

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 3 as we continue our studies through the historic books of the Old Testament.

I think we've mentioned to you several times, but when you read narrative books (which is how the Old Testament is written - it's written as a report of what happens; the book of Acts is the same), the lessons and narratives are in the stories themselves. So God may not give you all the information you would like to know about what you're reading, but this is all the information He wants you to have. So you have to take the lessons from what is set before us, and that's what we intend to do as we go through these chapters all the way to the end of the historical book sections of the Old Testament.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel start with the last judge, Samuel - he was born about 1100 or so B.C. - and they take us all the way to the end of David's reign. He died in about 970 B.C. So 1 and 2 Samuel only cover about 130 years' worth of historical information. They are set, or they come, at the end of the book of Judges, however, which was the book right before this book. It's in chronological order. The book of Judges covered about 338 years. It is a really ungodly time in Israel's history. We've mentioned to you (if you haven't heard it, you'll hear it now) they are set apart - those years - by what is called, in the Bible, the sin-drome. There are seven pronounced periods where the people had rest. They ended up, because things were light, life was easy...and rebellion. God, because He loved them, would not let them live in rebellion, so He brought retribution - usually in the form of an enemy or sometimes natural disaster. At some point, the people wised up and said, "Man, that's dumb what we're doin.' We need the LORD." They repented, and when they did, God brought redemption in the form of a judge, a deliverer, a healing, a provision. And then there was rest, and then that whole thing began all over again. Sin-drome. So it was a really bad time in Israel's history. It was in that setting that the book of Ruth is born. We spent some time last month going through the plight of one family - walked with God, walked away from God and walked away from God's dealing, and the consequences that followed the family, and then, eventually, the restoration and God's blessing upon Ruth and her family and their descendants. It's a real good book about God's providence and His willingness to care for all who look to Him and depend upon Him.

Which brought us to this favorite book of ours. It's the favorite book because we're studying that. Somebody said, "How come you have so many favorites?" It's just whatever one we're doin'. This is now my favorite book. And it follows chronologically on the heels of the book of Judges.

Chapter 1 tells us of the birth of Samuel, the last judge; also the first, really, national prophet in the Bible. He is the last judge. His mother, Hannah, had been, for years, barren. She had sought the LORD for a child every year she came to the tabernacle at Shiloh with her husband and the other wife, Peninnah. And she prayed, "LORD, give me a child." For a hundred different reasons, the LORD never answered her prayer. One year when she came there, she had had enough. She said, "LORD, if You'll just give me a son, I'll give him back to You to serve You all the days of his life. I just want to be a mother, and I want to raise the child in Your ways." And the LORD was waiting, I think, to hear that from her as that was what He had intended all along. And so the next year, she was with child. And, true to her promise to the LORD, after weaning this child for three to five years or so, Hannah brought this child to the tabernacle and presented him to the high priest, Eli, to learn how to serve the LORD. She made him a little outfit, a little ephod, and she left him there to learn to serve the LORD all the days of his life.

In chapter 2, we are given the story of two families - Samuel's family and that of Eli, the high priest, who ended up with judgment (and we'll see it in more detail tonight). Eli's sons worked as priests in the tabernacle, but they stole from the people. They misrepresented God. They slept with the women. They were horrible people. Eli, who was a good guy, never really talked to his sons; didn't slow their activity and didn't put his foot down, if you will. And so the LORD warns him in chapter 2. He will deal with him tonight in chapter 3. So, Eli was unwilling to correct or chastise or just restrict the evil in his sons. They had made a mockery of worship, and people didn't want to come.

Tonight we go to chapter 3. Ten years or so pass between these two chapters. Ten years we know nothing other than the results of ten years of Samuel being, if you will, at the tabernacle. Samuel is now a teenager - 13, 14, maybe 15 years old. The word "boy," in verse 1 here, is the same word used of David when he fights Goliath (there in 1 Samuel 17). It's translated "youth," but it is usually a word used in Hebrew for a young man. Like I said, although Abraham is the first one to be called a prophet in the Bible (back in chapter 20 of Exodus), Moses was a type of Jesus, the Great Prophet. Samuel would be the first prophet in a national office.

God established prophets in the Old Testament to speak to the nation and to speak to their enemies around them. Prophets most often spoke God's Word. Sometimes it's future, but it didn't have to be; I know we think prophet - somebody's telling us the future. The prophets of the Old Testament oftentimes just delivered God's message for the present. But sometimes they had, obviously, future implications as well. So Samuel will be that first, if you will, prophet as an office. They were God's mouthpieces in the Bible. They were spokesmen to the entire land. They had to be 100% accurate, or they should be put to death. That's what the Law said. So it was a pretty scary job to have. It is far different, by the way, than the gift of prophecy with the gifts of the Spirit today. They are given to many. They are not given, usually, for national consumption. The gifts of the Spirit, for the most part, are used in the context of accountability within a body. It is used to encourage and to deliver God's Word. You may or may not be given a gift of prophecy, or it may be given to you at a time when you need it. It isn't really yours to hang on to and say, "This is what I got. I'm a prophet." Well, there aren't any national prophets; not in the New Testament. That kind of ended in the Old Testament when God sends His Spirit to live in all of you, each one individually. But in the Old Testament, God used the prophets, and you have these books of the prophets as we get towards the end of the Old Testament as well, and we can see their function and their service to the LORD.

Tonight, as we get to chapter 3, however, we want to look at only one topic. And the reason we're doing this whole chapter is it really is a focus on one topic, and the topic is the calling of Samuel by the LORD to the ministry of a prophet. The chief lesson of chapter 3, if you are good at summarizing things, is that one faithful life in God's hands can make a world of difference. I don't know about you. I've never been good at memorizing verses. I think the only ones I know are because I teach a lot, and they kind of stick with you, they rub off. But when I was doing a lot of studying to just memorize, I would work on chapters; I think it's far easier. If I said to you - what is chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians about? - you would say.....(Congregation responds, "Love.") Very good because you know the chapter. You may not know all the verses, but you know the chapter. So that way you learn a lot of verses in a hurry. Chapter 1 of Genesis is about....(Congregation responds, "Creation.") Guy, you guys are smart. How 'bout Revelation chapters 2 and 3? Letters to the churches. How 'bout Matthew 5, 6 and 7? Sermon on the Mount. See? You know a lot! So if you know where things are....and this is really the calling of a man into ministry. God gives to us, in the narrative, seven specific steps that Samuel is taken through that will bring him to the place of discovering

what God's will for his life is going to be. If you're good at taking notes, you might want to write them down for yourself. I think that they can be repeated in the Scriptures in many places, and it's important that you know that you're right where God wants you, I think, to be and to know what God's will for your life is. And I'll tell you what - you find out what that is, and your life - singular life - can make a huge difference in the world. God has great plans for each one of us.

Verse 1 says this, after ten years of nothing, "Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation." After ten years of silence, the testimony about Samuel's devotion to the LORD hadn't changed. You might remember back in chapter 2, verse 11 says "the child ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest." This was a young boy who had just been left there by his parents. We will see, in verse 18 of the last chapter, "Samuel ministered before the LORD, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod" that his mom had made, a little robe for him and all. Verse 26 says, "And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the LORD and men." And then, ten years later, it's "the boy Samuel," older now, still ministering to the LORD before Eli the priest. Ten years of faithfulness from a young man that is now a teenager, living a life in relative obscurity at a time when few people really cared about what God had to say. Without notice, without applause, Samuel was a sincere young man, diligent in seeking God.

And here's step one in the way that you can determine God's will for your life: be faithful in the little things, and please God in private. Be faithful in the little things; please God in private. Shortly before his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus spoke a lot to the disciples, and one of the things that He spoke to them about (and I'll read to you out of Luke 19), Jesus told them a parable because the boys, as they got close to Jerusalem, really believed that somehow the Lord was about to take over immediately, that the kingdom was about to be established. And so you read in chapter 19 of Luke, verse 11, "Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately." And obviously that wasn't the case. The Lord was gonna die for our sins, ascend to heaven...but this whole Church Age would be plugged in before the Lord would come to rule and to reign upon the earth. So Jesus tells them a parable. It is called, sometimes, "The Parable of the Pounds" or "of the Minas." It starts off like this, and I'll read it to you, "Therefore He said: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return' " (speaking of Himself). " 'So he called ten of his

servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, "Do business till I come." But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." ' ' So Jesus speaks of leaving to go to heaven, to one day return in the future to receive for Himself a kingdom. He leaves His servants (in this parable) behind, and He gives to each one a mina. A mina is roughly a three-months' salary in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. So the word "pound," not English-British pound but biblical pound, is the same thing. There is another parable that Jesus told around the same time that is found in Matthew 25. It is the "Parable of the Talents," and maybe you remember that as well. They kind of go together. They teach the same basic lesson, and that is - use what God has given to you, and be faithful to what He gives to you. In "The Parable of the Pounds," in Luke, everyone got the same amount. So it speaks of opportunity. We all have an opportunity from the Lord to be useful to Him, to be used by Him; and that we should seek to be faithful. The one in Matthew finds those in the parable each being given a different set of amounts, if you will, or a different value, but they were rewarded based on the faithfulness to what they had been given. So the one lesson, the pounds lesson, is everyone gets opportunity; the Matthew lesson adds to it whatever God gives you, use it for Him because you'll be rewarded in the same measure to what you diligently or faithfully used in what He has given to you. Both of the parables speak specifically about faithfulness. In other words, God wants you to take what He has given you and fully use what He's entrusted to you so that when He returns, you can give to Him that which you have profited in what He has entrusted into your hand. The rewards are based on the degree to which faithfulness is used. In the Luke parable (the one in Luke 19), it is all about trust and the trust that God gives us. What do we do with the opportunities that God provides? When Peter was a little older, and he wrote 1 Peter to the scattered church, he said (1 Peter 4:11), "If you speak," (to the church) "then speak as God's oracle. If you minister, do it with the ability that God gives to you so that in everything God would be glorified through Christ, and He would receive honor." But Peter's word to the church is "do it with all that you've got, with all that God provides and lays, if you will, at your feet. Use every opportunity with diligence." So we read, here in the Luke passage, that some of the citizens hated Him. They got a delegation together. They said, "We don't want this Man to rule over us." So while Jesus is gone, opposition to Him and resistance to His rule begin to raise up, and you can certainly see that today. So that the servants of the Lord needed to serve and be fruitful and be diligent and be faithful in the midst of what will be a growing opposition. Fruit had to be borne in the midst of opposition, if you will.

In verse 15 of that chapter (Luke 19), it says, " 'And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, "Master, your mina has earned ten minas." And he said to him, "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities." And the second came, saying, "Master, your mina has earned five minas." Likewise he said to him, "You also be over five cities." ' " So, at the Lord's return, each servant was called to give an account of his stewardship. And there are three results. The first guy makes 1000% profit. Right? Ten times. And he gets 1000% reward. He's given ten cities to rule over. The second one - 500% profit. They both had opportunity. They were faithful to their opportunity, fully so. So you say, "One guy made 1000, one guy made 500. What's the difference?" The answer would be - if everyone starts with the same, you all have the same opportunity, then it all depends upon you. How much are you willing to put in? How much time are you willing to spend? How much of your life are you going to give to the Lord? He can take and use it to the max if you want. So the one guy, he's all in. The second guy, he still did good; not quite like the first guy. But this is all about opportunity. Right? The Matthew parable talks about how much He gives you and what you do with what you've been given. But this is about opportunity; everybody got the same minas. The last guy, in verse 20 of that chapter, said, " 'Then another came, saying, "Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow." And he said to him, "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?" And he said to those who stood by, "Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas." (But they said to him, "Master, he has ten minas.")' " And the Lord said, " 'For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.' " So the lesson being that God gives to us opportunity - we can use it or we can lose it. God'll use another, but the idea is be faithful in what God gives you, and God'll give you more. That's the first step, if you will, in Samuel's life. For ten years, out of the limelight, faithful to the LORD, every day serving in the tabernacle, seeking to please God when no one was watching so that God would prepare him for what comes next.

I remember the story (and you probably do, too - and it's in 2 Kings 13, so we'll get there eventually) where Elisha tells Joash Elisha is dying. Joash is worried about the enemies of Israel, and he said, "What am I going to do when you're gone because God has always used you to bring the deliverance?" And so Elisha said to Joash, "Well, take those arrows in your hand and beat the ground with them." And so he did; he beat it three times. He goes, "Now what?" It was like he didn't show much interest. And Elisha, from his death bed, got angry, and he said to Joash, "If you would have beaten the ground five or six times, your enemies could be totally defeated. But because you have this lackluster response, 'There you go, what? I need help.' Because you don't show much interest, you're only going to have a partial victory, and then they're going to overrun you." But he spoke to the king's lack of faithfulness in the position that God has given to him.

This last guy in the story here in Luke, out of fear and out of excuse, received judgment and suffered loss because he really didn't know God's heart. "If you really believe that I'm a guy that collects what I don't deserve to have, and if you've been given something you're afraid you're going to mishandle, then at least put it somewhere where I can gain what you think I'm going to want anyway." So this guy's afraid of failing; he should have been afraid of the Lord. But both of the positions that you get in the parable have a direct proportional kind of relationship to the diligence that was shown by others. So, look, you and I have the same opportunity. What we do with that will determine what the rewards will be and how we can honor the Lord with our life. I bring all that up, and I know we're going around the horn here a little bit, but Samuel starts with a place where, for ten years, he just remains faithful. God just skips over all of that time to say to us these faithful, silent years he has now been brought by the LORD to a time where He can entrust to this faithful man more. So if you're looking to see what God wants to do with your life, I would say start with being faithful in the little things. Start there. Please the Lord when no one watches and sees but the Lord because He's the only One that you really want to please anyway.

Second of all (of the seven), number two, is that you should be diligent when God is silent or, if you will, be faithful to the Lord even when you have no new information to go on. Remember this was during a time of spiritual decline in the nation. This was toward the end of the judges. But notice, at the end of verse 1, it says, "And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation." In that culture, Samuel remained faithful. The nation was apostate. The priests were corrupt. The people were walking away from the LORD. And hearing God's

voice was now a tradition of the past, not an experience of the present. So Samuel had to grow up in a culture that maybe you can relate to in our own - where you see very little of God in terms of people hungering to know Him. Right? There's this added difficulty when you walk alone in faith and you have to maintain your walk where few other people seem to care. And that's the way it is today. You know, when I got saved in the late 60's and early 70's, the Jesus Movement - which was amazing - would literally.....I used to teach at Calvary Downey on Sunday nights; 1500 people'd come on Sunday nights. We'd show a movie and have 200 people get saved. The dumbest movies. People would flock to come forward. And then we'd have to show it again at 9:30 at night on a Saturday, and 1500 people would wait outside to come in and see a dumb movie. And people would get saved by the hundreds. I tried explaining that to some of our staff guys who are younger, and they've never seen anything like that. Our assistant pastor was born on the year that the church started. He's young. I'm gettin' old. But he was never there. He would love to see that. I would love to see one more of those Jesus Movements. It was amazing what God was doing! Has God changed? No. But the response - both from the church and from the world - has changed.

So, into that climate or into that environment, without really the support that you might normally try to find in terms of your walk with the Lord, Samuel continued to be faithful. He was diligent when God was silent. He was faithful when no one else was. He was a man's man, a godly man. He was committed to doing things God's way. Staying faithful when others are not is a quality that puts you in a position to really know what God wants because you're probably one of the few that is really seeking the Lord and wanting to know His heart. Paul wrote, in his last letter to Timothy, "You know that everyone in Asia abandoned me" (2 Timothy 1:15). Jesus said (John 16:32), "The hour is coming," to His disciples, "and it's here now - that you're going to be scattered, and each one of you is going to go your own way, and you're going to leave Me alone. But I'm not really alone. My Father is with Me." But it's those isolated places where maybe everyone around you isn't running in that direction, but you are. Right? If you want to know what God wants to do in your life, then be faithful when God is silent, be faithful when no one else is running in that direction. Be faithful in the little things, please God in secret, first. Second of all, be diligent when God is silent. The Word of God was "rare." The word "rare" is the word for precious. It was valued because there was so little of it. There weren't many visions from the LORD, the Old Testament, by the way, way of communication. God was speaking to rarely a few. Few were usable. And here's this young man, Samuel, who's plugged in to the relationship that he has with God.

And like a flower growing in the wilderness, he's about to blossom. So in verse 1, we're told very clearly that Samuel, because of ten years of faithfulness, had been faithful day in and day out, pleasing the LORD while in private, and, in doing so, while the culture itself didn't really see or experience or support that relationship with God, he was diligent when God was silent.

Third of all (seven steps I'm going to try to give you - I think you should apply them to yourself), if you are seeking to see where the Lord wants to put you, then you should wait for God to open the doors for you because being prepared takes time. I know that when I first got saved I thought I could teach a Sunday morning two weeks later. "I got somethin' to say." And Pastor Jeff at Downey did not let me do that. He said no. I asked, but he said no. If he'd have said yes, I probably would have done it....and messed it up. The only way you're going to be ready when God is ready is to be committed to Him and wait for Him to move you forward. In other words, the danger that we find when we try to figure out what God wants us to do is sometimes we'll push and shove and manipulate and call in cards and make deals and call up friends, and, "I'll do you a favor, you do me a favor," and then I get to where I think I want to be, and I go, "Look what the Lord did." But the Lord didn't do any of that. You did. And if you'd have just sat, you may have never ended up there. So it is important that we wait for the Lord to open the doors. And we're going to see that here in Samuel's life as well, that he waits for the LORD to open the doors for him.

And let's read a bunch of these verses now, beginning in verse 2, "And it came to pass at that time," (in that setting) "while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down," (there's the whole setting) "that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, 'Here I am!' So he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' And he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' And he went and lay down. Then the LORD called yet again, 'Samuel!' So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' He answered, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' (Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him)" in this manner, if you will. "And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you did call me.' Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears." So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the

LORD came and stood and called as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel answered, 'Speak, for Your servant hears.' " The picture of Samuel in verse 1 could easily be any of us, I think. You're at your job, you feel like you want to serve the Lord, you're at school, you're at home, you're sold out, you want to revolutionize the world. "I've got ideas. Why can't everyone see my gifts?" But for now, nothing seems to be moving. God has a timing. You've got to wait for it. Samuel did not plot or make this happen. He was in bed, before dawn, asleep (or sort of asleep). The LORD began to open the doors to promote him.

Notice that God is very interested because this is narrative (again in verses 2 and 3) to very clearly explain to us the day upon which these things happened. Eli is old. He is blind. He's in bed. We know that the lamp of God that was before the veil of the Holy of Holies burned from evening until the morning, according to Exodus 27; so it was before morning, sometime before dawn. Samuel was still in bed when God began to speak. I love the fact that God remembers every detail. Don't you like the..... "Get on with it, Lord! We get it." No. No. He wants you to know every detail. This was the most important day in young Samuel's life - the day that he would hear from God for the first time.

Samuel was, notice from verses 4 and 5, sleeping somewhere close to elderly Eli. He would be there to help if he was needed. You want to say, "Where're your own boys? How come they're not here helping you?" When he heard his name called, he did the obvious. He went to the old priest and said, "What can I do for you?" And Eli, maybe he's crabby. He's old. I don't know if you have to be old and crabby, but sometimes you can be crabby. "I didn't call you! Go back to bed." It happened a second time, like the first. Samuel had a wonderful heart for a young man. He loved this man of God, Eli. Eli loved him as a son, called him his son; and who could blame him? His sons were a disaster.

Verse 7 explains to us the reason for Samuel's confusion. Up to this point, though he had been faithful to the LORD in his young life, he hadn't personally received a vision or heard a word from the LORD. It takes time, I think, to discern when God is speaking to you and when He's not. I can tell you five times in my life that I know God spoke to me, and I responded to each one - not always with great joy, but I did. There are a hundred times I went, believing God had spoken - sometimes I was right, sometimes I was dreadfully wrong. But to hear God's voice, you've got to work at it, don't you? You've got to learn to discern. There's a great verse in Hebrews 5:14, which says, "Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is,

those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." It takes time to learn this is the Lord, and this is the burrito I had for dinner. They're both speakin' to me, but this is God's voice. And up to this point, verse 7, we can be immature in hearing and trying to recognize what God had said. Jesus said to His disciples (John 10) that, "He who enters the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him, the doorkeeper will open, and the sheep will hear His voice, and He will call His own sheep out by name, and He will lead them out. And He'll bring out His own sheep, and the sheep will follow Him. They know His voice." So we need to learn to hear what God has to say. But it takes time. Samuel had not learned to do that; he would learn to do it as things would go, and as we continue on, we will see him maturing greatly in his ability to actually hear what God has to say. So, growing in the grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), which is our radio verse. He's learning. He's still learning, but it's a great thing to be working at. You want to know what God has done? Start to listen to His voice, and be willing to let God open the doors for you. And if He doesn't open them, don't do 'em yourself. Let God prepare you for what He has prepared for you. One thing for sure, biblically: God wants to speak to you personally. Very rarely, if you use the Bible as your basis for making determinations (as you should), very rarely do you find the Lord speaking audibly. Very rarely. More often than not, it is to the heart. It could very well have been to the heart of Samuel here. We don't know. I know we assume. But Samuel is new at this, and, like I said, he would get better over the years. So, after the third time, Eli realized, "I'll bet that's the LORD talking to Samuel." And so he gives him good counsel. He said, "Just go lay down and wait to hear that again. And when you hear it, just make yourself available to Him. 'Speak, I'm Your servant. I'm listening. LORD, I'm ready to serve.' " So, the third point - wait upon the Lord to open doors for you. It takes time to hear and to know what He wants.

Fourthly, (follows on the thirdly, perfectly) be ready to listen and then do what He tells you. Be ready to listen and do what He tells you. So, Samuel goes back, and he lays down, and he says exactly what he's told, "Speak, for Your servant hears." The only way you and I are ever going to make impact in the world for Jesus is to be able to hear God's voice and then do what He says. Here's what you don't want to fool yourself into doing: hearing is not sufficient. Being a hearer and not a doer is a deceptive way to go. "Oh, I read my Bible all the time." Yeah, but are you doing any of it? We need to hear, to discern, and then to act upon it. I can't begin to tell you how many people get disqualified because they're unteachable and unresponsive to the Lord's work by the Spirit in their hearts. We can miss making

a difference when we're too busy, too preoccupied, and the Lord says, "I want to use you," and you go, "Ah, not this week." And the Lord will find someone else because God has a work to do. He gives us the privilege, so we should be ready to listen and ready to act when He speaks.

Well, here's what we're told in verse 11, "Then the LORD said to Samuel: 'Behold,' " (it's a word that, just like in Greek, means to look at this, this is something unusual, or take particular attention) " 'I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.' " Now, the message of the LORD to Samuel was ear-tingling. By the way, when you read "ear tingling" in the Old Testament, it usually means judgment. You can read 2 Kings 21; there's another one of those as well (verse 12). But it's the immediate or the impending removal of the house of Eli from the priesthood forever. And the LORD explains to this young, teenage boy that the sins which his sons had committed were the responsibility of the sons, but over the years, the disciplining of them or the correcting of them or the godly guidance for them and the restraint of them would fall upon the father. And Eli had not done anything. So verse 14 says mercy had run its course. Second chances were all used up. If you were with us two weeks ago, the LORD spoke to Eli ten years earlier (in our last chapter), but no changes followed. He was warned of judgment if this wasn't corrected. Well, now it was too late. So you're young Samuel, you're now a teenager, and your life has been to serve the LORD. And now, for the first time, you hear God's voice, and His voice - it's not a good word that you're hearing. Right? He hears God's first word, and now he's going to be a prophet, and it's not such a blessing sometimes to hear what God has to say. What was Samuel going to do with this? He loves Eli, he's been raised by this man, he's been a father figure to him. He plants himself, sleeping, his bed down the hall so he can be.....and attends to his adopted father's needs. And here comes the LORD to speak to Samuel, and now Samuel's going to have to deliver this message; or at least he's told what God is going to do, and the LORD doesn't really give him any further instructions than that. "Here's what I'm going to do. I'm showing him what I'm going to do."

Step five. You want God to use you? Share everything of God's Word, in love, that you know. Why keep it to yourself? If God's taught you, tell someone else. Be available to pass the Word of God along. Verse 15 says this, "So Samuel lay down until morning," (I imagine he wasn't sleepin' anymore, probably a little freaked out) "and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision" (he'd been given; he'd been given a vision because, again, this isn't audible, this is a work of God in his heart). "Then Eli called Samuel and said, 'Samuel, my son!' " (He calls him his son again.) "He answered, 'Yeah.....I'm over here.' And he said, 'What is the word that the LORD spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you.' " You want God to use you, don't compromise God's Word. Don't water it down, don't leave something out. I mean, put yourself in little Samuel's shoes; lying in bed, heart pounding, nervous.

I remember, and maybe I've shared with you before, when I was a young pastor, I was invited by Pastor Chuck to come up to their conference center and speak to the men's ministry at Calvary Costa Mesa. And I was so worried because Chuck, he'd sit in the front row and just.....(Pastor Jack crosses his arms).....you never knew if he was happy or he wanted to kill ya. You know, he's a good poker player. So, I just imagined myself as a young twenty-something.....and there's Pastor Chuck doing like this (Pastor Jack crosses his arms). So I fretted for four months. I was sick to my stomach. I never worked so hard on a study in my life; I knew it was the perfect study, the perfect study. And I had to do five of them. So I was worried. And I got up there on a Friday and had to teach Friday night. And I came to put my stuff away, and I said to the guy, "So where's Pastor Chuck?" and he goes, "Oh, he's home sick this weekend." And I couldn't have been happier! Thank You, Jesus! (Laughing) "Pastor's not feeling well."

So I can relate to this poor young man, lying in bed. And it isn't always easy to tell people what the Bible says. You ruin relationships. You confront people who you like. You risk being misunderstood. But you're always having to be pressed into who are you going to serve? Are you going to compromise? If you compromise, God can't use you. So here's this young guy. I remember, in Paul's last meeting with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20), that he looked around the room, and he said to them, "I just want to remind you that I haven't failed to deliver God's whole counsel to you." So he was able to walk away from the church at least comfortable that he had given it all to them. He said, four or five verses later in the same talk with them, "Remember that, for three years with tears in my eyes, I warned you night and day

about how to walk with God." So, in the morning Samuel gets up, opens the doors for worship (this is going to be a big day). And, unfortunately, old man Eli, who can't see but hears the stirring, calls for this young man and says, "So tell me what the LORD says. Tell me all of it." Oh, no. Oh, no. A couple of things that come to mind. Number one - here's a man who served the LORD for years at the tabernacle who realizes, now, that God has quit talking to him; He's talking to the other kid. Right? He's being replaced. I think he had to have been aware that it wouldn't be long before that place wouldn't be held by him. This couldn't be good news at all. "But tell me everything."

Well, verse 18, and it's important and it goes along with share everything in love. It says this, "Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, 'It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him.' " Samuel passed the test. Flying colors. He brought a difficult word to a person that he loved. Fortunately Eli received it well. He knew it was the word of the LORD. Had he said this fifteen years earlier, things could have been fine. But he didn't deal with his sons, and now it was too late. So, again, we are given, in verse 19, another one of these general comments about Samuel's growth and his movement forward. And we read, "So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." Or, if you will, Samuel became a prophet that God could depend upon, a man that God could use, a faithful messenger who wouldn't compromise the message. No words fell to the ground when God handed them to this young man, Samuel.

Which leads me to point six, if you're taking notes. If you stay teachable and faithful and pass along God's Word, and not your own, God can use you. Stay teachable, keep growing, be the first one to receive and willing to share. We read, in verse 19, this, "So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD. Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD." Samuel took a new place of hearing from God. He was humble. He realized he had lots to learn. His attitude was right. And God continued to use him. God spoke to Samuel, Samuel passed it along. He was clear with Samuel. Samuel over time, notice from verse 20, established a reputation as being a prophet that God would speak through. People would come to hear from him. They wanted to hear what God has to say. Develop a reputation of being a person of God's Word. In fact we read, in verse 20, that, over time, people traveled from 150 miles away -

that's about the difference from the north to the southern border. People began to recognize and be influenced by the work of God in Samuel's life. One faithful kid. One faithful mom and dad. This kid, now, brought influence because he's faithful to one thing - he's just sharing the LORD.

Which brings me to my last point - if you want God to use you, let Him establish you, let Him raise you up. Notice what it says in verse 21. Because of Samuel's faithfulness, God again began to appear at the tabernacle - a place He hadn't been for a long time because people didn't come there; they were chased away from there by Eli's boys. But now there's a prophet there, and God began to reveal Himself to Samuel in Shiloh, and He revealed Himself to His prophet through the Word of God. And I want you to notice that. How did God reveal Himself? Primarily through the Scriptures. How did He find a man that He was willing to reveal Himself to? He was a man that was faithful. Faithful. Faithful to do what God has said. You never know what God will do with you if you'll make yourself available. I think there's a lot to be said for some faithful folks. I know we look around, and we despair, "Man, look at what's goin' on in our nation." I think God's just lookin' for a few good men and women who are willing to be used by Him.

And if you put these three chapters together, either you sit on the sidelines or you make a difference. Either you have fruit like Samuel or regrets like Eli. Because they're kind of laid on top of each other. Right? They're found in the same place, doing the same work at the same time. And one chose to look the other way, and the other chose - from a young age through his teens and on - to just do things God's way. One had great impact, the other one just disappears from the scene and finds judgment. It was Mordecai who said to Esther (Esther 4), "If you remain silent now, Esther, and don't go in and talk to your husband, the king, relief and deliverance for the Jews will come from some other place. God's not going to forsake His people. But you and your father's house are going to perish. And who knows? Maybe God brought you into the kingdom for such a time as this." It's nice to know that you can have a huge impact. I love the narrative of Samuel's calling. I mean, here's a kid who.....we go from chapter 2 to 3, and we absolutely miss ten years of his life. But, in the process, we get to chapter 3, and the LORD begins to just talk about his faithfulness.

So, be faithful in the little things. Please God when no one's watching. Just be sure He's happy. If you'll do that, then if God doesn't respond, the doors don't open, you don't see much happening, stay faithful. Be diligent when God is silent.

Wait for God to open the doors; He will. Preparation takes a long time. I know you think you're ready. You're probably not ready. "Oh, I'm ready!" Are ya? Then the Lord's messed up. All right. Maybe that's not what it is. He usually doesn't mess up. So, wait for God to speak and to put you out there where you need to be. When He speaks, go do what He tells you. Be ready when He speaks. I think that's really important. When you go, share all that you've learned; don't leave anything out. Stay teachable so that you can continue to grow in the ministry God's given you. And then don't seek glory for yourself; seek His glory. Does that make sense? All of that in how many verses? See, this is a good chapter to remember. The calling of Samuel is chapter what? 3. 1 Samuel 3.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
May 6, 2019