

1/14/2018

## “Answering God’s Call”

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139:1-12; John 1:43-51

**Sermon Series: Callings from God**

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**Theme: Today is the first of two sermons on Callings from God starting today with both hearing and answering that call.**

While I will be focusing mostly on stories from the bible, the idea or belief that God can call us or even show up in our times stirs the heart and imagination. Some of us may remember the movie, “Oh, God”, starring George Burns and John Denver, from the late 1970’s.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEbM3tjV-3Y>

And though I haven’t seen it yet, many have been more recently touched and inspired by the movie “The Shack”, which came out last year.

### † **God calls us as we are**

The Bible, and even modern books and movies, affirms for us that God calls us where we are, both literally and figuratively. That is, God calls us as we are. God doesn’t wait for us to be perfect, whether in body, mind or spirit. God doesn’t require that we be perfect morally: that is without brokenness, fault or sin. If that were the case, the only one God would have called is Jesus.

Rather, the only characteristics God requires is that we hear and respond to God’s call -- in faith. And by so doing, we accept God’s Spirit to work in and through us to follow God, be made whole by God and be used by God.

Further, God is no respecter of persons when it comes to things like age, gender, race, social or economic status or formal education. We don’t have time to go into all these aspects, but perhaps some scripture come to your mind.

For now, let’s just consider what we can learn from a few examples found in the bible.

From the Old Testament, consider that Samuel and David were just youth when God first called them. Samuel had been dedicated to God by his mother Hannah and would grow up in the house of the Lord at Shiloh. And David was just a simple shepherd, the youngest in his family, in a seemingly insignificant village and district.

In the New Testament, Philip was full of faith and excitement, but Nathaniel was (if we take him at his word according to John) somewhat reluctant and skeptical when Philip told him that he had found the awaited Messiah.

Now the bible makes it clear that God knew and nevertheless chose to call each of these persons. That tells us that God can and does call anyone He wants to, even you and me, just as we are, and where we are. In fact, David declares that God knows everything about him.

When we come to that realization ourselves, it can be both humbling and uplifting. For the God who made us and knows all about us desires to live in loving relationship with us. Our God wants to support, encourage and use us in wonderful ways we may not even imagine.

**But, you may ask: “How do I know it's God calling me?”**

We may hear a voice calling us to take a next step or launch in a new direction. How do we discover that the voice we are hearing is God's?

Samuel shows us how he came to know it was God's voice calling. (1 Samuel 3:1-8 NRSV)  
Listen to his story, which might also seem a bit humorous . . .

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup> 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.*

*<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" <sup>5</sup> and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.*

*<sup>6</sup> 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."*

*<sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup> 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.*

At first, Samuel thought the voice he was hearing was Eli's. Eli had been Samuel's trusted mentor for several years. It was Eli who most clearly represented God to Samuel. Though it took a while to make the connection, it was Eli who finally helped Samuel understand that the voice he was hearing was the voice of God.

How have others helped you recognize that the voice you were or are hearing was or is the voice of God? Perhaps it was an older relative, a Sunday School teacher, a youth group leader, a pastor, or another mentor of some kind.

Years later, when Samuel was then a great prophet who regularly heard God's voice, he was told by God to anoint another youth, David, who would one day replace Saul as king.

Perhaps someone has spoken a word of prophecy to you, as God's ambassador or representative, encouraging or directing you towards God's purpose. It's best to confirm that voice with someone else whom you trust and known as one who is close to God and listens to God themselves.

† **Listen for and hear the voice of God**

Eli gave Samuel some basic instruction in listening to the voice he was hearing. (1 Samuel 3:9 NRSV)

*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.*

Samuel was to offer himself and all his attention, letting God do the talking. Perhaps this was a form of prayer Samuel had not yet learned.

Listening prayer, as it may be called, is often something that does not "come naturally" to many people. If you've ever sat in bed awake at night trying to go to sleep, you know it can be especially difficult to be still or quiet your mind. Even in church, some folks find it difficult to "enter the silence" in worship.

When I pause during a pastoral prayer, often it is to allow God to call to my awareness the needs of others and that for which God wants me to pray aloud.

So take some time each day in quiet meditation on what God is trying to tell you. Is God trying to call to your awareness something about yourself, the needs of others or even simply to make you aware of His loving presence, comfort and peace?

Let me know if you need some help in developing this kind of prayer life. Or maybe some of you can share your own insights and practices of listening prayer or meditation. One way to begin is to meditate or pray upon God's word from the scriptures, using them as a point of focus. Or simply repeating a short prayer such as, "God, may I hear your voice speaking to me today." It may sound a bit strange, but when I feel like God has something to call to my attention, a feeling comes over my mind and body as though I am entering a cloud. I sit or lie down if I can and simply ask, "What is it, Lord?"

Some of you may remember how and when you first heard God call or speak to you. Perhaps it was Jesus himself inviting you to follow him, as he did Phillip. I'm going to give you an opportunity today to share a witness.

And that brings us to the last thing I want to talk about today:

### † **Respond to God's call**

Samuel responded with faith and obedience to God's call. (1 Samuel 3:10 NRSV)  
*As Samuel was lying down, The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

And Philip responded to the call of Jesus with faith, excitement and joy, no doubt. And although Nathaniel was more reluctant, he still responded to Philip's invitation to "Come and see" Jesus for himself. When he did, Jesus revealed that he could see and know Nathaniel even from afar. And Jesus promised him and the other disciples that God would do and show them even more wonderful things.

Friends, I know that God has shown me some amazing and wonderful things. And God will do the same for you, perhaps even angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, as you follow with Jesus. The heavens will open up, and you will see what the Lord can do.

Have you heard God calling you, yet? I know that many of you have. And many of you have responded to God's call, whether at an earlier age, in youth or even adulthood.

If you have, I invite you to share a witness with me or someone else this week. Perhaps you'd be willing to share it with others through our newsletter, Facebook or webpage.

Are you still listening for God's voice to speak to you today? Can you hear Him calling? How will you respond?

**May God richly bless you as respond to His call and follow his way that leads to abundant life and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen**