Ark. And the Lord came and stood over him and called "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel spoke into the darkness, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:9b-10)

At that moment Samuel received his call from the Lord. It's the beginning of his relationship with God. I imagine Samuel is thinking: "Oh boy" "The Lord is speaking to me!" Don't you think he's excited? And then God delivers the bad news: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears tingle." (1 Samuel 3:11) God was going to use Samuel to bring change to Israel starting with telling Eli that the Lord is going to bring down wrath on his house for his complacency regarding the sins of his sons. Oh boy.

Samuel audibly heard God's voice. And that little boy Samuel did listen. Even though at first he doesn't recognize that God is speaking. We learn from Samuel that God's call comes not just to Saints and Prophets. His call comes to the average Samuel, to whomever, whenever and wherever he chooses. I have never audibly heard God's voice but I believe God is speaking to me, to all of us, all the time through Scripture and the Spirit in our spirits. How do we make ourselves available to experience it?

1. Lean In

Position yourself as close to God's presence as you can. Let's look back at the passage:

"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."

When I am preparing a message I often look at different translations of the Bible to see if something different will be revealed to me through the Word. And when I looked at a different version of this passage it read: "Eli was lying in his own place." So the High Priest, who is not hearing from God or receiving any visions is lying in his own place compared to where Samuel is. Samuel, the boy who has not yet heard from God, who doesn't know God and yet is lying not in his own place doing his own thing but is in the Tabernacle, next the Ark, in the presence of God. If you want to hear God speak you've got to get into his presence. If you want to hear God speak you put yourself intentionally where God is found.

Get yourself to church. Now we know God is everywhere and the Bible tells us that when 2 or more gather in His name there He is with us. But there are some things God is only going to do in church, where a group of worshipers is gathered and lifting up songs of praise, prayers, and listening to His word through a message. And we should come to worship with an intentional heart like Samuel did. Think about what Samuel did when God called his name – He RAN. Now don't take this the wrong way...but I think sometimes we don't run to church at all. In fact we

get into a church “rut”. We come to receive but not with the purpose of learning something new about God. We go because it’s what we do. We are creatures of habit. We park in the same spot, we sit in the same row or pew or at the same table. We follow the same worship order. Not bad things. But routine can become routine...in other words we get complacent in our comfort zones. I think some of that happened with Eli. He was at the Temple every day. Going through his motions. He was in his usual place, his own spot. He was near God but spiritually he was far away. He lost his longing. Remember his response to Samuel asking did you call me?

“What? No go back to bed....

What? No go back to bed....

What...hmmm 3x you’ve heard this voice now? Hmmm...maybe it’s God!

Okay Samuel...here’s what you do. Next time you hear him call your name you say Speak Lord, for your servant is listening. And he’ll talk to you...yup that’s how you do it...now leave me alone I’m going back to sleep.”

No wonder visions and God’s word was rare. God wants to speak and Eli wants to go back to bed.

Don’t be like Eli. Get close to God physically and spiritually with prayer.

Prayer is the way we communicate with God. I don’t doubt that God could call our names like He did Samuel’s But I think it’s most likely we will hear him in the quiet of our hearts when we pray. When we go to God in prayer we are speaking to Him and we are inviting Him to speak to us. Communicating is key to the health of any relationship. Lack of communication creates distance. Prayer is key to the health of our relationship with God. In fact prayer is key to good health in general. According this article:

“It doesn’t matter if you pray for yourself or for others, pray to heal an illness or for peace in the world, or simply sit in silence and quiet the mind — the effects appear to be the same.

“If you want to achieve maximum health, here are a few things that you should do: exercise regularly, eat well, drop those extra pounds — and pray.

Prayer boosts the immune system and helps to lessen the severity and frequency of a wide range of illnesses. Individuals who prayed daily were shown to be 40 percent less likely to have high blood pressure than those without a regular prayer practice.”

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-schiffman/why-people-who-pray-are-healthier_b_1197313.html

I’m not suggesting you substitute prayer for your blood pressure pill. But why not add it to your routine?

And speaking of routines...

Do something really radical next week and if you always sit in the same seat next to the same people sit somewhere different! Really, try it. Reflect on how the words of the songs relate to Scripture and the message. When you say the words of the Lord's Prayer don't just recite from memory but consider the wonder that those words were given to the disciples directly from Jesus. Take notes on the back of your bulletin. Maybe God will speak to you in a way he hasn't before because you got in his presence with an open heart, with fresh eyes to see and ears tuned in to hear.

2. Listen Up

Are you hearing God's voice? Maybe you need to stop talking. Now wait. Didn't I just tell you to talk to God through prayer? Well, yes. But communicating through conversation means talking and listening.

It's amazing what you can hear when you quiet down and listen up.

"Before refrigerators, people used ice houses to preserve their food. Ice houses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the ice houses, and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer.

One man lost a valuable watch while working in an ice house. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the ice house during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch.

Amazed, the men asked him how he found it.

"I closed the door," the boy replied, "lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

Often the question is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are being still enough, and quiet enough, to hear.

Directions, James Hamilton

Samuel was alone and quiet before God. God is not going to yell over the noise of your life. Yelling in general is an ineffective way to communicate. I was in the mall the other day rushing to make a return and be on my way. As I walked through Macy's I saw a set of keys on the ground. I picked them up and looked around and saw a gentlemen about 20 feet away and assuming they were his I called out to him, "Sir! Are these your keys?" No answer, didn't even look up. I yelled again. I took a few steps closer and yelled again. Geez, I'm thinking, I don't have time for this. I walked right up to him impatiently and held up the keys. He finally looked

my way and a look of relief came over his face. “Thank you,” he said to me in sign language. The quiet approach is so much more effective when hearing and receiving messages don’t you think?

3. Look Out

When you get into God’s presence and quiet down to hear His voice, look out for how he is going to use you. He might nudge you out of your comfort zone. He might just tell you something you don’t want to hear. When God spoke to Samuel, it wasn’t great news. In fact, it was a message of judgment on Eli and Eli’s family.

When we hear God’s voice we also need to look out for confirmation that what we hear God saying is in keeping with Scripture.

1 John 4:1 says:

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Bill Hybels in his book *To Busy Not to Pray* writes: A leading to be unfaithful, to cheat on an exam, to exaggerate to a customer, to spread hurtful gossip...is never a leading from God.”
TBNT page 161

Instead, he says, a prompting is from God when it calls me to humble myself, serve somebody, encourage somebody or give something away.

And there is something else you need to look out for – the other voices. The ones that test you. The ones that challenge you with “Did God really say?” “Who do you think you are?” Lying spirits can masquerade as miraculous signs. Jesus warns us:

“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

Mathew 24:24

Tune them out. Look out for how God is working all around you and look out for ways to serve Him. When we serve God and/or others in God’s name it’s an expression of our faith in Him. Are you serving here at Woodside? I can tell you that Woodside as a whole is a community that values service. In fact we’ve flipped the 80/20 rule around...in most volunteer organizations 20% of the people do 80% of the work...here it’s opposite. 80% of us are serving in some way. Reason to rejoice yes! But there are still 20% not serving. You can’t say “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening” if you’re not serving.

Jeremy Camp is an award winning Christian singer and song writer. In his book [I Still Believe](#), he writes a lot about hearing God’s voice as he composes music but he wrestled with questions about leaning on the Lord and trusting Him during the most difficult time of his life. Before his music career really blossomed. He and his Melissa went from their honeymoon in Hawaii to the hospital. Melissa’s cancer that had been in remission, recurred. Though they had leaned in to God throughout her illness, though they had prayed for healing, her healing would come in Heaven.

Jeremy remembers the moment she passed away surrounded by their families. He fell to the floor in her hospital room overcome with grief. Worship music was softly playing in the background, Though Jeremy recalls he had no desire to move he says at that moment:

“God spoke gently but clearly to my heart: ‘I want you to stand up and worship Me.’”

He didn’t want to get up. He wanted to stay in that spot in his sorrow. His mother confirmed what he heard. She kneeled next to him and whispered: “Honey you have to lift your hands and worship the Lord. His parent’s helped him stand and together they worshipped God.

Jeremy says: “It was a powerful moment. As we wept and sang I felt the presence of God like I never had before.”

And since then God has used him through his music and his testimony about that time in his life to minister to people around the world.

Lean in to God and when He speaks and you listen. Look out. He’s going to touch your life in a powerful way.

Amen