



**Series:** 1 Samuel

**Date:** January 22, 2023

**Speaker:** Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text:** 1 Samuel 3

**Title:** Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening

### INTRO

OK - If you have your bible get to 1 Samuel Chapter 3. Today we are going to talk about how we hear from God. Pretty important topic, right? One I'm guessing people are all over the place on. Does he speak through creation? Because I feel close to God on a mountain. Does he speak through circumstances? Because man when I reached for that donut and then the donut fell into the trash can I was wondering if that was God telling me something. He speaks through his

word, right? And what about the Holy Spirit? What about my conscience? What about my friends? What about angels? They still a thing? What role does prayer play in all this?

In 1 Samuel 3 we are going to look at a prayer I've been praying daily since late July 2022. It is a simple prayer the Lord brought in front of me during my Sabbatical and it shifted how I approach my relationship with God. We are going to see young boy Samuel, our main character, invite the Lord to speak to him. And in God's kindness he quieted my soul through this invitation. I took this prayer as my own and began inviting God to speak. I'd go on 3-hour prayer walks where it was mostly just listening for God to speak.

This prayer was a big motivation for wanting to preach 1 Samuel to you guys. Because we need to hear from God! That's the reason some of you are here today. You desperately want to hear from God. Some of you Christians know the power of hearing from God.

A word from God brings **comfort** in the struggle. Just like Jesus calms the storm with a **WORD**, you want that word for your storm. We want God to speak a word of **direction** into our lives. I've got to figure out whether to move or stay, to marry her or break up with her, what career path to go down and man I just wish I could hear from God.

Not only that, but these Christians will also tell you we need God to speak because a word of his has often kept us from



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traveling down the road of sin and self-destruction. It is God's word that **warns** us from sin.

I believe God is calling us to take a step of faith this year, but We can't take steps of faith without first asking God what steps to take! I don't want to just ask God to bless our plans, I want God to speak to us where to go! I want to be a God-led people and I want us to know how to recognize when God is leading.

So, today we will learn a little about how to hear from God. And we will close as we did last week - praying together. Putting what we see into practice. Let's start by walking through 1 Samuel 3.

**1 The boy Samuel served the Lord in Eli's presence. In those days the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread.**

Quick review on how Samuel got here - His mom prayed for a child and told God that IF God gave her a son, she would give him to the Lord in service of him. God gave her a son; she joyfully took him up and gave him to the Lord to serve. So, Samuel is now the young priest in training under Eli.

And the rest of the setting - The word of the Lord being rare & prophetic visions rare too - This is a form of God's judgment. God has withdrawn his word in response to the evil of his

people and is letting them walk in the darkness they seemed to desire. We see this in other places in scripture. A form of God's judgment on the sins of his people is withdrawing the prophets who speak for him. He takes his word away. Later in Scripture the prophet Amos actually puts this reality into words.

**11 Look, the days are coming — this is the declaration of the Lord God — when I will send a famine through the land: not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. 12 People will stagger from sea to sea and roam from north to east seeking the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. -- Amos 8:11-12**

That's what was happening much earlier here in 1 Samuel. This is a dark chapter in Israel's history. But into that darkness there is this ray of light. The boy Samuel. And I hope you find some encouragement in this today. That God chose a young boy to be his agent of great change. God has a habit of using the weak & powerless to bring about his purposes. So, if you feel like you are too young or too insignificant, I just want to remind you that God is not waiting on your maturity or on your career advancement. He's looking for willingness. Are you willing to be his servant for his glory and not yours? He is ready to use you if you are willing.



**2 One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his usual place.**

This encounter is ripe with symbolism. Eli's eyesight was failing. That's his physical condition. BUT It's also his spiritual condition. His spiritual insight had been failing for years. When Hannah was praying in the temple, he thought she was drunk. He totally missed the terrible men his sons had turned into until it was too late. His sight had indeed failed.

**Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was located.**

Before the Lamp of God had gone out...Samuel. See the hope? God has a plan. It looks like darkness is going to completely snuff out his plan. But there's a boy named Samuel. Just you wait.

Samuel is laying down in the temple of the Lord right next to the ark. The ark represents the physical presence of God. And here Samuel is...right close to it. This is symbolic of his role to come. The one closest to God.

FWIW, the closer you are to God, the better you will be able to hear him.

**4 Then the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, "Here I am."**

Now if you know your Old Testament you know this verse is very intentional. Because it confirms a special relationship between God and Samuel. It echoes some other important "CALLS" God gives.

- Abraham Gen 22.1, 11 - 'Here I am, Lord'

- Jacob Gen 31.11 - Here I am Lord
- Moses Ex 3.4 - Here I am Lord
- Isaiah 6.8 - Here I am Lord, send me.

Again, there is an incredible childlike innocence to this, not full submission to God. He didn't recognize the voice correctly, but the author intentionally opens it this way to tell us something major is unfolding in his house tonight.

**5 He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am you called me." "I didn't call," Eli replied. "Go back and lie down." So, he went and lay down. 6 Once again the Lord called, "Samuel!" Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am you called me." "I didn't call, my son," he replied. "Go back and lie down." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, because the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.**

Couple of things - one - you cannot know the Lord apart from knowing the word of the Lord. We are seeing in this passage and see throughout scripture God & his word...are so intertwined that you can't know him apart from it. We are going to talk more about that in a minute when we get to "how to hear from God" but keep this in mind. To know God is to know God's word.

Also, notice how patient the Lord is with boy Samuel as he's going on this discovery. I love this reminder about the



character of God in the repetitive gentle call of the Lord. Sounding like a fatherly voice so much that he mistakes it for Eli. God's word is powerful enough to create mountains and oceans and galaxies and yet gentle and patient enough that a young boy mistakes it for the familiar fatherly figure in his life. The relationship God calls you into with him, is with a heavenly FATHER. Who is loving and gentle and patient with you too.

**8** Once again, for the third time, the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the boy. Takes him a minute. Sight is failing him. But eventually he realizes and knows how to proceed.

**9** He told Samuel, "Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So, Samuel went and lay down in his place.

**10** The Lord came, stood there, and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Something different happens this time. We don't know exactly what this means but the Lord **came** to Samuel this time. And

this time, he's ready. And he says, "speak for your servant is listening."

This prayer is the prayer I have prayed every day for 5 months. **Speak Lord, your servant is listening.**

I think this prayer, & it is a prayer, captures so much of what a great heart for God SOUNDS like in a few words. These are the words of a soul that desires to know God. And it has changed me because it is a prayer of humility and listening. I'm a servant, you are the Lord. Every time I say it, I'm put back in my place. And I put aside my REQUEST LIST and I just listen. What happens is my relationship with God changes from a monologue of my needs to a dialogue. Where I LISTEN.

And I want to tell you something Charles Spurgeon told his church years ago. When you pray this prayer, it is a "probable mercy" that God will respond.<sup>1</sup> We'll talk about HOW God responds in a minute but...it is a probable mercy that he will. After all he calls himself our father. Doesn't a father speak to his children? Yes. A lot. He calls himself the groom and the church his bride. Doesn't a groom speak to his bride? Yes. A lot!

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<sup>1</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "[Speak, Lord!](#)" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 43 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 341.



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My point is - he speaks to us if we ask. If we listen. So, here's what we are going to do. We are going to invite God to speak to us. For the next month...Every day at 3:10 pm. We are going to pray 1 Samuel 3:10 together.

3:10 Daily Prayer

"Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening"

And we are going to see what God has for us. It's a simple prayer. Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening. What I want to ask you to do is put it in your phone as a reminder to go off each day. And pray. If you work with others who go to mercy or are in school with others or whatever. Every day at 3:10 we are going to take time pray "Speak Lord, your servants are listening."

And then we are going to get together in one month.

February 22

Night of Prayer and Worship

February 22 at both campuses for a night of prayer and worship. We are going to fast all day that day and ask the Lord to speak.

Where our goal is to seek the Lord together. To do together what we will be doing each day on our own or in small groups. SPEAK LORD your servant is listening. I told you I believe God has big steps for us in 2023. But I want HIM to make those clear to us. I also think he has a step of faith for EACH of us to

take. And I think he's going to reveal that to you over this month. So, you need to pray 'Speak Lord Your servant is listening.' And let's see what step of faith he might call you to.

Let's see what God tells Samuel.

**11** The Lord said to Samuel, "I am about to do something in Israel that will cause everyone who hears about it to shudder. **12** On that day I will carry out against Eli everything I said about his family, from beginning to end. **13** I told him that I am going to judge his family forever because of the iniquity he knows about: his sons are cursing God, and he has not stopped them. **14** Therefore, I have sworn to Eli's family: The iniquity of Eli's family will never be wiped out by either sacrifice or offering." **15** Samuel lay down until the morning; then he opened the doors of the Lord's house.

This is tragic right? Samuel receives a word from the Lord, and it is a confirmation of what the prophet had told Eli in chapter 2. The sin & tolerance of sin by God's priests...has brought the punishment of God. And he reveals this to his new prophet. Very difficult news. And what happens next is a true example of how God's word, when received, should be spoken & received.

But before I get there... I want to show you a fuller picture from scripture of how God speaks to US today.

When we say "speak Lord, your servant is listening" - How does he answer? What are we listening for? And how can we



be sure? 10-minute-deep dive on how God speaks to us. To do that I'm going to venture beyond our passage here and show you what the whole bible says about how God speaks. So, buckle up.

### **God Speaks through his creation.**

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge. -- Psalms 19:1-2

Sometimes we skip over this, but he says the days are POURING out speech & revealing knowledge. God is speaking through his creation. What is it saying? GOD IS GLORIOUS. The power of God. We went out west and at night...you could see the milky way. And if you are saying speak Lord your servant is listening...and looking at THAT...IT IS POURING OUT GOD'S GLORY TO YOU. TELLING YOU KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GOD. Why? So, you will be humbled by, & confident in, the one you are approaching. You are asking the one who created & sustains all things to speak to you. Are you really ready for that?

**God Speaks through his providence** - By this I mean God has a way of speaking to us through circumstances and situations that we could have never strung together on our own. But they come together and as we perceive them, we are able to say with some slightly greater sense of certainty (though not

perfect certainty) perhaps the Lord is speaking here. This is the whole book of Esther. The NAME of God is never spoken. On purpose. To show the sovereign hand of God working through circumstances. When Esther is doubting a big, risky step she is being asked to take to defend Israel her uncle Mordecai looks at everything that has happened in her life and says listen God will accomplish his plan whether you do this or not...but "Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this." Esther 4:14-15

What I love about this is Mordecai's humility. In other words,...it seems like this could be what God is doing. And when it comes to God speaking through providence we too should walk with this humility. And thankfully, we have some things we can test it against.

- Example: MPR.

**God Speaks through his word** - This is the one certainty we have of God's voice. Because it is perfect. 2 Peter says This word is actually more sure, more reliable, than if peter James and john were standing here telling you what happened. Why? because it is breathed out by God himself. 2 Timothy 3.16 - All scripture is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. So, in all of these forms of God speaking, we test them BY his infallible word. I see these circumstances, but am I discerning them leading me to do something that is contrary to his word?



If so, I'm just wrong. Sometimes that's the devil setting a trap. Well Lord I know we are not married but the mood is right & our song just came on the shuffled playlist...your word says the bed is reserved for husband and wife but look at the providence. Nah bro. That aint God talkin. In the words of general akbar - ITS A TRAP!

This is why I am so insistent on basing our church on God's word. It's why I preach it. Because he speaks through the preaching of his word. Evidence is some of ya'll come to me and I love it you say, "it was like you were speaking to me." Our Ops Director Mandy says to me "hey get out of my journal." What is happening? Am I reading mandy's journal? No. I got stuff to do. God is speaking to you through the preaching of his word.

What if we approached Sundays EXPECTING to hear from God? Each of us in our hearts - speak Lord, your servant is listening. If you tell me, you want God to speak to you, then my response to you is are you coming to the preaching of his word - EXPECTANTLY? When we say we EXPECT God to change a life today, this is how. It's through his living and active word! I think the reason the average attendance has dropped to 1 time per month is because we don't really expect God to speak here.

But not just on Sunday, God speaks through his word to us every time we open it. In fact, the Bereans in Acts 17 heard

Paul preach and were praised for going home and reading the bible for themselves to see if what Paul said squared up with it. You want to hear from God? **READ HIS WORD! Listen to it. Memorize it. Some of you want God to speak but you don't know his word. You don't know HIM That's like asking a stranger to tell you how to live. GET TO KNOW HIM HERE.** And then you will recognize his voice. And some days the Lord pierces straight to the heart. This prayer - Speak Lord your servant is listening - Speak it with the bible OPEN. Start your time in God's word with THAT prayer. It won't happen every day but man there will be some days the Lord will cut you wide open with his word. Just stay in it. And even if you don't "feel it" you will still KNOW his word to you.

**God speaks through his Spirit** - One of the great promises Jesus gave to his followers is that when he left, he would send a guide or a counselor. The Spirit of Truth. And he says in John 14 he will be with us and in us. This holy spirit leads us. When we are reading God's word the Spirit convicts us. And there are times the Spirit speaks to the heart - never contrary to God's word - but in a way we can't exactly link with a specific verse we just read. There are feelings, emotions, warnings, joys, delights that the Spirit of God puts on our heart. This is what the word is talking about when it says walk not by the flesh but by the spirit (Gal 5.6).



Be listening for the Lord to speak. And as we go about our day listening, the Lord sometimes impresses on us a burden for someone else. To pray right there for them. Maybe gives us a word from his word to pray. Maybe the Lord tells you to go encourage that person & gives you something to tell them. Maybe it's just a word from God for you.

I will say this - God speaks through his spirit. Now God's Spirit and his word will never conflict. That's what scares some of you about this one. Some Christians abuse this to play the "GOD TOLD ME" card and it kind of shuts down the conversation. So, if God impresses something on you, pray about it. Ask God for confirmation. The Lord impresses things on Courtney a lot. Usually prayers for other people. And it's scary to go to someone on behalf of God. So, let's do it like the early church did. Acts 15.28 They said "it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit" to tell you these things. SEEMED. Let's take that humility and apply it. "I felt like God put you on my heart." "It seems like God is telling me this."

Such 'couching' - That's not a lack of faith in God. It's a lack of faith in your ability to interpret God. AND THAT is humility. But that shouldn't stop us from listening to the Spirit and taking steps of faith in response.

**God speaks through his people.** In his kindness, God has given you the church. His people who speak his words & who confirm his words. Which is why I told you last week to get

people in your life you will listen to when they speak a word to you. And take that responsibility seriously. I've received several words from God through his people that have been huge blessings in my life. Some confirming my calling, some calling me to courageous faith & leadership, some warning me about a bad path I was unknowingly headed down. I am where I am because I listen when God speaks through his people. Why it matters that you are praying for one another in community group. God is going to use you in another person's life.

The way to test whether or not God is speaking is to evaluate it in light of all 4 of these. If the circumstances, the word, the spirit, and his people all agree, there is a probable mercy that God is speaking. Here are four questions to ask. And you need a YES from all 4.

**God is that you?**

- Does this exalt Christ?
- Does this agree with Scripture?
- Is the Spirit confirming it?
- Do other Christians confirm it?

Let's see how this closes.

He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, **16** but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." "Here I am," answered Samuel.





**17** “What was the message he gave you?” Eli asked. “Don’t hide it from me. May God punish you and do so severely if you hide anything from me that he told you.” **18** So Samuel told him everything and did not hide anything from him. Eli responded, “He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is good.”

Samuel didn’t hold back the hard word he had to give to someone he loved. There is a real word in that to us brothers and sisters. Yes, Eli made it easy on him by basically cursing him if he didn’t say it. But he still spoke the full word of God. Sometimes we avoid the hard truths God tells us don’t we. We especially try to avoid it when we sense we have to tell it to others. We really want to avoid that. And yet sometimes this is the step God calls us to take.

And verse 18 is the response of the one who hears from God. “He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is good.” Somebody tells you they have a word for you? Well, he is the Lord, let him do what he thinks is good. I’ll receive it, pray & ask the Lord to confirm it or not. Eli fascinates me. His cowardice ultimately dooms him. But he does understand who God is. He’s in charge and he knows best. And so, he receives it not as SAMUEL’s word, but as God’s word.

**19** Samuel grew. The Lord was with him, and he fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied. **20** All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a confirmed prophet of the Lord.

**21** The Lord continued to appear in Shiloh, because there he revealed himself to Samuel by his word. And Samuel’s words came to all Israel. -- 1 Samuel 4:1

What is happening here is that for the first time since Moses, Israel has a national prophet. God’s word that was once rare is now regularly accessible to his people again. Through his prophet Samuel.

If you remember we said week 1 you gotta read narrative looking for the big picture and what is happening is God is pulling all these divided tribes together. And before he establishes a king, he established a prophet who would have the authority to anoint the king. And the even bigger picture is Eli the priest, Samuel the prophet, & David the King all foreshadow Jesus. See we need a priest to go atone for our sins on our behalf. We need a prophet to speak God’s word to us. We need a king to direct us. And no human can perfectly and eternally do these things. All of them point to the coming of Jesus. The prophet, priest, and king we need.

Some of you need to come to Jesus today. You are asking God to speak and I’m telling you he is speaking. Come to Jesus. Hebrews 1.1 - He has spoken to us by his son.

The only word you need is Repent and Believe. That’s what God is saying to you. Repent and believe.



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**Closing Time of Prayer**