



“I’m Getting a Call...But Who’s On the Other End?”

Discerning the Voice of God

Focus: God has placed a call on our lives—and sometimes it takes a while for the message to get through! Like Samuel, we can experience confusion or uncertainty when we begin to hear the voice of God, and we can benefit from the wisdom of others (like Eli) to help us in the discernment process.

General Comments:

- This sermon will—depending on the direction you and the Holy Spirit choose to take it—invite your congregation to ponder:
 - How we discern God’s calling in our lives
 - How mentors and others can provide clarity when the message seems “fuzzy” or when we’re unsure of the next step
 - How God’s call sometimes directs us to do challenging things (in Samuel’s case, bringing a hard prophetic word to his mentor Eli and Eli’s sons)
- If you began with last week’s introductory sermon using your own call story, consider how you might bridge from that into the story of Samuel’s calling.
- As you prepare for this week’s sermon, take time to touch base with anyone who might have expressed interest in the notion of call, or anyone who may be responding to an invitation to discipleship. Those ongoing conversations might shape your thoughts around this series in unexpected ways as you move forward!
- As with last week, consider prayer walking through the sanctuary/worship space before the service. As you move through the sanctuary, ask God to speak to the people who will be in that space. Pay attention to any Holy Spirit “nudges” as you dedicate and pray for the space.
- Consider including the teaching points from the Proclamation section in the bulletin for further reflection.

Scripture Selection:

- 1 Samuel 3:1-10—The Call of Samuel

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.” (NRSV-UE)

Outline:

The following sermon has been structured to have the flow of an **AGAPE** sermon. For more on this, check out the model in the book [That’ll Preach: 5 Simple Steps to Your Best Sermon Ever](#) by Charley Reeb. The five steps are: (AGAPE) Anticipation—Gospel—Answer—Proclamation—Explosion. An outline is provided that includes research and preaching “helps.” However, it is heavily dependent upon the preacher bringing their own experience to the sermon.

- **Anticipation (Introduction/Hook)**
 - Think back to last week’s sermon on your own experience with calling. Very few—if any!—of us spring into the world with a fully-formed sense of call. Our understanding of God’s call is generally shaped over time, and there are key people and events who God uses to nudge us in the right direction. Consider:
 - Who were the “key players” in your call story? Who were the mentors and guides who affirmed your sense of call?
 - Looking back, did you ever second-guess or misinterpret your call? (*i.e. “God would never call me to ministry; I must be imagining things!”*)
 - How was your call honed and clarified over time, and who offered you direction?
 - Another option (that you could use alongside or instead of the above prompt) would be to use an opening illustration about a time you misheard or misinterpreted something.

- “Hook” your listeners with a question about hearing the voice of God. For example:
 - **What should I do when I think I’m getting a call from God?**
 - **How do I know I’m being called if the call seems fuzzy/uncertain?**
- **Gospel (Scripture)**
 - Spend some time reading and contemplating 1 Samuel 3. Consider the following questions:
 - What do you notice about this text? Are there words or phrases that grab your attention?
 - Put yourself in Samuel’s shoes—what would you be feeling in this situation? (Fearful? Frustrated? Confused?) Imagine his internal dialogue during this experience. Then, do the same for Eli.
 - What does this text tell us about hearing the voice of God? What does it tell us about responding to the voice of God?
 - Consider reading on through the rest of the chapter, as Samuel is given a difficult prophetic message to deliver to his mentor. What does it mean to respond faithfully when our calling challenges us or asks us to do something uncomfortable?
 - Below are a couple of commentaries that may be helpful in guiding your unpacking of the Scripture:
 - From the [Center for Excellence in Preaching](#), by Rev. Doug Bratt
 - From [Working Preacher](#), by Rev. Dr. Alphonetta Wines
- **Answer**
 - Go back to the question you used in your “hook”. What wisdom can you glean from this Scripture as you answer this question?
- **Proclamation**
 - What is the “big takeaway” that you want to communicate to your hearers?
 - Consider incorporating the following points (you could share these in your bulletin, on your Facebook page, or other avenues as well):
 - It can take *time* to discern what God is calling us to do.
 - God’s call can *take us by surprise!*
 - We are not expected to figure out our response to God’s call on our own! *God has given us mentors, guides, and teachers who can point us in the right direction!*
 - When we’re discerning God’s call on our life, we’d do well to remember that *God’s next steps for us aren’t always the obvious or easy ones.*
- **Explosion (Closing)**

- You've asked a question, you've turned to Scripture for an answer, and you've proclaimed the Good News—so now what? What are you inviting your congregation to *do* with the story of Samuel's call? This will be for you and the Holy Spirit to discern; below are just a few directions you might explore.
 - Invite your listeners to brainstorm three people who they would trust to give them wise counsel about where God might be calling them next.
 - Invite your listeners to think of a discernment question that has been on their hearts or minds recently. Encourage them to think about what the next step is—who can they talk to about this? Who can offer guidance?
 - Invite your listeners to think of someone who has played a key role in their faith story up to this point, or who has offered them direction at a pivotal moment. Invite them to find a way to express their gratitude to that person in the coming week.
 - Depending on your setting, you might consider transitioning from your message into an interactive prayer response—for example, a writing exercise where people can bring their questions to God, or a litany that repeats the phrase “Here I Am” or “Speak, For Your Servant Is Listening.” (Consider using this "[Called By God](#)" prayer from re:worship)
- Continue to extend the threefold invitation from last week: **Pray. Seek. Go.**
 - **Pray:** Invite your people to ask God to help them see, hear, or know what God's voice sounds like. Encourage them to use whatever words they might have for prayer. “God, will you help me to hear your voice?”
 - **Seek:** Pay attention to possibilities that open up or scripture that reveals what God might be saying to you. “I am paying attention to God's words for me by...”
 - **Go:** Reach out to a pastor, mentor, or trusted friend to consider what God may be calling you to do. “I think God might be...”