

1 Samuel 3:1-10. The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. ² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ 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. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel a third time, 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."

Speak, O Lord

- 1. To create a deeper connection*
- 2. Teach me how to stay connected*

He was a small boy who basically grew up in church. He even lived at church, sleeping just a stone's throw away from the holy presence of God, the Ark of the Covenant. Samuel served in the Tabernacle, the temple of God, the house of the LORD. He was an obedient young man, who made his mother proud. He served and even slept in God's house, but we are told that he did not yet know the LORD, **because the word of the LORD was not yet revealed to him.**

Sometimes we think of people who need the gospel as primarily those who are clearly lost and far away from God. We may think of people living under a foreign government or pagan superstition; these are the ones who need the gospel. We may think of the lost and the hurting, those who living a life that is very contrary to the ways of God; these are the people who need the gospel. And that certainly is true, such precious souls need the gospel. Such men and women and children need the good news of Jesus, but don't forget, so does the nice young boy, so does the good mannered young lady, the helpful neighbor, the pleasant old man, and so do you. We all need the gospel! We all need the good news of God's Word. For it is through the Word that we are called to faith. It is not through our service, or who we are, or what we do, that we come into a right relationship with God and remain connected to our LORD. We are kept connected through regular use of God's Word and sacraments. As we are connected to him through the Word, the Spirit works through this Word to create and strengthen our faith and thus we then enabled to truly serve our God. As we are connected to the vine Christ Jesus we are able to produce fruits of faith. It is God who reconciles us to

himself through the message of salvation in Christ so that we may be redeemed and set free to serve our God.

The order of how things unfold in our text might strike you as strange. Samuel was in the temple. Dedicated by his mother to the LORD, Hannah brought her son Samuel to the temple to serve, when she came to visit him she would fashion for him each year a little ephod, a little robe to wear. She was so proud of her son who served in the tabernacle. Samuel had the look of a righteous little boy, he even had the vocation that put him in the LORD's presence, and in our verses today we are told that he was carrying out the very work of God in the house of God. But something very important was missing? While Samuel tended to the articles of the temple, living and sleeping in God's house, he was *yet to know God*. We are told that at this point in his life he did not know the LORD **because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.**

And then God spoke. In a time when the word of the LORD was rare, when there were no printed Bibles stacked in book stores or comfortably lining bookshelves in believer's homes, and it was also a time when the kind of communication that God had with Moses and other prophets through visions and direct communication was rare. It was in this time that the word of God was rare that the LORD suddenly spoke to Samuel. A good young lad who had a heart of service, whose mother had raised him well, ran to Eli the high priest when he heard a voice call out to him in the night. ***"Here I am, you called me."*** Samuel replied. This happened a number of times and Samuel kept coming and then Eli realized it was the LORD God who was calling and he simply instructed the boy in this way, ***"Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'"***

Maybe you know someone who is a good person, who displays what appears to be good Christian character and yet doesn't really know the LORD. Think of a nice young man, a good neighbor, a young lady who makes her parents proud, but do they know God? Maybe you just assume they know God, that they go to church. In our little communities I think we often assume that everybody just has a church. Ask. Talk to your neighbor, talk to your niece or nephew about God, talk to your son or daughter about you heard at church this Sunday or read in your personal devotion Monday morning.

Think about those who need the gospel, who are right here among you. Do they know their God? Do they go to church often and understand what they hear? Do they know the God they serve? That connection to God makes all the difference. A life loosely connected to God may be brought closer to him through your invitation. God's voice may come to this person through you. Speak the truth of God's Word to them in love. Talk to them about Jesus. Share your faith and the simple message of the gospel so that the Word of God may be revealed to them. Or you can simply invite them to listen, to come to church, come to bible study, or your pastor's bible information class. Offer to go with them so that you both may connect with your LORD. In a way, you can give them the same kind of instruction that was given to Samuel. You can encourage other that Almighty God wants to speak with them through the word and we can all say, ***"Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."*** God's voice may come to this person through you as that precious soul is then connected or reconnected to God.

Or maybe the one who needs to connect with God on a deeper level is you? Maybe you have been just "doing and going" without anything in the spiritual tank. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in living the Christian life, in serving, even taking care of God's house or God's

work and we forget to sit at the feet of the Savior. We plan, we meet, we speak, we talk, we work for the LORD, but do we always take time to just be silent, to listen. We try so hard to be a good Christian do we forget what being a Christian means? Look at Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus in Luke chapter 10 and remember that this is what being a Christian entails. Yes, we will get up and serve the LORD as Martha did. We will live and act and do, but first we need to listen. We need to be filled up with his wisdom, his Word, with his love and kindness before we get up and go, and live, and serve.

Think of it this way. What do you do before taking a long trip in the car? You stop and fill up the tank at the gas station. What do you do before a long day of work out in the fields? You fuel up with a good breakfast. How can we expect to live out our faith, to live, to act, to speak, if we are not first filled up with God's Word? How can we expect to withstand the attacks of this world if we are going out on an empty spiritual tank? Be in God's house and then be in God's word, for it is in His Word where we hear of his love, where we are instructed with his wisdom, where we are guided in his ways, encouraged in our faith, built up in our beliefs, and sent out into the world equipped with his strength, with his powerful sword of the Spirit. It would be wise for us to remember, to imitate, to duplicate Samuel's coached response to the LORD voice, saying **"Speak, for your servant is listening."**

"But where do we begin?", you might ask. Coming to church is a good start. Listening to the word, paying attention to theme of the day in the readings, the prayer, and the hymns, and then listening for the main points of the sermon, and then trying to repeat them or write them down before you leave church or when you get home are good ways for a servant of the LORD to listen to your Savior's voice.

But what about all the days in between Sunday. God wants us to listen to his voice more than just one day a week. Read your Bible. Develop of Bible reading plan. But where should I begin or start again, you might say? Starting a bible reading plan or routine might be as hard as starting a workout routine. It is tough to jump into something when it hasn't been a part of your life for some time, or ever really. A plan to read through the bible in 3 years is available on the WELS website and mobile app. (I have also printed a few copies and left them in the back of church.) The Meditations booklets not only include useful devotions but have suggested Bible readings at the bottom of each page. If you don't like reading that much you can always listen to God's Word. Audio Bible CD's and software can be purchased at Christian bookstores and other places. Faith Comes By Hearing is a ministry that includes Bible software and mobile applications that will in essence read the bible to you in dramatic fashion that helps draw you in. Movies like "The Gospel of Matthew" and "the Gospel of John" can be watched in their entirety on YouTube. And there are several other similar programs out there. Take a look at these tools and develop your own plan. Pray about it. Get into God's Word in some form or another and do it routinely. Ask the Lord to speak to you and as a willing servant be ready to listen. The important thing is that somehow, some way you listen to God's voice by being in his word.

And if we get started on a bible reading plan our next struggle might be. But I try to listen to God's voice, I try to read, but then it becomes an empty routine? What can I do to avoid this? Our district President, within the last year or two, has begun sending out daily prayers through email that in a way journals his bible study and encourages his fellow called workers and brothers in the ministry. In a rather simple, but effective, format Pastor Degner breaks down his devotional thoughts in three categories. Each email includes the words in

boldface: Listen, Think, Pray. In the “listen” category he includes the passages on which he is meditating (and also includes a portion of the catechism). In the “think” section he writes a few sentences about what those words mean from context and then applies them to life in general. And then in the “pray” section he takes what he has heard from God’s Word, how hearing that word has touched him and made him think, and then speaks to God about these words of Scripture. His intention of encouraging his brothers in the ministry has worked as I have benefitted from reading these daily emails, and I also believe that those three categories stand out as a tool that could be a tremendous bible study guide for any Christian. As you listen to God’s Word as you read it over, jot down some notes in a notepad, or notebook, or a journal. Or at the very least think with these three categories in mind: **Listen, Think, and Pray.** God calls out to you in his word. He desires a deeper relationship with you. He wants to speak to you. Listen, take time to truly listen to God’s Word, think about and process and meditate on these truths that he wants to share with you and then pray. Speak to your LORD after listening to his voice in his Word. **Listen, Think, Pray.**

If you need a catchier memory hook. Another suggested way in reading the Bible is the SOAP method. Read a portion of the Scripture (S). Observe (O) what it says. Take notes if necessary. Restate what the words mean in your own words. Apply (A) the words to your current life circumstance. Pray (P) the thoughts the Bible brought to mind before your God and Savior. The repetition in this method will help you remember what you learned in this portion of the Bible.

So Listen, Think, and Speak or SOAP (Scripture, Observe, Apply, Pray). Whatever the method. Whatever the memory hook. Let’s get into the habit of hearing God’s Word, of reading the precious and holy Scriptures in a way that is going to deepen our relationship with Christ. Let’s get into the habit so that we don’t coming running to God just once, but that we continue in our faith; that we pick up a bible reading plan and stick with it. Like Samuel came back repeatedly, may we come back often and regularly and habitually and willingly as we hear our LORD’s voice calling out to us through his Word.

God Word is brought to us in these days through neatly packaged devotional books and nifty mobile applications. It is a blessing that we can access in so many different ways, our personal bibles, devotional books, computers, handheld devices, and even our cell phones. It comes to us in the written word, video sermons, and audio recordings. And while the word of the LORD is anything but rare in this sense, it is always precious, to be valued and treasured. No matter how we come across it.

And so now this morning we have listened to God’s Word as we read about Samuel in the temple, we have thought about what it means to be truly connected to Christ and how to nurture and improve that connection, and now let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, your Word in my heart is like a drop of honey on my lips. It is like music to my ears. How sweet it is! Only, in my sinful weakness, I don’t always feel this way and often I neglect your voice altogether. Sometimes I may neglect it by reading just for reading sake, and not for learning, and growing in my faith. I pray that you will motivate me to use your Word diligently every day. Guide me into your Word regularly, help me to develop good bible reading and listening habits so that I may be blessed with joy and life and light and peace in you. I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.