

CHIEF MINISTRIES

October 2018

Samuel is a type of today's servant of Christ on the lookout for tomorrow servant. *"The Lord said to Samuel, 'how long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king'" (1 Samuel 16:1).*

Samuel was now on the spot. He had to break with yesterday's man, Saul, whom he had discovered and put in power, and at the same time find and anoint tomorrow's man, David. In seeking tomorrow's man Samuel was at considerable risk. Samuel said to the Lord, *"How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me" (v2).*

I sometimes wonder which is more painful: being yesterday's man, today's man or tomorrow's man. Yesterday's man endures the pain of irrelevance, having known what it was to be used of God. And yet if he thinks he is still under the same anointing he once had, he still suffers by knowing in his heart of hearts that he is struggling with great effort to convince himself and others that he is still on the cutting edge of what God is doing today.

The pain of being tomorrow's man is that you have to wait – sometimes much longer than you thought. The preparation is hard, God having to mold and shape for your usefulness at the proper time. *"How long, O Lord?"*, You cry as David did (Psalms 13:1). We are never quite prepared for the rigid disciplining God puts us through for the calling He has destined for us.

The pain of being today's man largely comes from the degree of courage required with the job. We never feel up to it. *"Who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:16).* We may feel like Gideon. The Lord addressed him as a *"mighty warrior" (Judges 6:12).* His response: *"How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (v15).* Gideon still needed the "fleece" to be wet, then dry, before he could carry on (v36-40). He felt like anything but a mighty warrior. Moses too felt unprepared. *"Moses said to the Lord, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor, since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue'" (Exodus 4:10).*

It took courage for Samuel to pronounce King Saul as yesterday's man, because Saul continued to wear the crown. Samuel was therefore nervous about going to the house of Jesse, to anoint the next king since the present King was very much alive.

God seems to love putting today's servant in the most awkward situations. Joseph, who was engaged to Mary, had to make the hard decision to marry her when she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, knowing what people would think of the two of them for the rest of their lives (John 6:42). It required a vision before Joseph decided to marry her. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the only link between himself and the promise of a seed that was to be as vast as the sand of the sea – and only one step at a time at that: *"Sacrifice him....on the mountains I will tell you about" (Genesis 22:2).* Elijah was promised that he

would drink from the brook of Kerith, only to find that “*some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land*” (1 Kings 17:7).

And yet by the time Samuel had to break with the regime of which he had been no small part, he was highly seasoned and trained in the knowledge of hearing God’s immediate voice. His initial training came early. It too required having to break with one regarded as today’s man but who was rapidly becoming yesterday’s man – Eli the priest. Samuel was very young at the time. He looked up to Eli with uncritical adulation and respect. Eli could do no wrong. Eli alone heard from God. So, when the Lord called “*Samuel!*”, Samuel immediately went to Eli and said “*Here I am; you called me?*” A scenario that was repeated three times. Finally, Eli realized what was happening – that God was actually calling directly to the young Samuel. It is to Eli’s everlasting credit that he recognized that God was at work. *So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if He calls you, say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”* (1 Samuel 3:9).

Samuel was getting a kind of training every servant of Christ must undergo: seeing that those we have admired aren’t perfect. Eli was highly respected in Israel at the time, and the young Samuel would have stood in awe of him. It was hard for Samuel to accept that God would speak directly and immediately to him and not the revered Eli. But Eli had a blind spot – he tolerated his sons in their mishandling of the things of God. And yet Eli knew the Lord and had a heart after God. The deaths of his sons, clear judgment of God, no doubt grieved him. But what grieved him more was the mention that the ark of God was taken from Israel, which led to his own death (1 Samuel 4:18).

No saint of God is perfect. As Solomon said in his prayer at the dedication of the temple, “*There is no one who does not sin*” (2 Chronicles 6:36). Eli had his blind spot; we all have them. Calvin the theologian even said that in every saint there is something reprehensible. And yet we all like to think that heroes are perfect.

We do our admirers no favor to let them adulate us or get too attached to us. We are going to disappoint them – it is only a matter of time. I will say that it scares me nearly to death when I discern that someone, especially a new convert/Christian is regarding me as some sort of hero. I know they will crash when they know how vulnerable and human I really am. Samuel, therefore, being distanced from Eli by God’s own intervention, was being trained for a much more difficult test that he would face years later – having to call a spade a spade regarding the very man he discovered: Saul.

God was in the process of preparing today’s man. *And the Lord said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone tingle”* (1 Samuel 3:11).

From that moment God and Samuel had an unbroken intimacy. *And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ^{v20} And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. ^{v21} And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek.* (1 Samuel 3:19-21, 4:1).

It must have been hard for Samuel to accept himself as God’s man for today. He assumed Eli was that. Every person God uses in the here and now sooner or later must discover God for themselves. Secondhand Revelation no longer will do. We must learn to recognize God’s voice so clearly and distinctly that we know we aren’t being deceived. But it is sovereign and humbling.

How do we recognize God’s voice? Like young Samuel, we aren’t always sure at first what is going on. It is good when a veteran – like Eli – can help us. But the older generation won’t always be around. The

torch will be passed to us, unworthy is how we feel and really are. Here is a general way of knowing God's will and whether or not we have truly heard God's voice.

P: Providence

Is it providential? If God gives a word, it will be in line with His Providence. In other words, does God open the door, or do we have to knock it down? If I have to pry a door open, it is a fairly good hint I am in the flesh. Providence refers to God's way of governing: His overruling, His going before us, His way of arranging circumstances – the “coincidences”. If it is providential – that is, if a door is open without you having to open it yourself – move on a bit and look for other tests.

Samuel was ordered to go to the house of Jesse. But would Jesse accept him?

Samuel was welcomed by Jesse, Jesse had several sons. So far, so good. There was nothing un-providential about Samuel's visit to Jesse. Had Jesse not welcome Samuel, the great seer would have had to say, “I've got it wrong.” If Jesse had had no sons, only daughters, Samuel would have had to climb down and admit God had not sent him.

An ambitious, “spiritual” man went to Charles Spurgeon with a word from the Lord. “The Lord told me to preach for you tonight,” said the man to Spurgeon. But Spurgeon replied, “sorry, but the Lord hasn't told me that”.

When God is at work, doors open. His Providence is a good hint that you are not being deceived. It isn't the only test, but I would say it is an essential ingredient in knowing whether you have heard from God. If it is providential, move on and put forth another question.

E: the Enemy

What would your enemy, the devil, want you to do? He comes as a roaring lion and masquerades as an angel of light (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 11:14). The roaring lion comes to intimidate. The “roar” is to make you say, “I'm finished,” so you will give in and let him destroy you. The angel of light comes to deceive, so you will think you are hearing from God – or that you are in the presence of a man of God – when it is a complete deception.

When we are given an impression, impulse or feeling that we think could be of God, we should ask, “What do we suppose the devil would want us to do?” In other words, most of us have a fairly shrewd idea what the devil hopes we will do with a certain feeling. Do the opposite, and you will be right most of the time. This is relevant with regard to sexual temptation, intellectual temptation, financial temptation, social temptation or temptation connected with ambition. If you will calmly figure out in your mind what your enemy the devil hopes you will do in a given situation then do the opposite, you will most certainly be safe from years of regret. But there is more.

A: Authority: the Bible

What does God's word say? The Holy Spirit will never, never, never lead us to anything contrary to God's revealed will – the Bible. ^{v9}**Beth** *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.* ^{v11} *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* ^{v17} **Gimel** *Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. (Psalms 119:9, 11, 17)*

The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible, using consecrated men (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). He will not lead us in a way that does not cohere with Holy Scripture. However strong the impulse, however powerful the feeling, however clear the vision, do not listen to or obey any “word” that doesn't affirm God's Word.

I knew of a married man who fell in love with a married woman (he called it love). His wife didn't understand him or desire him anymore; her husband didn't understand her or desire her anymore. But they met each other, understood each other and desired each other. This is why the first point, Providence, isn't enough to know you are hearing from God. But they felt they heard from God so what they decided to do – sleep with each other – they felt it met with God's approval "in this particular case." But, what does the Bible say? *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ^{v4} that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ^{v5} not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ^{v6} that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ^{v7} For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7).*

Sin and temptation are always providential. Jonah said no to God's command to go to Nineveh and decided to go to Tarshish instead. Lo and behold, when he went to the dock there was a ship ready to sail for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). It made him feel confirmed in what he had already decided to do. Providence, then, is not enough.

The Holy Spirit will always affirm the Bible. He will always lead us in a way that dignifies the plain teaching of Scripture. If your word from the Lord goes against the teaching of God's Word, then you did not hear from God at all!

C: Confidence

Does the impression you have received diminish your confidence? Be honest here. Does the thought of obeying his "Word" increase your confidence? If so, that is a good sign. If you lose confidence. It is a bad sign.

I find that if I am pleasing the Lord my confidence is at a fairly high level. When I lose confidence, it does not mean I am seriously out of God's will; after all, if our hearts condemn us, "*God is greater than our hearts*" (1 John 3:20). *He gives more grace (James 4:6)*. And I know what it is to feel a lack of confidence and have God nonetheless affirm me. But I wouldn't want to make a major decision at a time like that! It is better when our hearts do not condemn us and we have confidence before God. (1 John 3:21).

When I hear a word, get an impulse or feel an impression to do something, I ask myself, How do I really feel? I have learned that a lack of confidence is a warning signal not to proceed.

But this can be tricky. The fear of man can get in and cause us to miss a wonderful, wonderful blessing. I therefore have to ask, why am I afraid? "*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*" (1 Peter 3:13). When I can see that my lack of confidence is based upon the fear of what people might think, I ask, what does God think? If a great sense of confidence swells up inside, I have learned to recognize it is a warm, sure signal that I am hearing from God.

Confidence, boldness, assurance and inner liberty were what enabled Peter to preach on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-26). It is the Greek word parrhesia, translated "confidently" (Acts 2:29), "courage" (Acts 4:13), "bold" (2 Corinthians 3:12), "confidence" (Hebrews 4:16). When that comes, especially if combined with the other four points, I am quite sure I am not being deceived. The final test, if all the above suggest a green light, now follows.

E: Ease

Are you being true to yourself? Ease is what you feel in your heart of hearts. Your conscience. What you feel deep down inside when you are being true to yourself. God will never lead you to be untrue to yourself. He will never lead you in such a way that you violate your conscience.

This alone – ease – is not enough. It must follow the four previous propositions, if you choose to accept this teaching. If all five don't fit, I would say that God is not speaking to you. If all five fit – it is a good sign – not an infallible sign, since it is but a general hint – that you are not being deceived.

P.E.A.C.E. *“let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification”* (Romans 4:19). When we do the things that make peace, we will feel peace and make peace.

At the end of the day, it is peace that should have governed you more than anything else in making decisions, big and small. One of the fruit of the spirit is peace (Galatians 5:22). It is deep and very powerful. *“You will keep in perfect peace with whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you”* (Isaiah 26:3). The lack of peace is like a flashing red light that says, “STOP”.

Even in the small decisions, that peace is a test, whether you will obey when you have it, and whether you will obey by saying no when you don't have it.

Today's man or woman must develop a network, or code, or channel – call it what you will – by which they know they recognize that voice. The aforementioned acrostic is a beginning. But eventually one needs an even more refined instrument through which God speaks clearly. You probably won't be allowed to tell anyone how you know, and you couldn't convince them anyway. God wants a relationship with you – just you – by which you know you are not being deceived when He speaks. God “confides” in those who fear Him (Psalms 25:14).

Samuel had that. God let none of his words “fall to the ground” (1 Samuel 3:19), contrary to my experience years ago when I was learning to speak the word of the Lord. I've had to learn many lessons the hard way. It may take time to develop an intimacy and godly familiarity by which you and I can know God's voice. But it is worth waiting for and crucial to the anointing of being today's man or woman.

Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” ^{v12} *And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.”* (1 Samuel 16:11-12).

Samuel had no peace until he saw young David. But when he saw David he recognized the voice that had never let him down. *Then the Lord said, “rise and anoint him; he is the one”* (1 Samuel 16:12).

Today's man or woman recognizes God's voice – the very thing the Hebrew Christians were in danger of losing (Hebrews 5:11). The real issue is recognizing the Spirit. A good question to ask, then, is, “How long does it take to recognize the Holy Spirit?” The sooner the better. Everyone will eventually see the truth. Today's servant of Christ must learn to see early on what God is doing, how His Spirit is moving and be willing to flow with Him. Be open to the Spirit people of God and don't let your surroundings blind you to truth. His truth. Be today's man.

Be Blessed

Chief

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