



“Listen Carefully; Very, Very Carefully”

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Scripture (ERV):

I Samuel 3:1-19

3 The boy Samuel was Eli’s helper and served the LORD with him. At that time the LORD did not speak directly to people very often. There were very few visions.

2 Eli’s eyes were getting so weak that he was almost blind. One night he went to his room to go to bed. **3** The special lamp in the LORD’s temple^[a] was still burning, so Samuel lay down in the temple near where the Holy Box was. **4** The LORD called Samuel, and Samuel answered, **“Here I am.”** **5** Samuel thought Eli was calling him, so he ran to Eli and said, **“Here I am. You called me.”**

But Eli said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to bed.”

So Samuel went back to bed. **6** Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” Again Samuel ran to Eli and said, **“Here I am. You called me.”**

Eli said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to bed.”

7 Samuel did not yet know the LORD because the LORD had not spoken directly to him before.^[b]

8 The LORD called Samuel the third time. Again Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, **“Here I am. You called me.”**

Finally, Eli understood that the LORD was calling the boy. **9** Eli told Samuel, “Go to bed. If he calls you again, say, ‘Speak, LORD. I am your servant, and I am listening.’”

So Samuel went back to bed. **10** The LORD came and stood there. He called as he did before, saying, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel said, **“Speak. I am your servant, and I am listening.”**

¹¹ The LORD said to Samuel, “I will soon do things in Israel that will shock anyone who hears about them. ¹² I will do everything I said I would do against Eli and his family, everything from the beginning to the end. ¹³ I told Eli I would punish his family. I will do this because Eli knew his sons were saying and doing bad things against God. But he failed to control them. ¹⁴ That is why I swore an oath that sacrifices and offerings will not take away the sins of the people in Eli’s family.^[c]”

¹⁵ Samuel lay down in bed until the morning came. He got up early and opened the doors of the LORD’s house. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli about the vision.

¹⁶ But Eli said to Samuel, “Samuel, my son.”

Samuel answered, “*Yes, sir.*”

¹⁷ Eli asked, “What did God say to you? Don’t hide it from me. God will punish you if you hide anything from the message spoken to you.”

¹⁸ So Samuel told Eli everything. He did not hide anything from him.

Eli said, “Yahweh is the LORD. Let the Lord do whatever the Lord thinks is right.”

¹⁹ The LORD was with Samuel while he grew up. God did not let any of Samuel’s messages prove false.

Sermon:

When someone listens, listens carefully, listens attentively...they listen with their whole body.

It is an amazing experience to be listened to like that.

It is validating, encouraging, comforting.

Whoever listens like that, is a friend.

When we are at our best, we all try to listen so carefully...with focus, attention, openness, concern for the other. It says that we are there for that other person.

But the reality is, we are often preoccupied.

Small children tug at you and say “put your cell phone down” because they feel you aren’t attending to them, “listening” to them.

Fights erupt between friends and lovers.

Societal lines are drawn against each other because we don't listen.

Some of the best listening we get, we pay for, with therapists, counselors, life coaches.
We want to be heard, we need to be heard!

The child Samuel is listening, very, very carefully to a small voice in the darkness.
It isn't clear at first,
Listening hard is the only thing that eventually allows the voice to become clearer.

Is that true for you?

When you listen hard, not getting ready to speak, but instead, listening hard to hear the other...then clarity, then understanding, has the chance to shine through.

This story of Samuel and Eli is revered as a "call" story; the youngster listening and responding to God in his life.

But the old guy, Eli, is listening too.

Is trying to respond too.

Is mentoring the child. Guiding him in the right words, the right response to God-speech in the child's heart and mind.

Even when the word is hard, Eli encourages Samuel to speak it.

So it is with the youngsters of March for our Lives.

Or young people changing the world and shocking the rest of us old people, with a thousand new ways of doing things.

Whether we help them by listening very, very carefully...or we mentor them by urging them to listen to their inner guidance, very, very carefully...

They need us, and we need them.

But only when we listen very, very carefully.

Only when we accept that God speaks to whomever God wishes to speak. And in humility, we agree to listen.

So, maybe through women in the pulpit.

Or GLBTQ people.

Or people of color.

Or children.

Or someone who is mentally ill.

Or someone who is a professional.

Or someone who is not a professional.

Someone who is a refugee.

Someone of another religion.

Through whom have you heard God speak?

Who have been some of the surprising messengers for you?

This listening may require us to slow down. Quiet down. Wait. The voice may be very, very soft.

But we can reply: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

And it might just change our lives.