

STOPPING TO LISTEN, 1SAMUEL 3

Stop The World I Want to Get Off #4

◆**Intro:** The Church council was on our annual planning retreat for the year. It was January and the golf lodge we used was blanketed with snow. Part of our intent included slowing down enough to hear from God. We had boxed up all cell phones and I invited all 22 of us to find a place either indoors or outdoors to be alone with God and ask four questions: 1) God, what do you like about me?; 2) God, what would you change about me?; 3) God, who do you want me to pray for?; 4) God, what should I pray for that person?

◆Off we went. I donned my hunting overalls, coat, boots, hat and mittens and headed toward a small stream winding through the frozen golf course, where I sat in the snow to ask God these four things. When I got to "Who should I pray for?" The name of one of the elders on that retreat popped into my head immediately. We'll call him "Ed" because that is his name, and because Ed has given me permission to repeat this story naming him. God said, "Pray for Ed." That's odd, I thought. He's somewhere praying right now himself. Oh well, how should I pray for Ed, God? "He doubts his significance." I'm telling you it was as clear as if someone was standing right there. So I wrote in my journal, there along the creek, "God help Ed to know he is significant to you."

◆After our hour was up we reconvened in our warm meeting hall. We went around the room, all 22 of us. Sharing who we felt God has called us to pray for. To a man, we all had a very distinct

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impression of a specific person. I went last. I was nervous because Ed was sitting two chairs to my right. If I said what I thought God said, and it turned out to be completely untrue, Ed could surely, would surely, correct or disagree with it on the spot. Wouldn't that look super dumb? Maybe I should make something up about someone nobody knew, or who at least wasn't there! So I said, "I don't know if I heard it right but... Ed, I prayed for you. God says you doubt your significance. I think he wants you to know you are."

◆Ed started to softly cry, right there in the circle with 21 other men. He murmured, "When were you praying about this, may I ask?" I said, "About 9:50am", because I recalled looking at my watch while I sat there in the snow writing my prayers about Ed. He said, "At that exact time I was asking God about my significance." That's when I thought *I* was going to cry. I mean, you can't make this stuff up! I can give you 21 phone numbers of men who can verify this story. God had spoken and we had heard him! We were thrilled and praised God for his grace because at that moment we knew even more that he was real, and not some theory that church people just talk about! Later my associate pastor, and my youth pastor would exclaim, "God showed up, just like we prayed he would!" because the three of us had planned the retreat, and specifically prayed for that we would experience God.

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◆**1.** I firmly believe that God is always speaking to us. But make it first person in your notes and write **God is always speaking to me.** Some folks think that God exists, but that he doesn't care much about, say, what we like to eat, or that we collect Fall leaves and save them and why, or that certain music can make us weep. They say that God created the world like a clock maker winds up a spring powered clock, and then lets it tick off it's time while he goes off somewhere to watch TV or something. We call that Deism. Deists think that God isn't present in the minutia of life, that he doesn't care whether you go for a motorcycle ride or not, or what kind of blouse you like to wear. But that's not the truth about God. That's not the God who speaks to a young boy in a temple, or who tells David which ravine to hide his army in, or when to attack and where. That's all in the Bible. Many years ago I'd have thought that, but not today. Not after all the clear answers to my prayers. No, if we don't hear God, it's not because he's not around or speaking. It's because we don't recognize his voice.

◆ Look at Samuel. He was serving in the church! He lived there! Doing, you know, God stuff and all. But he didn't recognize God calling to him. Verse 7 says, "*Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.*" 1 Samuel 3:7, NIV. But it can be revealed to you, just as it was to Samuel! You can "know the Lord", you just need to learn to recognize his voice. The New Testament

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tells us that God's Holy Spirit comes to live in his followers to convict us of God's ways.

◆*"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."* John 16:13, 14, NIV.

◆*"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* Jeremiah 29:12, 13, NIV.

◆B. God's words are like radio waves beaming always through the air and life all around us, all the time, day and night. God is active, at work, and speaking. He doesn't sit around in the park staring blankly and the ripples on the water. No, he is more like a rancher or a zoo keeper, constantly caring for his creation and walking among it.

◆*"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."* Psalms 19:1-3, NIV.

◆*"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."* Isaiah 55:10, 11, NIV.

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◆ *"I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right."*
Isaiah 45:19, NIV.

◆ C. Here is a take-away of all this and it's a beautiful thing! You know when you feel like "stop the world I wanna get off"? It helps to know, to remind yourself in that moment that God is not gone. God doesn't leave or forsake. Do you not think that the God who knew you before you were born (Jer.1), the God who has your name written in his book (Ps.139), who knows the number of hairs on your head (Mt6), –do you not think that he is interested in interacting with you on a moment by moment basis?

◆ *"for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you;"* 1 Chronicles 28:9, NIV.

◆ *"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."* Isaiah 65:24, NIV.

◆ *"He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him."* Psalms 91:15, NIV.

◆ So if we don't hear God, it isn't because he's gone. It could be that we are not listening very well.

◆ **2. When I don't stop to listen, I miss him whose word is most important.**

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◆ *"Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit. This is what the LORD says--your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea." Isaiah 48:16-18, NIV.*

◆A. Lets go back to the people of Samuel's day. It was the time of the Judges. Israel was in the promised land but had no king, no one, single ruler. From time to time God would raise up a powerful person (judge) to lead in times of crisis. Mostly people did their own thing for 300 years, that's longer than the US has been around.

◆v1 tells us that a word from God was rare, and that there were not many visions. Why not? People weren't listening for him!

◆v2 tells us the priest, Eli, is going blind. We are led to feel it's more than physical. (no visions) Seems like he isn't listening for God either.

◆v13 Our suspicion is correct. If we read chapter two, we discover that Eli's sons were stealing the best of the sacrificial meat for themselves, and sleeping with the lady volunteers at the temple. And Eli didn't stop them.

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◆Here's the lesson: my disobedience cuts me off from hearing God. Israel's disobedience cut them off. Eli's disobedience cut him off. It is not really that God is not active anymore for I could not draw a breath apart from him. It is not that God has nothing to say, no direction to give. It's more that we have tuned him out by our own choices. We cannot expect to live as we please, watch what we please, read what we please, spend how we please when these things do not line up with God's ways –and expect that we'll feel his good will, enjoy the blessings hearing clearly from him. God allows us to cooperate in knowing him, and hearing his Holy Spirit.

◆In the OT, the Spirit was said to “come upon” individuals like Othniel, Gideon, Samson. –“The Spirit of the Lord came upon them.” It says the same thing of King Saul, and King David. Saul prophesied, David was enabled to fight like an indestructible super hero. But at disobedience, the Spirit connection broke. When Samson disobeyed with Delilah he lost his supernatural strength. When Saul disobeyed in plundering the Amelekites, –it says the sad words: “the spirit of the Lord left him.” Now think about it. Have you ever heard a whisper from God, a voice in your conscience tell you something (that would be the Holy Spirit) and then chosen against it anyway? What's happening there is you are setting up a blockade, you are putting on spiritual ear muffs, or turning off your spiritual hearing aids –

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until you confess it and receive forgiveness, don't expect you hear God very well.

◆3. Sabbath is the prime day to practice listening for God.

It's the day most set up for it. We stop and rest. We delight and worship God. Worship is our specific opportunity to seek God and hear from him. That's why we read his Word. That's why we pray –to interact. Does your world feel like its spinning out of control and you want to get off? Start stopping one day a week. But on that day plan some effort for looking for, or hearing from God.

◆**A.** Samuel's story is all about God making a way to speak into the world again, to let them hear him! God will let you and I make choices that distance us from his joy. But God never totally gives up on his chosen. Let's review. If you know the story from Chapter One you know that Samual was a literal answer to a prayer. Hannah was childless and pleading for a son. God was listening to Hannah. "Samuel" means "God heard". In chapters 1&2 we learn about the wicked practices of Eli's sons, but interspersed in these are comments about Samuel. Hope is on the way.

◆"This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt. But Samuel was ministering before the LORD--a boy wearing a linen ephod." 1 Samuel 2:17, 18, NIV.

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◆ [Eli's] sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death. And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the LORD and with men." 1 Samuel 2:25, 26, NIV.

◆ **B.** Be assured friends, in this frenzied world there is a God who is near and speaking. When you come to Jesus Christ as your savior he promises to guide you.

◆ "And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago." Ephesians 1:13, NLT.

◆ Jesus is the final word, the final act of God making away to speak into the world again!

◆ *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."* Hebrews 1:1-3, NIV.

◆ I urge you to seek him more than you do right now. I urge you to stop and listen for his voice. Bring him your decisions, and dilemmas. Ask him which choice to make.

◆ **Conclusion:** Let me suggest to you a bit of a liturgy for your Sunday. As a follower of God you are seeking to know him. In

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fact that is the primary reason he made you; to know him. On your day of rest, set aside some time for listening prayer. Find someplace still and quiet. Open God's word to read. When you have read a portion ask God what he wants you to see in it and read it again. Or in prayer instead of telling God all the things going wrong and who needs healing, ask God your questions. As a starter, you could use the 4 questions I gave the Council:

1)What do you like about me? 2) What do you want to change in me? 3) who should I pray for? 4)what should I pray? Now at first you may not recognize God's voice. But I can assure you, God always answers. His answers do include things like, "No" and "not yet" or "yes" and the like. But he answers. So ask. Ask away and then listen.