

## Inspiring Moments

### RECOGNISING GOD'S VOICE

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Is God silent?

Why is God silent? Is God silent? Is it possible that God may have spoken but we did not hear? And we did not hear because we do not recognise God's voice? These are perplexing questions that confront us in times of difficulty and uncertainty.

God's call of Samuel

In 1 Sam 3, we see God's calling of Samuel (the greatest Judge and Priest of Israel). Young Samuel grew up in the Tabernacle of God, serving as an apprentice to Eli, the priest of Israel. One night while Eli and Samuel were asleep in the Tabernacle, God called Samuel. He called Samuel by name and Samuel heard it. But he mistook it for his master's calling. So he ran to Eli, only to be told that he did not call him. God called Samuel three times, and three times Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's. By the time God called the third time, Eli knew that it was God calling Samuel. So he instructed young Samuel how to respond to God should He called the fourth time. And God did.

How is it possible that Samuel, who heard God's voice, did not recognise God's voice; whilst Eli, who did not hear God's voice, recognised it?

Why Samuel did not recognise God's voice

Why was Samuel unable to recognise God's voice? Two reasons. First, God's message and vision were rare at that time, because of Israel's sins (verse 11). Second, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before" (verse 7). Samuel was only a young boy, an apprentice priest, when God called him. He was unfamiliar with God's voice. Perhaps that was why God called him four times.

Why Eli recognised God's voice

On the other hand, Eli, who did not hear God's voice knew it was indeed God calling Samuel. How come? Eli had been serving as Israel's Priest and Judge for 40 years. During those 40 long years, God would have spoken to him to

give him instructions to perform his roles. He would have been acquainted with God's voice and he would be able to recognise God's voice, even though he did not hear it. So it boiled down to his long years of walking with God. That is the same for us today. Our ability to recognise God's voice depends on how close we walk with God daily. The closer we walk with God, the easier for us to recognise God's voice.

Does God give us the ability to recognise God's voice?

Does God give us the ability to recognise God's voice? The answer is, "yes", if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In John 10:4 we read, "After he (the Good Shepherd) has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognise his voice" (NLT). John chapter 10 tells us that Jesus is the 'Good Shepherd' and we, who believe in Jesus, are his sheep. The 'sheep' recognise the 'Good Shepherd's' voice because there is a personal relationship between the Shepherd and the Sheep. Likewise, we who believe in Jesus Christ can recognise his voice.

Recognising God's voice is not a science nor is it an art; it is a 'heart' thing. We must learn to listen to God's voice with our hearts and not just with our ears. We should not just rely on our five senses (smell, taste, hearing, sight and touch) alone but on our 'sixth sense'. And why not? We know that when we accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour, the Holy Spirit indwells in us. So the Holy Spirit speaks to us from within. God can speak to us from without and within us. So we should not expect God to speak to us only audibly from without.

Priests who did not know God.

Where was Samuel when God called him? He and Eli were sleeping in the Holy Place, in the Tabernacle of God. Next to the Holy Place was the Most Holy Place, where the Ark of God resided. No one was allowed to enter into the Most Holy Place except the Priest (even then only once a year). Anyone else who entered the Most Holy Place would be killed instantly by God. We read in verse 3 that Samuel was sleeping in his usual place, near to the Ark of God. Any closer, Samuel would die. So here was Samuel serving God in the innermost sanctum of God's Tabernacle (mobile temple). Yet he did not know God (because of his young age).

In the preceding chapter, 1 Sam 2:12, we are told that Eli's two sons were priests themselves serving in the same Tabernacle. They were described as 'scoundrels' or 'worthless men'; and they did not know the Lord.

So it is possible that we may serve in high positions in a church or other Christian organisations, yet may not know God in a personal way. That is a sobering thought. Religiosity is not equivalent to spirituality. God is not concerned with our position in churches or other Christian organisations but with our close relationship with Him.

God has no protocol in dealing with man

It is also interesting to note that when God called Samuel, He spoke directly with Samuel even though he was merely an apprentice priest. God by-passed Eli, his master, and spoke directly to Samuel. God has no 'protocol' when dealing with man. God can by-pass the pastor and speak directly to any church member.

Run to your 'Eli'

What do you do when you are unsure whether it's God's voice? Young Samuel ran to old Eli and he affirmed Samuel that it was God's voice. We need 'Eli's to help us affirm God's voice. They have walked longer and closer to God than us.

One morning after our church service was over, a church member came to my wife and I and said, "I need to talk to both of you. I have a big decision to make (regarding her banking career). I want to know what is God's will for me." So she told us about her circumstance. As she told us the facts, it became very clear to both Ethel and I about the choice that laid before her. We told her what we thought. She left for home, a happy lady.

A few months ago I received a call from the chairman of a public listed company. He turned up in my office, not to seek legal advice but to seek spiritual advice (I don't do this often). Briefly, he told me that his company employs 2,000 over employees around the world. Sometimes he has to make hard decisions which would adversely affect the livelihood of many families. He wanted to do the right thing in God's eyes as a Christian businessman. He came to find out whether he could come and see me to be his 'sounding board'. Whilst I was honoured by his confidence in me, I accepted his request with some amount of fear and trepidation because of the responsibility.

When I was much younger serving God as a church leader. I was often burdened with many challenges. I would run to my 'Eli', my pastor, Hugh Smith. Every time I left his home, my heart was always lighter. We all need an 'Eli' in our life. Or better still, be an 'Eli' to someone.