



12

SESSION TWELVE

Samuel Hears from God

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we come to the end of the period of the judges. During this tumultuous time, God spoke to a boy, Samuel, and gave him a message to receive, believe, and proclaim. In the story of Samuel, we see the proper response to hearing God's voice: receiving, believing, and proclaiming. Through the Spirit, we too are able to hear God speak through His Word today. As we respond in belief, we then proclaim the gospel of Christ to those around us.

SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 3:1–4:1

THE POINT

God's people are called to hear, obey, and share God's Word with others.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

- **What would happen if you didn't talk with your friends, especially your best friend, for several days? weeks? months?**

Invite students to share about a time when a friend moved away or started going to a different school, and how not being able to spend as much time together affected the relationship. Point out that friends tend to grow apart when they stop spending time together.

- **Do you have a regular time alone with God? Why or why not?**

Distribute paper and pencils, then instruct students to write out their daily schedule. Discuss where students could fit time into this schedule to spend with God.

- **Why is it important to spend time with God every day?**

State that spending time with God helps us to grow closer to Him and hear Him when He speaks.

Option 2

Display instruction manuals for a variety of appliances, electronics, video games, smartphones, and so forth. Discuss the purpose of the instruction manuals. What are we supposed to do with these instructions? Why were they written? If you have ever put something together (something with lots of pieces and parts), did you read the instructions just once or did you continue to read them over and over to try to understand them?

Share that people who don't need instructions or manuals are the people who do those projects over and over.

- **How does this compare with handling God's Word?**

Emphasize that we don't fully obey God unless we follow our study of His Word with action based on what we learned.

- **What are some examples of things you have learned over the years that you now put into practice daily, weekly, or regularly? How many hours per week do you spend practicing an activity, studying, and doing homework?**

What might happen if you watched videos, listened to coaches, and read books on golf—but never hit a golf ball? State that we sometimes treat the Bible this way. The Bible is our book for life. It is vital that we not only study the Bible, but live it out and share what we learn with others.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God's people are called to hear, obey, and share God's Word with others.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Eli:** judge and high priest for Israel; accepted responsibility for the spiritual training of Samuel following a vow made by the boy's mother, although he failed to discipline his own sons
- **Samuel:** dedicated to the Lord before his birth; prophet and final judge of Israel

PLOT

As we have worked our way through this study of God's Word, God has spoken to us. Through the Judges cycle, He showed us His abundant mercy toward His people. With Deborah and Gideon, He reminded us that He is the God who fights on behalf of His people. With Samson, He showed us how He was the God who would claim victory over His enemies. In the Book of Ruth, He professed His loving kindness toward His people as their redeemer. In the events of each story, God has been speaking.

The Bible is God's voice. When we open the Word of God, we hear the words of God. Second Timothy 3:16 says that every word recorded in the Bible is inspired—breathed out by God. The words on each page come from His breath! God wants to be known, He wants to be near, and He wants to be worshiped. So, He speaks.

TIMELINE

SAMUEL HEARS
Samuel hears from God.

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING
The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

SAUL'S DOWNFALL
Israel's first king fails to obey God.

SAMUEL HEARS

We begin this study with a little backstory on Samuel's life. This child was chosen before he was born to be a prophet to the nation of Israel. His mother named him Samuel (possibly meaning "requested from God") because she prayed for a baby and then dedicated him to the Lord. As soon as he was weaned, Hannah took Samuel to live at the temple and to be raised by Eli.

Eli was the priest in Israel, mediating between God and the people, and he had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. These two men were nothing like their father in regard to knowing and worshiping God. (See 1 Sam. 2:12.) People would come to worship God with sacrifices, but the sons of Eli would interrupt their worship and plunder all of the offerings the people would bring. As Eli grew older, he lost control of his home. This is where our story picks up.

Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. 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. Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose 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." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the young man. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." (1 Sam. 3:1-10)

Notice that the word of the Lord was rare. This means that God was not speaking regularly to His people. The people would not listen to God's voice. So now, without hearing the word of God, the people were in distress.

The word of the Lord was rare, but not for long. As our story continues, we see that here, God did not choose to speak to the cultural elite, a leader, or even a general, but instead to a boy.

Notice how it took three times for Samuel to realize that God was speaking to him. Verse 7 says that he didn't yet know the Lord personally. The word of the Lord

had not yet been revealed to him. But even though Samuel didn't know God, he was growing in his understanding. After this night, his life would never be the same.

Even Eli didn't seem to be expecting God to speak. It took both of them three times to realize that it was God calling in the night. Samuel was God's chosen instrument. Metaphorically, Eli's sight was growing dim, while Samuel's eyes were opening to the word of God.

Samuel's eventual response to God's voice is worth considering: "Speak, for your servant hears." He was ready to hear the word of the Lord. To ask God to speak to us through His Word is to offer up our lives in faithful listening.

- **Do you find yourself actively listening for God to speak through a sermon or Bible study you are attending? What are some things within our lives that might hinder us from listening?** (p. 78, PSG)

SAMUEL OBEYS

In the Book of Judges, we saw how God poured out judgment on His enemies. But here in 1 Samuel, we see the judgment of God poured out on His own priest. The good news that God speaks soon becomes bad news for Eli.

Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." (1 Sam. 3:11-14)

Eli's home was a wreck. His two sons, who were next in line to become priests, were blaspheming God, and Eli was completely passive in his leadership. Note how verse 13 says he did not stop them. As a result, God's judgment was going to be poured out on Eli's household.

Samuel was prepared to hear the word of God, even when it was very difficult. To sense how difficult this message was, let's try and put ourselves in Samuel's position. He had been unofficially "adopted" by Eli. Everything he knew about God came through the teaching of Eli. Now, Samuel, who loved Eli, was commissioned to pronounce judgment upon his house. Tough task for a young prophet!

We must be prepared to believe the Word of God in whatever it says. Whether the issues concern greed, the sanctity of human life, drunkenness, coveting, pride, or any kind of immorality, God never apologizes for speaking truth, and neither should we. But just as the heart of God is good and patient and kind, so should the tone of our message be expressed in love. Our task is to humbly love people with the truth, not stand in judgment over them.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Clarity of Scripture

Because God gave us His Word as authoritative in all matters related to life and faith, we believe His Word was written in a way that can be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit. Believing the Scriptures are clear does not mean that every part is equally easy to interpret; neither does it mean we will never make mistakes in our interpretation. It does mean that, with God's help, people are capable of understanding the biblical text for themselves as they employ correct methods of interpretation.

SAMUEL SHARES

There are two ways to approach the Word of God: to stand in judgment over it or to allow it to stand in authority over us. When we open the Bible, the posture of our hearts cannot be “I’ll let others decide if Your word is true or not.” No, our hearts must cry out, “It’s true!” Part of listening to God’s message and believing it is true is delivering it to others. This is what Samuel did with boldness after hearing God speak.

Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” And Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.” So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.” And 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 was established as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. (1 Sam. 3:15-4:1)

I can imagine Samuel lying in his bed unable to go back to sleep after spending time with God. With human ears, Samuel heard the whisper of the Lord. Eli probably didn’t sleep much either. Perhaps he expected to hear that God’s judgment was coming upon him and his household.

Eli called for Samuel the next morning to find out what the word of God was. Samuel told Eli everything. In this critical moment, Samuel walked in obedience to the word of the Lord. He chose to fear God rather than man. The ministry of Samuel for the rest of his days would be marked by this unwavering commitment to speak the truth to God’s people. His message continued to ring out through Israel. He grew to be a great prophet who would anoint both Saul and David as the first two kings of Israel.

TIMELINE

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID

The characteristics of a true king.

DAVID AND JONATHAN

The gift of true friendship.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

God reestablishes the covenant with David and his descendants.

Samuel was the first of a new kind of prophet, not one who would suddenly come in and out of the people's lives, but one who would live among the people and speak the word of God constantly. The Lord was with Samuel, and none of his words were meaningless. His words were effective because he walked by faith and in obedience before his Maker. Samuel walked with God and talked for God.

CHRIST CONNECTION

As Francis Schaeffer once said, "God is there, and He is not silent." Into the darkness of our lives, He speaks. Through the waves of our doubts, He speaks. From generation to generation, His Word is clear and His Word is to be received with joy and gladness.

Through the faithfulness of Samuel speaking God's word, we see the shadow of the greater Prophet who would come—Jesus. Into the quiet, God would speak. Jesus would literally become "God's Word with us." His Word would be among His people that we would know Him and He would be our God. Through Jesus, God would speak.

May it be true of us that we would be a people who are eager to receive the Word of God! May we be a people who believe whatever God says. May we be a people prepared to deliver God's message with empowered boldness.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Illumination of Scripture

Because of the vast difference between God's wisdom and ours, and because of humanity's sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through the process of illumination. When it comes to understanding the meaning of God's Word, Christians do not ultimately rely upon human reason in the process of interpretation, nor do we rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian's ultimate reliance is upon the work of the Spirit of God who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (Matt. 13:13-15; Mark 8:18).

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What kind of routine or activity helps you spend time in God's Word?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can prepare our hearts to receive God's Word?** *Some ways we can prepare our hearts might include having an active prayer life; being cautious about our entertainment decisions and recognizing that some forms of entertainment can pollute our hearts and minds and make us callous to the things of God; not staying up late on Saturday night and being exhausted on Sunday morning; etc.*
- **When have you been open to receiving the Word of God only to find yourself convicted rather than comforted? How did you respond to the challenge of God's Word?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **When speaking the truth of God's Word to others, why is it important to pay attention to our tone or the way we speak it?** *The truth of what we say and the manner in which we say it are both important. In today's climate, it is easy for our message to be disregarded or never heard simply because of the way we said it.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Imagine if we had no Bible. Without God's Word, we would not know how the earth came to be or how evil entered our world. Without Scripture, we would not know what God is like or how we can live in relationship with Him. Without the Bible, we would not know right from wrong or why we exist in the first place. We know God because He has spoken to us. And yet, even today most of us have multiple copies of the Bible. The Word of God has never been more accessible, but are we hearing His voice?

- **What are some additional truths we know only because of the Bible?** *This question is intended to show that Scripture is essential for knowing truths about us and the world we live in.*
- **If one really believes the Bible to be God's Word to us, then why wouldn't he or she take the time to hear what it has to say?** *This question simply challenges our stated beliefs and our actual practices—what we say and what we do.*



HEART

Our sight is like Eli's, dim and fuzzy, and when we go to Scripture we need the Lord to prepare our hearts and adjust our eyes. Sometimes we feel like God is a million miles away, and we can't hear His voice. Even when we read the Bible, we may feel like we're reading a dusty old history book, not the living, breathing Word of God. If that is you, don't give up. Recognize that God has spoken to you. God's loudest word is the gospel. In it, He has spoken His love and acceptance over you in Jesus. Keep preparing your heart to hear from God.

- **Why do you think the psalmist prayed, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11)? What is the connection between hiding God's Word in one's heart and not sinning?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What is the difference between merely "hearing" God's Word versus internalizing it?** *While hearing God's Word is necessary, it should go beyond that to actually living it out.*



HANDS

Like Samuel, we must also be prepared to share the truth of God's message to those around us. There are people in our lives who do not understand sin and their need for a Savior, which is why sharing the message of the gospel that we have been entrusted with is so important. However, it is encouraging to know that even though we are commissioned to share God's word with others, we are not called to share it in our own strength but by the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- **How can you prepare to be a voice of truth in a culture that desperately needs it?** *One way to prepare now is to first know the truth, meaning spending time in Scripture.*
- **What are some practical ways you can be active in sharing the truth of God's Word with others this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #11, which contains a quote poster for this session.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject