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Samuel Hears God

1 Samuel 3:1–21 · Harvest · Adults

God calling a sleeping boy in the dark is one of the most beloved scenes in the Old Testament. It is also a quiet lesson about discernment, mentorship and courage.

Context: Israel is at a low point at the end of the time of the judges. The sanctuary at Shiloh, where the ark of the covenant rests, is run by Eli and his corrupt sons, priests who treat offerings and worshippers with contempt (1 Sam 2:12–17). Eli complains but doesn't act. A prophet has already announced the end of his family's priesthood (1 Sam 2:27–36). Into this comes Samuel, the son Hannah begged God for and then gave back to him (1 Sam 1).

The chapter opens with a note of scarcity: few messages from the Lord, few visions. Eli is old and his sight failing. The lamp of God is still burning, which places the scene before dawn and quietly hints that God has not abandoned Israel.

God calls Samuel, and Samuel runs to Eli. Three times. The narrator's comment is gentle: Samuel had served in God's house for years, but the Lord's voice was still new to him. Faithful service in God's house had not yet become personal encounter.

To his credit, Eli recognizes what is happening and teaches the boy to respond, presenting himself as God's servant ready to hear. When the Lord comes and calls, Samuel answers. The first message he receives is a hard word against his own mentor. Samuel is afraid, but he tells the truth, and Eli accepts it with humility. Samuel grows into the prophet who will anoint Israel's first kings.

The Church's reading: the Catechism holds up Samuel learning from Eli how to listen (CCC 2578). Prayer begins with God's call (CCC 2567), and contemplative prayer is chiefly hearing the Word (CCC 2716).

For adult life:

Discernment is rarely instant. Like Samuel, many adults spend years serving God faithfully before hearing him personally. That isn't failure; it is the way many vocations unfold.

We need Elis. Spiritual direction, a wise priest, a mentor in marriage or work: Samuel could not interpret God's call alone. And some of us are called to be Eli now: flawed, older, and still able to point a young person toward God.

Hard truths are part of the call. Samuel's first assignment was to speak honestly to someone he loved. At work, in families and in parishes, faithfulness sometimes means saying what's true, with charity.

Eli also warns us. He knew his sons were doing wrong and didn't act. Parents and leaders are responsible for correcting what they can.

A real-life step: set aside ten minutes of silence each day this week, perhaps with the day's Gospel (lectio divina, CCC 2708). Begin by telling God you are ready to listen. If you are discerning a vocation, ask someone to help you, as Eli helped Samuel.

> **Church teaching note**
> Church teaching: Samuel and Eli as a model of learning to listen (CCC 2578); prayer as response to God's call (CCC 2567); meditation and lectio divina (CCC 2708); contemplative prayer as hearing the Word (CCC 2716). The lamp still burning as a hint of hope is a common reading of the narrative, not Church teaching.

Talk about it

1. Samuel served God for years before he knew God's voice. How far along that journey are you?

2. Who has been an Eli for you, and for whom could you be one?
3. When have you had to speak a hard truth to someone you love?
4. Catholic connection: read CCC 2578 and 2708. How could daily silence with Scripture change your prayer?

Key verse: 1 Sam 3:10. Look it up in your Bible.