**Sources of God’s Call**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

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Hannah was in anguish. Her husband Elkannah loved her more than his other wife, Peninnah. Yet, Peninnah made sure she reminded Hannah of the sons and daughters she was able to give to Elkannah. All Hannah wanted was a son but Scripture says that the Lord had closed her womb.

Once when Hannah was in Shiloh, she went to the temple and bared her soul to God. She wept. It wasn’t the dignified, silent cry with tears slowly falling down her cheek. It was the ugly cry. I’m sure her makeup was all over the place. It was one of those cries where she couldn’t catch her breath for her voice to be audible. There laid out at the altar, she made a vow to God that if he would just give her a son, she would give him back to the Lord for all the days of his life.

At the temple, Eli, the priest, saw her moving her mouth but didn’t hear anything come out of her so he assumed that she had too much to drink. When Eli chastised her for being drunk, she quickly corrected him and told him of her plight. With Eli’s blessings, she went back home.

Soon after her visit to the temple, the Lord heard her cry and Hannah gave birth to a son and named him Samuel saying, “Because I asked the Lord for him.” When Samuel was just a child, Hannah took him back to the temple in Shiloh and left the boy with Eli to serve the Lord.

That is where we pick up the story in chapter 3. Verse 1 says, “The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” A couple of important points to consider to put this passage in the proper context: 1) This was shortly after Israel had entered into the Promised Land and was just developing their understanding of worshiping Yahweh, the one True God. Like many other nations, Israel was used to being a polytheistic nation. 2) In the early days, Shiloh was thought of as God’s dwelling place, where a light always burned to symbolize that God was present in the temple. Yet, though God was present, the voice of the Lord was rarely heard in those times.

Both Eli, who was advanced in his age, and Samuel were sleeping in their respective places when Samuel hears someone call his name. Thinking that it was Eli, Samuel runs to Eli and says, “Here I am; you called me.” Having not called him, Eli turns away the young boy and sends him back to bed. This happens three times but on the third time, Eli finally figures out what is happening. He coaches the boy to say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening,’ the next time he hears the voice. So on the fourth time, Samuel hears his name, Samuel responds as he is told. “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” The Lord then reveals the punishment that is going to be levied on Eli and his sons for their corruption as priests.

When I’ve read this story before, I never paid a whole lot of attention to verse 7: “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” Samuel -- whose mother had dedicated him to God's service from birth, who had grown up in the company of the priestly men of Shiloh, who had faithfully served Eli and had found "favor with the LORD and with the people" (2:26) -- Samuel "did not yet know the LORD" (v.7). Although he had lived virtually all his life in what was believed to be the very dwelling place of God -- had in fact slept in front of the holy ark of the covenant -- "the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." Why had God not revealed himself to Samuel?

Last week, we started a series on “Hearing God’s Call.” We talked about how God is still in the business of calling men and women to the holy work of the kingdom as clergy and laity. In so doing, we are to embrace God’s calling for our lives, knowing that the way we fulfill his calling changes through the different stages of life. But how does God call us to his work? How do we know its God and not heartburn? How can we be certain it is God’s voice and not our own?

Ben Johnson, author of *Hearing God’s Call*, shares eight ways God can use to reveal his call in our lives. Let me share these with you quickly.

1. God speaks through an idea that emerges in our minds. The ideas can emerge from reading books, listening to radio, watching a TV program, having a conversation with a friend, etc. God can use any and all of these medium to plant a seed that can germinate into a call for our lives.
2. God often speaks through another person’s affirmation. We sometimes need encouragement from our friends and family to pursue what we sense internally but don’t want to admit out loud. Plus, sometimes others see in us our giftedness before we see it in ourselves.
3. God often speaks directly through a text in Scripture and God always speaks in accordance with the Scripture. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the voice of God is revealed through God’s Holy Word. It can be a direct hit to the heart or it can be a timeless truth of God’s word.
4. God sometimes reveals his call by allowing us to come face-to-face with human pain. Often mission trips reveal God’s call on our lives. Maybe it is to return to the mission field for an extended time or maybe it is to meet a need upon returning home. Either way, seeing human pain first hand can and should change us.
5. God often speaks to us through our personal pain. I believe that our own pain often becomes the training ground that shapes the call God extends to us. We can consider it joy when we endure this pain because God is near. Our pain can be the kingdom’s gain.
6. God speaks in the stirrings of our soul. Think back over your lifetime of experiences. Can you identify times when you felt really close to God? During those times, did you feel that God had something for you to do? That wasn’t heartburn. It was God.
7. The prelude to a call from God often takes the form of restlessness. Our dis-ease with a situation could be God preparing us for something else. Whether it is work or a personal ministry, the sense of restlessness is something we should pay attention to.
8. Sometimes a call originates in an experience as simple as an invitation by another to share in an existing ministry. We go because we were invited. We see God at work. Like Henry Blackaby says in *Experiencing God*, sometimes all we have to do is join God where he is already at work.

There is no way to list all of the ways God calls his people to the work of the kingdom. My guess is we could stay here all day sharing stories of how God called you to do much of what you do or have done in life. Sometimes hearing a list like this gets our mind moving in the right direction and we are more attune to hearing God’s voice. “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”