

# connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

## *Called to* **SERVE**

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Dallas, Texas

*Called to Serve—Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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# How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all of the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on page 9 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
  - If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
  - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
  - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- E. Additional Bible study comments on the lessons are available online. Call 1-866-249-1799 or e-mail [baptistway@texasbaptists.org](mailto:baptistway@texasbaptists.org) to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website, [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org). The price of these comments for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) to purchase or for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

- F. Additional teaching plans are also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these additional teaching plans for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.
- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

### Do you use a Kindle?

This Connect 360 *Bible Study Guide*, along with several other studies, is available in a Kindle edition. The easiest way to find these materials is to search for "BaptistWay" on your Kindle, or go to [www.amazon.com/kindle](http://www.amazon.com/kindle) and do a search for "BaptistWay." The Kindle edition can be studied not only on a Kindle but also on your smartphone or tablet using the Kindle app available free from [amazon.com/kindle](http://amazon.com/kindle).



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# Called to Serve

<i>How to Make the Best Use of This Issue</i>	3
<i>Writers for This Study Guide</i>	7
<i>Introducing Called to Serve</i>	11

DATE OF STUDY \_\_\_\_\_

## UNIT ONE

---

### Old Testament Examples

<b>LESSON 1</b>	_____	<b>Responding to God’s Call to Service</b> 1 SAMUEL 3	19
<b>LESSON 2</b>	_____	<b>Serving Through an Expression of Kindness</b> 2 SAMUEL 9	29
<b>LESSON 3</b>	_____	<b>Serving by Meeting One Another’s Needs</b> 2 KINGS 4:8–20, 27–37	39
<b>LESSON 4</b>	_____	<b>Serving in Spite of Opposition</b> NEHEMIAH 6:1–16	49
<b>LESSON 5</b>	_____	<b>The Suffering Servant</b> ISAIAH 52:13–15, 53	59

## UNIT TWO

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### Jesus on Service

<b>LESSON 6</b>	_____	<b>Setting a Humble Example</b> JOHN 13:1–17	71
<b>LESSON 7</b>	_____	<b>Serving Through Loving Sacrifice</b> JOHN 15:9–17	81
<b>LESSON 8</b>	_____	<b>Serving Christ by Serving Those in Need</b> MATTHEW 25:31–46	91

---

**UNIT THREE**


---

**New Testament Examples**

<b>LESSON 9</b>	_____	<b>Serving Through Our Giftedness</b> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–13, 27–31	103
<b>LESSON 10</b>	_____	<b>Serving as Ambassadors of Reconciliation</b> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11–21	111
<b>LESSON 11</b>	_____	<b>Serving Through Generous Giving</b> 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1–15	121
<b>LESSON 12</b>	_____	<b>Acts of Service Reveal Our Faith</b> JAMES 2:14–26	131
<b>LESSON 13</b>	_____	<b>The Attitude of Service</b> PHILIPPIANS 2:1–11	139
		<i>Our Next New Study</i>	149
		<i>How to Order More Bible Study Materials</i>	151

# Introducing

## Called to Serve

“It’s my pleasure.” Perhaps you’ve heard this reply from a server at a particular fast food restaurant that is famous for its chicken sandwiches. It is part of the company’s focus on delivering outstanding customer service at each of its locations and has served as a model for other organizations.

We love to receive excellent service *from* others, but how eager are we to provide excellent service *for* others? How often do we look for ways to serve those around us? The truth is, all Christ-followers have been called to a life of service. But this call runs counter to our culture that celebrates self-fulfillment, self-expression, and self-achievement above all else.

As we learn from Jesus, service requires sacrifice. In fact, he redefined greatness when he told his disciples,

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:43–45

These are challenging words. Will we choose to follow Jesus’ example? Serving others allows us to put our faith into action—the practical application of the gospel message that our world needs. Let’s seek and respond to opportunities for service with an attitude that says, “It’s my pleasure.”

This study consists of thirteen lessons focused on the topic of service. These lessons explore various aspects and examples related to serving others

from both the Old Testament and New Testament, including some of Jesus' teaching on service. Our service should be motivated by our love for Christ. Our efforts can build bridges of relationship to others so that the gospel can be shared with those who need to hear it. In doing so, we become ambassadors of reconciliation who model Jesus' example.

Each summer our Connect 360 Bible Study series focuses on a biblical theme. For a complete list of our studies see [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org).

## Studying These Lessons

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Serving others is an integral part of the discipleship journey, and it starts with the proper attitude. Paul, as he was encouraging unity in the Philippian church, wrote the following:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:3–8

One of the best ways for us to follow Jesus' example of humility is to look out for the interests of others and to take actions to meet their needs.

Jesus shared a powerful lesson about service with his disciples on his last night with them before his crucifixion by washing their feet. After completing this seemingly menial task he stated,

You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

John 13:13–17

Jesus shows that there is no act of service that is “below” us. In fact, he equates true love with service and selfless sacrifice:

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

John 15:12–15

## Serving Others Proves Our Faith is Real

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Our service has to be more than lip service if we want to impact the world for the cause of Christ. James puts forth the challenge to us:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:14–17

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of separating the sheep from the goats when “the Son of Man comes in his glory” (25:31). In separating the righteous from the unrighteous, he speaks to acts of service performed on his behalf (providing food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, clothing the naked, extending hospitality to strangers, tending to the sick, and visiting

those in prison) as characterizing the true followers of the King. Note the surprised response of the righteous:

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Matthew 25:37–40

In similar fashion, words of judgment are spoken to the unrighteous who failed to perform such acts of mercy (Matthew 25:41–46) for “the least of these.” This group is equally surprised by the King’s pronouncement.

This should serve as a warning to all of us when it comes to providing acts of compassion and mercy for others, especially to “the least of these.” Yes, there are sins we should avoid committing, but here we also see the concept of sins of omission. As James writes,

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.

James 4:13

Let this study remind us of the privilege of serving others in Jesus’ name. Our surrender and obedience in this area of discipleship will stretch and mature our faith. It will also provide pathways enabling us to take personal risks to bring the gospel to every relationship.

#### UNIT ONE: OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Lesson 1	Responding to God’s Call to Service	1 Samuel 3
Lesson 2	Serving Through an Expression of Kindness	2 Samuel 9
Lesson 3	Serving by Meeting One Another’s Needs	2 Kings 4:8–20, 27–37
Lesson 4	Serving in Spite of Opposition	Nehemiah 6:1–16
Lesson 5	The Suffering Servant	Isaiah 52:13–15, 53

**UNIT TWO: JESUS ON SERVICE**

Lesson 6	Setting a Humble Example	John 13:1–17
Lesson 7	Serving Through Loving Sacrifice	John 15:9–17
Lesson 8	Serving Christ by Serving Those in Need	Matthew 25:31–46

**UNIT THREE: NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES**

Lesson 9	Serving Through Our Giftedness	1 Corinthians 12:4–13, 27–31
Lesson 10	Serving as Ambassadors of Reconciliation	2 Corinthians 5:11–21
Lesson 11	Serving Through Generous Giving	2 Corinthians 8:1–15
Lesson 12	Acts of Service Reveal Our Faith	James 2:14–26
Lesson 13	The Attitude of Service	Philippians 2:1–11

**Additional Resources for Studying Called to Serve<sup>1</sup>**

- Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary—Abridged Edition: New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994.
- Bruce Barton, Philip Comfort, Grant Osborne, Linda K. Taylor, and Dave Veerman. *Life Application New Testament Commentary*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Craig S. Keener. *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Timothy Keller. *Serving a Movement: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016.
- Max Lucado. *Outlive Your Life: You Were Made to Make a Difference*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.
- A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Concise Edition*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2000.
- Charles R. Swindoll. *Improving Your Serve: The Art of Unselfish Living*. Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1981.
- Dave Workman. *The Outward-Focused Life: Becoming a Servant in a Serve-Me World*. Ada Township, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008.
- Spiros Zodhiates and Warren Baker. *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, New International Version*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996.

**Notes**

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1. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all of its comments.

## UNIT ONE

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# Old Testament Examples

Unit One, “Old Testament Examples” contains five lessons that illustrate a response to God’s call to serve, challenges to serving God, and models for our service to God. Lesson one describes Samuel’s experience of hearing, recognizing, and responding to God’s call. Lesson two explores David’s commitment to his friend Jonathan as expressed through acts of kindness to his son Mephibosheth. Lesson three recounts the relationship between Elisha and the Shunammite woman, and how they served one another. Lesson four reveals Nehemiah’s courage as he chose to serve God in spite of opposition, and in lesson five we consider Isaiah’s prophetic description of the Suffering Servant.

### UNIT ONE: OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Lesson 1	Responding to God’s Call to Service	1 Samuel 3
Lesson 2	Serving Through an Expression of Kindness	2 Samuel 9
Lesson 3	Serving by Meeting One Another’s Needs	2 Kings 4:8-20, 27-37
Lesson 4	Serving in Spite of Opposition	Nehemiah 6:1-16
Lesson 5	The Suffering Servant	Isaiah 52:13-15, 53



# lesson 1

## Responding to God's Call to Service

### MAIN IDEA

Samuel responded to God's call to service with openness and obedience.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

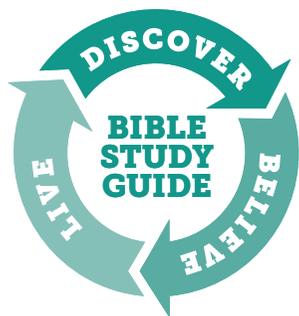
How do we respond to God's call to service?

### STUDY AIM

To embrace God's call to service with openness and obedience

### QUICK READ

God wants to use us in his kingdom's service. Samuel is an excellent example of how to respond to the calling of God.



## Introduction

Throughout the years, I have had the privilege of leading several spiritual retreats for missionaries across the world. I have so enjoyed preaching and teaching with these precious servants of God. One year, my wife was organizing a large retreat for about 300 missionaries in Africa, and she approached me about my interest in participating.

She said, “I know you usually preach at these retreats. However, the leader has already secured a speaker. I still want you to go. In fact, I want you to work in the nursery with me.”

*What? Work in the nursery? Don't you know who I am? I am a senior pastor. I have a seminary Ph.D. Are you going to waste my talent in the nursery?*

I didn't say all that to Cindy; I just thought it. But—guess what? I went! I served in the nursery. I took care of small children while our workers had the chance to be refreshed and encouraged in worship and Bible study. Guess what? I loved it. It was hard work—but it was fun. I fell in love with those children. Serving in that nursery was a blessing.

Let's be honest. Serving is not all that glamorous. It is not attractive. In our most authentic moments, we would probably prefer someone serve us rather than to serve others. However, remember Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45).<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Samuel 3

<sup>1</sup> The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

<sup>2</sup> One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, “Here I am.” <sup>5</sup> 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."

**11** And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.

**12** At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. **13** For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. **14** Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

**15** Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, **16** but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

**17** "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." **18** So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."

**19** The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. **20** And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. **21** The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

## Dark Days (3:1)

The story of Samuel appears in the days of the judges before the establishment of the monarchy. Israel had established the city of Shiloh as a place of worship. The tabernacle had been located in Shiloh with some type of structure built around it. Evidently, there were priests who oversaw the practices of worship for Israel in Shiloh.

When the book of 1 Samuel opens, Eli is the priest in charge of the holy place. His sons, Hophni and Phineas, were assisting him in the priestly duties. However, these were dark days in the story of God's people. The anonymous writer of this material simply stated, "In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions" (1 Samuel 3:1). Further, God had previously sent a prophet to Eli to warn him of the impending judgment against his family (2:27–36).

During those dark days, a family from Ramathaim visited Shiloh annually to worship and sacrifice to the Lord. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children; Hannah was barren. Her inability to bear a child for her husband was a burden on her heart. While in Shiloh on the family pilgrimage, Hannah wept before the Lord and pleaded with him

### Ready to Obey

Hebrew is the original written language of the Old Testament. The word *hinneni* is translated into English as "Here I am" in 1 Samuel 3. However, *hinneni* implies more than just an acknowledgment of presence. While it can be a greeting, this word is used elsewhere in Scripture to signal a readiness to obey.

For example, in Genesis 22:1 and 22:11, the word *hinneni* was used by Abraham in his encounter with God concerning sacrificing Isaac as an offering. In both instances, Abraham demonstrated his willingness to obey God through his actions.

Also, Isaiah used the word *hinneni* in the unforgettable experience recorded in Isaiah 6 when God revealed himself to the prophet through the vision in the temple. When God posed the question, "Who will go for us?" Isaiah responded with "Here I am, send me." Again, the answer was indicative of a desire to be obedient to God.

to give her a child. She promised to give the child to God for his service if he answered her prayer (1:9–11).

God heard her prayer and gave her a son. She named him Samuel (“God heard”). She kept her promise and at the appropriate time, she presented Samuel to Eli the priest at the house of the Lord in Shiloh. The boy became an attendant in Shiloh, serving alongside the aged Eli.

### The Word of the Lord (3:2–9)

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Our text opens with Samuel in place as a servant alongside the elderly priest, Eli. Notice the contrast painted by the writer in the introduction to this section of Scripture. Again, the darkness of this era appears in verse one. Not only were there few visions from the Lord, but Eli’s eyesight was also failing. However, there was still a light shining in Shiloh. The Law required that lamps burned in the tabernacle from evening until morning (Exodus 27:20). Evidently, this tradition was still in place in this more permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant.

On one occasion, while the lamp of God was still lit (early morning), in the midst of the darkness of Israel’s spiritual condition, in the context of long periods of silence from heaven—God spoke! The Lord called Samuel. Samuel assumed Eli was calling. He slept near Eli, so he could be of assistance to the aging priest during the night. Samuel responded to hearing his name with the Hebrew word, *hinneni*—“Here I am.” This word embodies obedience. It is the same word Isaiah used in Isaiah 6:8 when the prophet answered the call of God in his life. Samuel was not just answering; he was stating his willingness to obey his master’s voice.

Notice that verse 7 reveals Samuel did not yet recognize God’s voice. Obviously, Samuel was still a boy at this time. However, he was poised to embark on a lifetime of service to the Lord and Israel. God would make a habit of revealing himself to Samuel, but this wake-up call was the first instance of God’s self-revelation to this servant.

We all need to learn to discern the voice of God. God speaks in various ways to different people. He never compromises who he is, but he seems to work in ways discernible to folks across the spectrum of humanity. For example, when I am seeking to hear from God, I always begin with prayer

## Finding Meaning & Purpose

When God calls, we are to obey. It is that simple!

1. Serving God leads to a lifetime of meaning and purpose. Following your own path leads to self-satisfaction and self-absorption.
2. Service to God is not always glamorous. However, serving God is characterized by fulfillment and blessing.
3. The next time you sense God's leading in your life, answer with "Here I am" and follow with obedience to discover what God can accomplish in your life.

and Scripture reading. I know God speaks to me through both. Then, I seek counsel from godly people I respect and know. Finally, God begins to reveal himself to me through a deep and profound awareness. I refer to it as happening in my gut. I have learned throughout the years to trust his impressions in my heart. (Notice I always filter the process through prayer and biblical truth.)

In the text for this lesson, after Samuel had heard the Lord's voice three times and consulted with Eli, the old priest realized God was speaking. He instructed the boy how to respond to God (3:9).

## Responding to God's Call (3:10–21)

In verse 10, God used the double vocative, "Samuel! Samuel!" Only three double vocatives appear in the Old Testament (Genesis 22:11; 46:2 and 1 Sam. 3:9). Samuel heeded the advice of Eli and responded to God's call with, "Speak, for your servant is listening." God then revealed his plans to Samuel. The message God shared with Samuel was not favorable for Eli. In fact, God pronounced his judgment upon Eli and his sons. God was going to fulfill all he had already revealed to Eli (2:22–36). This information must have been tragic news for the boy Samuel to digest.

The next day, Eli wanted to know what God revealed. Samuel moved beyond his fears and shared fully with Eli what God had said. In spite of the terrible news, Eli responded with grace and faith. He was ready to receive whatever God had decided (1 Sam. 3:18). This interchange reveals much about both Samuel and Eli. Samuel was about to begin a lifelong journey as the spiritual leader of Israel. He demonstrated a willingness to listen to God's voice and faithfully share God's message. These qualities served Samuel well into adulthood. Eli demonstrated a willingness to receive God's will. Even though he had been disobedient in handling his sons, Eli still had a desire to know God's will.

Samuel observed how Eli received this message. Surely it left an impression on the young boy. Samuel did not want to share God's message with Eli, but he did. Plus, he had the opportunity to see his spiritual mentor in a moment of crisis. Eli's statement of faith (3:18) undoubtedly had an impact on Samuel, an impressionable boy. God chose him to be a servant during a challenging time in the history of God's people. He had a devoted mother who prayed for him. He also had the opportunity to spend time with Eli in his elderly years. Eli had failed God by not chastening his sons and allowing them to abuse the office of priest. However, Eli still loved God and loved the priesthood. Samuel benefited from knowing Eli in those years.

Samuel also expressed his willingness to respond to God's call in his life. He was a willing listener and would faithfully obey God's directives. God honored that obedience. The writer summarized Samuel's life as a prophet, judge, and priest in verses 19–21 of our text. God was with Samuel. God blessed the teaching and prophetic pronouncements of Samuel. In fact, God's presence with Samuel was recognized by all of Israel. God continued to speak to Samuel and used him as a spokesman for his entire life.

Serving God is not easy. Sometimes, it requires communicating hard messages. Sometimes, it requires costly obedience. However, Samuel's life is an example of one who served God well. He did not shy away from responsibility just because the path was difficult. God trusted him to anoint the first two kings of Israel. He became a valuable vessel through whom God spoke for a generation of his people. Samuel was a boy and then a man who responded to God's call to service.

## Implications and Actions

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Why is responding to God’s call so difficult for some people? Perhaps it is a call to become a teacher or a leader at church. It may mean an invitation to serve as a volunteer in a mission effort. Sometimes, it is a deeper call to a lifetime of Christian commitment. For many people, it is hard to accept these invitations from God and embrace meaningful endeavors with kingdom implications.

Perhaps we are afraid of failure. Or, maybe we are afraid of what God may be asking of us. Samuel serves as an inspiration. He learned as a boy that God’s call is worthy of obedience. He also learned God’s presence accompanies his call—and he will provide supportive people along the way.

When we begin to sense God’s calling in our lives, let’s remember Samuel. God will provide his presence and his power to sustain us in our journeys. Obedience to him is the best path to a meaningful life. He can use each of us in his great plan of redemption.

## Questions

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1. What lessons did Samuel learn from Eli?



4. How do you respond when you sense God calling you? Why?

**Notes** 

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1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–5 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).