

1 Sam. 3:1–10
(11–20)

Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18

1 Cor. 6:12–20

John 1:43–51

God Calls

**Goal for
the Session**

Children will dig into the story of Samuel’s call as they listen for God’s voice today.

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on 1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Richard Boyce

Human speaking and hearing now become one of the main means by which the light of God’s revelation breaks into the affairs of this world. Here, at this point in the story, when words from the Lord are rare, this listening and hearing becomes a communal affair, dependent on both the hearing and the speaking of the community together. As the stories of Saul and David spin on in 1 and 2 Samuel, there will be times when the Lord seems absent from the scene. All we will hear are words of human beings, on the one hand, counterpoised with actions of human beings, on the other. And yet even here we will learn that the Lord is at work. Indeed the Lord has drawn as near as the words and actions of our fellow human beings, attuned or not attuned to the voice of their God.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Joseph L. Price

Throughout the ages persons have perceived their call into ministry in a variety of ways—from the blinding experience of Paul on the road to Damascus, to the visionary perception by Ezekiel, to the intensifying sense of moral compulsion that Jeremiah increasingly discerned. Here we discern another distinct means of a call, so clear in its articulation that it is recognized as a call, a voice. The story of Samuel’s call establishes his authority, empowering his transfer of priestly leadership from Eli to Saul, and reinforcing hope in God—that God will refresh and renew.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Donna Schaper

Eli and Samuel’s encounter with God has a dramatic motion. An old man and a young man collaborate to hear God’s vision for a new Israel. When was the last time you felt a “tingle” about the word of God to you? When was the last time you experienced hope kicking into high gear, forgiveness writ loud, pins and needles all over your body because you were so excited? With its promise of “pins and needles,” this passage is a kind of spiritual acupuncture. It brings us by way of thrilling news to a time of renewal and forgiveness.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Lawrence Wood

This comic, tender, tragic story really does come from modern life. In an age of divine reticence and the all-too-human failings of religious leaders, it speaks to every servant weighed down with fatigue or regret. Are we Samuel? Are we Eli? Can we really be sure which? And what shall we do if the living God comes into our troubled temple? It is Eli, ironically enough, who tells us what to say: “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.”

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 3:1–10
(11–20)

Focus on Your Teaching

When children hear their names called, they learn at an early age what is behind the calling. When a parent calls a child by his or her full name, such as “Noah Jacob Wilson,” it’s pretty sure the child is in trouble. When a first and last name are called out in a school assembly, it might be as a sign of recognition for good grades or some other achievement. Nicknames by peers often indicate an acceptance, unless the name is used for bullying. When the learners hear Samuel’s name called in the Bible story, any of these experiences pop into their minds.

God who calls us, help me find ways to listen and hear your voice when you call me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- poster board
- marker
- green cloth
- Christ candle
- matches
- offering basket
- Bible
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- Resource Sheet 1
- Color Pack 13, 14, 30
- scissors
- tape
- craft sticks

For Responding

- option 1: small spiral notebooks, stickers, pencils, newsprint or board, marker
- option 2: paper, pencils
- option 3: Resource Sheet 2, fleece fabric, 14" square pillow forms, scissors
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player; Color Pack 30

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a bookmark at 1 Samuel in the worship table Bible. Print the gathering litany on poster board, if that has not been done. Cut out the figures on Color Pack 14 and tape them to craft sticks. For option 2 in Responding, invite guests to be interviewed. For option 3 in Responding, cut 20" squares of fleece, two for each child.

As the children arrive, ask them to set up the worship table, with the green cloth, Christ candle, offering basket, and Bible. When everything is ready, play “Jesus Bids Us Shine” (track 14 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). After the song, light the Christ candle and lead the children in this litany:

Leader: God of light, we gather in your presence.

All: We want to walk in your light.

Leader: We gather to learn how to follow Jesus.

All: We will learn and follow. Amen.

Receive the offering. Point to the green cloth and explain that the church is now in the season after Epiphany. This season continues until Lent.

Extinguish the candle.

Ask each child, one at a time, to say her or his full name. Inquire about how the children got their names. Were they named after a relative or after a famous person? Is there a story about how the name was selected? Conclude that the story today is about a child who hears his name called in the night.

Asking occasional questions about the Bible will build the children's knowledge about it and set a foundation for using it.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table, open it to the marker, and read the name of the book. Ask the child to hold the Bible open so the group can see where 1 Samuel is. Ask:

✪ Is the book of 1 Samuel in the Old Testament or the New Testament?

Tell the group that this is a story Jesus would have heard as a young boy. The stories in the Old Testament are many years older than Jesus. Tell the story from Resource Sheet 1 (Listen), showing Color Pack 13 each time Samuel hears the voice calling his name.

To help the children understand the sequence of events in the story, ask:

✪ Who did Samuel help at the temple?

✪ When did this happen to Samuel?

✪ How many times did God call to Samuel before Samuel knew who it was?

✪ Who helped Samuel figure out who was calling his name?

For the children to experience the story in another way, select three children to be Samuel, Eli, and the voice of God. Tell the story again as the children act it out with the stick puppets prepared from Color Pack 14. After the dramatization, ask:

✪ Why didn't Samuel recognize that God was calling his name?

✪ Why do you think God didn't give the message directly to Eli?

✪ How do you think God gives messages to people today?

RESPONDING

If possible, provide two options so children have a choice. Select one that is more challenging for children who are able to work on their own.

1. Prayer Notebook One way people today communicate with God is through prayer. Assure the children that it is rare that people hear God's voice in the way that Samuel did, but today we pray to God and wait quietly to accept God's message. Because God's answers may not come immediately, the learners can keep a notebook of their prayers. Give each child a small spiral notebook. Provide a variety of stickers for the children to decorate the covers. Explain that they can keep a list of people and places that they pray for in their notebooks. This will help them see how God answers their prayers. Have them begin their prayer notebooks by writing the names of the children and leaders in your group in it. Print the names on newsprint or board for the children to copy. They can add more names and things to their notebooks and use them when they pray at home.

If there are several children, invite two or more guests and form groups of an adult and two or three children. Smaller groups may make it easier for some children to speak.

**EASY
PREP**

2. **Interview** Church members can be role models for children as they describe their prayer lives and experiences in a similar way that Eli was a model for Samuel. Before your visitor(s) arrive, distribute paper and pencils. Talk with the children about questions they might ask, helping them write them on their papers. Remind them that they can add other questions as they talk with the guest(s). Introduce the guest(s). Talk as one group. After the guests leave, ask the children to tell what they discovered about prayer.
3. **Pillow** The pillow will remind the children that one time they can listen for God is when they lie down at night. Make fleece pillows, following the directions on Resource Sheet 2 (No-Sew Pillow). If a number of younger children are in your group, invite adults and young people to assist with this project. Adults who are uncomfortable teaching children, but who enjoy working with children one on one, may appreciate the invitation, and the children will increase their number of friends in the congregation. A teenager who enjoys crafts can also be an asset to this option.
4. **Song** To pray to God, children need to be assured that God is with them and is listening for their prayers. “Behold, I Am with You” (Color Pack 30; track 2 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) is a simple song that will remind the children of God’s care and presence. It can be sung repeatedly as a way to prepare to pray to God. Play it for the group. Sing it together, repeating it several times. The children will learn the melody and the lyrics quickly.

Behold, I Am with You

Behold, I am with you,
(Behold, I am with you)
 And will keep you wherever
 you go, *(And will keep you
 wherever you go)*
 And will keep you wherever
 you go. *(And will keep you
 wherever you go)*

Behold, I am with you,
(Behold, I am with you)
 And will keep you wherever
 you go, *(And will keep you
 wherever you go)*
 And will keep you wherever
 you go. *(And will keep you
 wherever you go)*

CLOSING

Play “Behold, I Am with You” (Color Pack 30; track 2 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) as the children gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

Sing “Behold, I Am with You” several times to prepare for the closing prayer.

Pray:

*God, you hear our prayers. Keep us ready to hear your answers to them.
 In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Thank the children for coming, and encourage them to return next week. To each child, say, “*(Name)*, pray to God this week because God is always with you. Be ready to hear God’s answer to you.”

Listen

based on 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

Samuel was a young boy who lived at the temple and helped the priest Eli. A priest led all the worship of God for the people. Many troubles were in the land in those days, many years before Jesus was born.

Eli, the priest, was old and his eyes weren't as good as they used to be. He was lying down in the temple, and Samuel was lying in another part of the temple.

A voice called, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Thinking Eli needed him, Samuel ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am! I heard you call me."

"I didn't call you," said Eli. "Go and lie down."

Samuel did as Eli said. But again he heard, "Samuel! Samuel!" Again he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am! You called me."

"No, I did not call you," said Eli. "Go and lie down."

Samuel went back to his bed. A third time, he heard a voice call, "Samuel! Samuel!"

He hurried to Eli and said, "Here I am! You did call me."

Eli now understood that God was calling Samuel, but Samuel did not know it was God's voice. Eli said, "Samuel, go back and lie down. When you hear the voice again, say, 'Speak, God, I am listening.'"



When Samuel heard the voice again, he did as Eli told him and answered, "Speak, God. I am listening." Then God gave Samuel an important message for Eli.

No-Sew Pillow

You Will Need

- two 20" squares of fleece fabric per pillow
- 14" square pillow form
- scissors

1. In advance, cut 2" by 2½" strips along each edge of both fleece squares.
2. Place the two fleece squares together, right sides out.
3. Show children how to tie double knots along three sides of the pillow.
4. Slide pillow form inside the fleece pocket.
5. Tie the remaining strips together.

