

*I wrote the following story, any deficiencies are completely mine, any resemblance to someone else's creative writing is accidental and not intentional plagiarism. Today's sermon notes have a three-page biblical text addendum, as I included several chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel (pages 3-5). Pages 1 and 2 are a transcript of my sermon reimagining of the story of Samuel's call by God in more modern terms. The middle of page 2 includes a clarification and questions.*

**Hannah's story (Samuel's mother)** I love my boy, Samuel. He is an adult now. But I want to tell you what it was like back then before he was born. I was so much younger then. We had tried for years to get pregnant. Trying everything from handstands to cough syrup, we finally doctored up! It still feels like yesterday when we were bankrupting ourselves with In Vitro. After two years of paying out of pocket, I felt like we were single handedly paying for Dr. Chen's summer vacations.

Before Sam came along, all my friends were on baby number 1, 2, 3 or even 4 and here I was getting old without a baby and our life savings - gone. It is not like friends shamed me; I did a great hatchet job all by myself. But, their casual insensitivities cut right through me, and it was worse *because* they weren't trying to hurt me with their words.

Friends I could handle, but don't get me started on Peninnah. She was constantly humblebragging about *her* kids. She would tell me how her two children with their extreme smarts were just *exhausting* her because of all the extra tutors she was *forced* to hire. Does a four-year-old really need an algebra tutor? Peninnah, bless her heart, never let me forget that I was an also-ran. The relationships I built, the church we poured our lives into, and the faith we groomed, meant nothing to her. It was all about the keeping up with Joneses.

Samuel, though, came as a miracle. The kid seemed to be sunlight itself in our lives. He was a gift, pure and simple. Both of us were on the verge of giving up and God gave us Sam. I had been praying for years to be a mom, and finally, finally we were parents.

Sam was too smart for his own good. He was so curious always asking questions, and we quickly realized we could not help him flourish. He is one of those gifted kids who was so gifted that we were at a loss most of the time how to be his parents. You might be tempted to say it was a mixed blessing, but you would be wrong. His problems were a joy to manage, but we were exhausted.

Both my spouse and I lost our jobs after an extremely bad car wreck. We could only turn to our faith leaders. The community was heavily invested in High House. It was the center of our community's worship and also housed an alternative boarding school. It was a quirky place where the money flowed and certain families could have their kids get a mixture of apprenticeship, education, and faith formation. We would have lost him to the gulf of our financial woe, if not for High House. Samuel started his training right away under Eli. The financial storm passed in the years to come, I would go to have several kids, but God interceded at a most important time to put Samuel in the right place for him.

I had to remind myself often that God told me that Sam was loan and everything was in God's hands. I rejoiced to give him over to High House and to the Lord. During the recovery from the wreck, the only thing that brought me solace was singing to the Lord, and I would later go to High House often to thank Yahweh for many blessings.

I am not making excuses for giving my son to High House, but he thrived. Sam loved it. The man I mentioned earlier, Eli, in the beginning really took time to mentor Sam, but his blind spot in leadership almost ruined everything. Questions began to surface about Eli. He had gotten his two sons odd jobs and pretty soon they were pushing people around. Eli was a solid man, but the more his sons became involved in the ministry, the more things went sour. Donors and faculty kept telling him to fix it, but he turned a blind eye. The financial mismanagement was literally

tearing the school apart and the sons were even physically intimidating donors. Then there was the straight up graft, Hophni and Phineas were stealing 20% right off the top. A forensic accountant would later prove all the rumors true. Eli knew his sons were stealing, and whenever he was confronted by parents or the board, he would just shrug and come up with a semi-reasonable sounding explanation to keep the status quo and his sons in the mix

Yet for all of Eli's problems, he always had a special place in his heart for Sam. Eli felt like a dad to Sam in a way he could not be to his own kids. Eli kept Samuel close and trusted this young boy's innate wisdom, but the worries of managing his boys often disconnected him from Sam and everyone else. Surprisingly, Sam really thrived during those tumultuous years. Sam had this gnawing sense that God wanted to use him. But he could never put his finger on it. That is until God spoke.

Sam kept looking to Eli to tell him what to do, as time went on Eli was too distracted wringing his hands of his two sons, to really much of a mentor. High House always told Sam to listen to his heart, but when God started calling directly - like audible voice directly - Sam did not know what to do. Every time God literally called out to Samuel, he would rush to Eli asking "Yes, you called me?" To Eli's credit, he was able, if only for a moment, to understand that God was calling to Samuel. After several sessions of "Yes, you called?", Eli told Sam to go back to his bed and ask the Lord directly "Speak God, your servant is listening"

Sam got an answer, and it was like riding a tiger. God grabbed ahold of Sam that day and has not let go. It was exhilarating and terrifying. Sam has a rare fire in him that drives him to connect with people. After God spoke to Sam, part of the message was to curse his mentor, Eli. That was tough, but Eli demanded the whole truth of what God said. Sam reluctantly told Eli he and his son would be cut off. It's weird, but Eli actually seemed relieved when Sam told Eli about this curse. Eli had heard it many times before and now, here from this young boy, it was a special kind of repeated theme. Soon, the accreditation board shut out Eli's family and the sons met an inglorious end. And even later, Eli died in a freak accident.

But Sam has grown into a leader we can emulate. He listens to the Lord and is always reminding, even me his mom, reminding us, to listen for God and act upon God's will. As an adult Samuel, has his own struggles, a little bit like Eli did, but he is brave enough to keep pressing forward - faults and all. He never stops looking for God's voice and light in the world. Do you have the courage to be like Sam and ask "Speak God, your servant is listening?"

**Artistic License taken** L Hannah *gladly* gave Samuel to the Temple's care in the Bible . I just could not imagine most modern American parent handing their kid over to a religious boarding school, so I gave them a car wreck to create financial hardship where they would have no choice to but to "board" Samuel.

**Who do you relate more Eli, Hannah, Samuel, Peninnah or who.**

IF you feel too far down the road like Eli remember --You're never too old, never too bad, never too late and never too sick to start over with God.

IF you relate to Sam, remember to tell the whole truth. nothing but the truth so help you God.

If you more in the Hannah, remember how much God loves and answers the prayers of those who seek God.

IF you connect with Peninnah – you are loved more than you can imagine. Relax, it is just not worth the struggle you put into it.

Every day we can pray "Speak God, your servant is listening."

## **Biblical Text ---Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel (Chapters 1-3: 4:18)**

**Chapter 1** 1 There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. 3 Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. 4 Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. 6 Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. 7 This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. 8 Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

9 Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. 10 In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. 11 And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

12 As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

15 "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. 16 Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." 17 Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

18 She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. 19 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. 20 So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

**Hannah Dedicates Samuel** 21 When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, 22 Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always." 23 "Do what seems best to you," her husband Elkanah told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him. 24 After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. 25 When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, 26 and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. 27 I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. 28 So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

**Chapter 2 Hannah's Prayer** Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD;  
in the LORD my horn is lifted high.

My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.

2 "There is no one holy like the LORD;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

3 "Do not keep talking so proudly  
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,

for the LORD is a God who knows,  
 and by him deeds are weighed.  
 4 “The bows of the warriors are broken,  
 but those who stumbled are armed with strength.  
 5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food,  
 but those who were hungry are hungry no more.  
 She who was barren has borne seven children,  
 but she who has had many sons pines away.  
 6 “The LORD brings death and makes alive;  
 he brings down to the grave and raises up.  
 7 The LORD sends poverty and wealth;  
 he humbles and he exalts.  
 8 He raises the poor from the dust  
 and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
 he seats them with princes  
 and has them inherit a throne of honor.  
 “For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’s;  
 on them he has set the world.  
 9 He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,  
 but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.  
 “It is not by strength that one prevails;  
 10 those who oppose the LORD will be broken.  
 The Most High will thunder from heaven;  
 the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.  
 “He will give strength to his king  
 and exalt the horn of his anointed.”  
 11 Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the LORD under Eli the priest.

***Eli’s Wicked Sons*** <sup>12</sup> Eli’s sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD. <sup>13</sup> Now it was the practice of the priests that, whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled <sup>14</sup> and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot. Whatever the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. <sup>15</sup> But even before the fat was burned, the priest’s servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, “Give the priest some meat to roast; he won’t accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.” <sup>16</sup> If the person said to him, “Let the fat be burned first, and then take whatever you want,” the servant would answer, “No, hand it over now; if you don’t, I’ll take it by force.” <sup>17</sup> This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD’s sight, for they were treating the LORD’s offering with contempt. <sup>18</sup> But Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod. <sup>19</sup> Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. <sup>20</sup> Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.” Then they would go home. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

<sup>22</sup> Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>23</sup> So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. <sup>24</sup> No, my sons; the report I hear spreading among the LORD’s people is not good. <sup>25</sup> If one person sins against another, God may mediate for the offender; but if anyone sins against the LORD, who will intercede for them?” His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’s will to put them to death. <sup>26</sup> And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people. Prophecy Against the House of Eli. <sup>27</sup> Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “This is what

the LORD says: ‘Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestor’s family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh?’<sup>28</sup> I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your ancestor’s family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. <sup>29</sup>Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?’ <sup>30</sup>“Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. <sup>31</sup>The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age, <sup>32</sup>and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. <sup>33</sup>Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life. <sup>34</sup>“And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day. <sup>35</sup>I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always. <sup>36</sup>Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread and plead, “Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat.””

### ***The LORD Calls Samuel (chapter 3). Lectionary reading draws from this chapter***

<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 house 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. <sup>6</sup>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.” <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

<sup>8</sup>A third time the LORD called, “Samuel!” 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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

<sup>11</sup>And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. <sup>12</sup>At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. <sup>13</sup>For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God,<sup>[1]</sup> and he failed to restrain them. <sup>14</sup>Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’” <sup>15</sup>Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, <sup>16</sup>but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” Samuel answered, “Here I am.” <sup>17</sup>“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.” <sup>18</sup>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.” <sup>19</sup>The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. <sup>20</sup>And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. <sup>21</sup>The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

***Eli’s death Chapter 4:18*** When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years.