LESSON 9
November 1, 2026

Unit III: Samuel: Prophet, Priest, Judge, and King Maker

An Exemplary Discernment

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Thessalonians 5:11–22
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 Samuel 3:1–4:1
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Samuel 3:8-20

KEY VERSE

Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. (1 Samuel 3:9a, KJV)

. . . . .

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" (1 Samuel 3:9a, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Become better at listening to God.
- Discover the ways in which God calls His people.
- Begin to discern God's call in their own lives.

*Key Terms

Answered (verse 10)—Hebrew: *'âmar* (aw-mar'): replied; responded; spoke back; declared; "said" (NIV). Samuel answered God's call finally after believing it was Eli the first two times.

Called (verse 8)—Hebrew: *qârâ'* (kaw-raw'): named; cried out; summoned; proclaimed; invited; to read aloud. In this context, the word was used when God was calling Samuel.

Judge (verse 13)—Hebrew: *shâphat* (shaw-fat'): to govern, rule (over), vindicate, punish. In this context, it is used as a verb, referring to how God would render punishment to Eli's sons after they blasphemed against the Lord, and Eli did not restrain them or chastise them for it.

Offering (verse 14)—Hebrew: *minchâh* (min-khaw'): a gift, tribute, present, oblation, sacrifice. It can refer to a gift given (as in the Genesis narratives), or tribute paid to a ruler or superior or an offering to God. In this case, it refers to the consequences that would fall upon Eli's family—that their sins would not be atoned for with sacrifices or offerings.



The Biblical Context

First Samuel opens during a period of spiritual decline. Eli served as priest, but his sons abused their positions and treated the Lord's offerings with contempt. While religious structures remained in place, moral leadership was weak, and God's word was described as rare (Coogan and Chapman, 216-217).

Samuel's early life reflects God's quiet work during a troubled time. Dedicated to the Lord by his mother Hannah, Samuel served faithfully in the sanctuary from a young age. Unlike Eli's sons, Samuel grew in favor with both the Lord and the people. His faithfulness stands in contrast to the corruption around him (Buttrick, 171-172).

The calling of Samuel marks a turning point. God speaks again, initiating a new phase of prophetic leadership. This moment signals that God has not abandoned Israel, even when leadership fails. Instead, God raises a new voice to guide the people.

This text highlights an important truth. God's silence is not absence. Even when God's voice seems distant, God is at work preparing leaders and restoring direction. Samuel's calling reminds believers that discernment grows through faithfulness, mentorship, and willingness to respond when God speaks.

Perform (verse 12)—Hebrew: *qûwm* (koom): to accomplish; to arise (often with intention or consistency); "carry out" (NIV). Used for actions done by both God and people, including doing good, doing evil, completing tasks, or carrying out work. The Lord spoke to Samuel about what would happen to Eli's line as his sons sinned against the Lord and blasphemed his name.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Most adults have learned that listening is more difficult than hearing. We hear many voices every day: advice from family, expectations from work, opinions from media, and our own inner thoughts. Over time, it can become challenging to discern which voices deserve our attention and which ones quietly shape our decisions without our initial awareness.

The story of Samuel begins in a time when God's voice was rare. God was heard through the instructions that God had given in past times. Therefore, religious routines continued, but spiritual sensitivity had weakened. The people knew what God wanted but they did not know what God was up to next. They did not receive any new revelation from God. Samuel was young, serving in the house of the Lord under Eli's supervision. When God called him, Samuel did not immediately recognize the voice of God. He assumed it belonged to Eli. Only through patience, instruction, and repeated calling did Samuel learn how to listen rightly. Eli had heard God's voice and knew God's communication pattern. He was able to make Samuel aware of it, too. This lesson reminds us that learning to recognize God's voice often takes time and guidance. As you explore Samuel's calling, consider how you listen for God today.

Learning to Recognize the Voice of the Lord
(1 Samuel 3:8-10)

KJV

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.
9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.
10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

NIV

8 A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."
Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy.
9 So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and 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 and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"
Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Samuel hears God's voice repeatedly, but he does not recognize it at first. He assumes Eli is calling him. This detail reminds readers that discernment is learned. Recognizing God's voice often requires guidance from someone more experienced in faith. Eli, though flawed, helps Samuel understand what is happening and teaches him how to respond. The text notes that Samuel did not yet know the Lord, meaning he had not yet experienced direct divine communication. Eli's instruction is simple but profound. Samuel is told to listen and to speak honestly before the Lord. The phrase "Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth" becomes a model for faithful listening. It shows openness, humility, and readiness to obey. Eli recognizes what Samuel cannot yet see and provides the words Samuel needs to respond appropriately (Brueggemann, 152-153).

This passage offers reassurance to those who struggle to recognize God's leading, especially early in faith or during seasons of confusion. Samuel's experience teaches that discernment develops over time. God is patient and continues calling until we are ready to rightly listen. The Lord called Samuel four times before he understood who was speaking. The text also emphasizes posture. Samuel lies down in stillness and attentiveness. Discernment requires space for silence, reflection, and prayer. The passage invites readers to cultivate habits of attentiveness creating room for God's voice. God's guidance is reassurance for those who listen.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What voices compete the most for your attention today and every day? What helps you to create space to listen for God's guidance more clearly?

Responding Faithfully When God Calls

(1 Samuel 3:11-14)

KJV

11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.
12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.
13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.
14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

NIV

11 And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle.
12 At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end.
13 For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them.
14 Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

God's message to Samuel is difficult. It announces judgment against Eli's household because of ongoing disobedience and failure to correct wrongdoing. Discernment does not always bring comfort. Sometimes it brings responsibility and hard truth (Keck, 701-702). Samuel receives this message as a young servant. He is not seeking authority or recognition, yet God entrusts him with a serious word. Listening to God includes being willing to receive and carry difficult truths faithfully. Samuel's youth does not disqualify him from receiving weighty revelation. God chooses vessels based on faithfulness, not on status. This passage challenges assumptions about spiritual growth. Discerning God's voice does not mean hearing only affirming messages. God's guidance may call us to confront injustice, speak truth, or accept uncomfortable responsibility. Obedience requires trust that God's purposes are just and loving, even when the message is painful. The content of God's word to Samuel concerned the sins of Eli's sons and Eli's failure to restrain them.

The text also reveals God's patience. Judgment comes after repeated opportunities for correction, and Eli had been warned. God's actions are not impulsive, rather, they are measured and rooted in covenant responsibility. Samuel's willingness to receive this message marks the beginning of his prophetic role. His faithfulness in listening prepares him to serve God's people with integrity and unwavering courage.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

When have you sensed God calling you to face a difficult truth or challenge, recently? What helps you to respond with faithfulness rather than avoidance?

Growing in Discernment through Obedience

(1 Samuel 3:15-20)

KJV

15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.
16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.
17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.
18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.
19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.
20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

NIV

15 Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision,
16 but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."
Samuel answered, "Here I am."
17 "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you."
18 So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."
19 The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD.

Samuel's response completes his call. Though afraid, he tells Eli everything God revealed. Samuel does not alter the message or avoid responsibility. He speaks truth with humility and trust, his fear did not prevent him from being faithful. Eli's response acknowledges God's authority. He submits to God's judgment, recognizing that the Lord is righteous. The text then summarizes Samuel's growth. The Lord was with him, and his words proved trustworthy. Over time, the community recognized Samuel as a prophet. Discernment did not remain private. It shaped public trust and leadership (Longman III and Dillard, 164-165).From Dan to Beersheba, all Israel came to acknowledge that Samuel had been established as a true prophet of the Lord. This passage highlights a key principle: discernment deepens as obedience is practiced. God's guidance becomes clearer when people respond faithfully to what they have already heard. Samuel's willingness to speak difficult truth opened the way for greater responsibility. Discernment is not a single event. It is a lifelong practice shaped by humility, obedience, and trust in God's presence.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How has obedience helped you to grow in discernment and spiritual maturity? What small step of faithfulness could help you listen more clearly this week?

A Closing Thought

Samuel's calling shows that discernment grows through listening, guidance, and obedience. God speaks during times of spiritual decline and raises faithful leaders to restore direction. Samuel's willingness to listen, receive difficult truth, and respond with obedience prepared him for lasting leadership and ministry. Samuel's example of obedience to God is a reminder to us to follow. This lesson invites believers to cultivate attentiveness, humility, and trust, knowing that God continues to guide those who listen faithfully.

Your Life

Create intentional space to listen for God's voice this week. Set aside quiet time without distractions and say: "Speak, Lord." Notice what surfaces in your thoughts or conscience. Don't worry about the silence, silence is communication, too. Write one insight or question that emerges as you listen attentively.

Your World!

Identify some in your social circle who feels uncertain about their direction or purpose. Don't just offer them a quick solution. Instead, listen and pray with them. Your willingness to accompany another person in discernment can help create space for God's voice to be heard and trusted.

Closing Prayer

Lord, teach us to listen when You speak. Shape our hearts to respond with obedience and trust. Help us grow in discernment so we may serve You faithfully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

The lesson topic for Sunday, November 8, 2026, is "Leadership Run Amuck." The Devotional Reading is Psalm 29, the Background Scripture is 1 Samuel 4:2–7:2, and the Printed Passage is 1 Samuel 4:12-22.

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, November 2	"Bask in God's Eternal Glory"	(Revelation 21:1-4, 19-27)
TUESDAY, November 3	"The Glory of the Lord"	(Ezekiel 10:1-7)
WEDNESDAY, November 4	"God's Glory Leaves the Temple"	(Ezekiel 10:15-19; 11:22-25)
THURSDAY, November 5	"We Reap What We Sow"	(Galatians 6:1-10)
FRIDAY, November 6	"Rejoice in God's Glory"	(1 Samuel 6:13-18)
SATURDAY, November 7	"God's Judgment Is Sure"	(2 Corinthians 5:1-10)
SUNDAY, November 8	"When All Is Lost"	(1 Samuel 4:12-22)

Notes