



Samuel Ministered Before the Lord Even as a Child

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

Just over 3000 years ago a man named Elkanah lived in the mountains of Ephraim. He had two wives. One, Peninnah, bore children. The other, Hannah, was barren. Every year Elkanah would take his family to Shiloh, to the house of the Lord, to offer their vows and sacrifices. Every year Hannah would weep and pray because of her barrenness. Finally, while at the house of the Lord, Hannah prayed, "O Lord of hosts, if you will ... give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life" (**I Samuel 1:11**, ESV). The Lord heard her prayer and granted Hannah a son. She named him Samuel. Samuel became one of the great men of God. He was a Levite, a prophet and a judge. We see a great deal of Samuel's life, but perhaps one of the greatest statements about Samuel is found in **I Samuel 2:18**: "But Samuel ministered before the Lord, even as a child" (NKJV). This week is our VBS. Our theme is "Life Saving Lessons from Water." Each day, our goal is to learn more about God's plan for saving us as demonstrated by stories surrounding water. Stories like Noah and the flood, Jonah and the Great Fish, Baby Moses in the Nile, Israel crossing the Red Sea, and Naaman dipping in the Jordan. While we will have adult classes, our focus is on teaching children. They cannot really serve God, can they? They are too young, aren't they? Yet, here is Samuel who ministered before the Lord, even as a child. I want to examine four key factors in Samuel's childhood that caused him to serve as a child and stuck with him into adulthood, through this, I hope to impress you with the great need to start your children off on the right foot. Our VBS will be a big help in this.

Discussion:

- I. Hannah started Samuel early.
 - A. When Hannah prayed for a child in **I Samuel 1:11**, she simply said she would devote the child to the Lord. There was no specified time for giving him to the priests. In fact, in the vow itself, there was no mention of Samuel going to be with the priests at all. Rather, Hannah vowed Samuel would be a Nazirite according to the laws found in **Numbers 6:1ff**.
 - B. Yet, at the time Hannah weaned Samuel (about three years old), she took him to the tabernacle to minister before the Lord—something Levites typically did around age 30 (**Numbers 4:3, 23, 30, 39**). Samuel was a little child. Yet, he was ministering before the Lord.
 - C. How easily Hannah might have said, "He is only a child. He will have plenty of time to minister when he is older." Hannah could have kept her son to herself saying, "We need to allow him to be a child. He only gets to do it once. I need to let him be little." But Hannah did not. She did not deprive her boy. She nursed and nurtured him. But she challenged him to be more than a child.
 - D. I am not asking parents to give their children away or to send their sons to "preacher training" instead of school. Neither has God asked any of these things. What I am asking is for parents of children at just about any age to realize they have a little servant in their midst. We need to be parents like Hannah and challenge our children to be more than just children. They need to be servants. I know your children cannot do what only adults can do, but there are things children can do. Samuel opened the doors to the tabernacle (**I Samuel 3:15**). Let your children serve before the Lord in any way they can. Make sure they are at VBS this week and have them invite friends. Take them to visit people in the hospital or deliver food to those in need. Have them write notes of encouragement to their friends, to wayward members, and even to guests.
- II. Samuel grew in favor with God and men.
 - A. According to **I Samuel 2:26**, Samuel grew in stature. But there is nothing impressive about that. Any child of three should grow in stature. But he also grew in favor with God and man. That means he was pleasant, agreeable, and becoming to both God and man. He was a joy to be around. He was a blessing in the lives of those around him.
 - B. I believe each and every one of us would like this to be said about ourselves and our children. I know I do. I want people to enjoy being around me. And nothing makes me happier than to hear someone say they enjoy being around my children. So, I have to ask myself what caused Samuel to grow in favor before God and men? I believe the answer to this question is found through our first point. Samuel started early. Samuel did not wait until he was done growing in stature to start growing in favor. This runs contrary to our natural

inclinations and societal expectations. We want to baby our children. We want to allow them to experience the joys of childhood as long as possible. In too many cases, our children do not mature as they can.

- C. I want to talk both to children and parents here. If you want to grow in favor with God and man or want your children to, learn from Samuel. Challenge yourself to move beyond the societal expectations for someone your age. Challenge yourself to grow to be more than you are now. Keep in mind, Samuel was three or four years old when he began ministering before the Lord. If you are a parent, expect more from your child. If you are the child, expect more from yourself. This may sound odd. But ask yourself this question: have you ever heard of a child being praised simply because he acted his age? I haven't. But I have heard many praised because they are "mature beyond their years." It works the same today as it did with Samuel.

III. Samuel was willing to serve others.

- A. In this point, while it applies to all, I want to focus on young people. I am talking to all children living in the home. If you can grasp anything I am saying and learn from it, I am talking to you. One of the strongest keys in Samuel's life is that he was willing to serve—even as a child. Too many children and young people (and even adults) are unwilling to serve. They only grumble when they are asked to do anything. But Samuel was willing to serve.
- B. Note his willingness in **I Samuel 3:1-9**. Samuel was unaware that the Lord spoke directly to anyone. So, when he heard his name, he believed Eli had called him. Put yourself in Samuel's shoes and tell me how you would have reacted. You are asleep and somebody calls you. You run to him and he says, "It wasn't me." Then he does it again. Then he does it a third time. (Keep in mind, from Samuel's perspective who else could it be but Eli?) Yet, each time Samuel immediately ran to Eli without complaining or murmuring. Why? He was willing to serve.
- C. In your homes, you must be willing to serve. When your parents ask you to do something, do not back talk them. Do not murmur. Do not complain. Instead, comply. Even if you believe they ask too much of you. Whatever reason you might come up with for trying to keep from serving, submitting to, and obeying your parents is invalid, you need to follow in Samuel's footsteps and be a willing servant. The only exception is if your parents ask you to disobey God. Remember **Ephesians 6:1-3**. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right" (ESV). Are you willing to serve?

IV. Eli trained Samuel to listen to God and serve Him.

- A. Finally, Eli taught Samuel one of the greatest lessons of his life in **I Samuel 3:9-10**. When the Lord speaks, you listen. We must learn this lesson. You, children and young people, must learn this lesson. When the Lord speaks, we are His servants and we must listen.
- B. You realize that Samuel did not like what he heard from the Lord. He did not like to hear that his master and mentor, Eli, was going to be punished and he did not want to relay the message to Eli (**I Samuel 3:15**). But that was the Lord's message and Samuel had to tell it.
- C. Sometimes we may not like what the Lord says. He tells us that we cannot do all the things that we may want to do, claiming that the desires of our flesh lead to sin (**James 1:14**). He tells us that we cannot say everything we may want, but that we are to control our tongues (**Ephesians 4:19**). He tells us that we cannot hang out and be best friends with just anyone we may want to because bad company corrupts good morals (**I Corinthians 15:33**). We are not the master, we are the servants. When the Lord speaks, we must listen and obey.
- D. Remember **James 1:19**? While we often use that verse as a pattern for our communications with one another, primarily that passage is about our relationship with God and is further explained in **vss. 20-22**. We are to accept what God says and do it, without question. We need to approach the word of God saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Conclusion:

No matter how old or young you are, do not wait until you grow up to use what you have learned. Use it right now. If Samuel could minister before the Lord, even as a child, so can you. Will you be a minister before the Lord, growing in favor with God and man, willing to serve and accepting God's authority without question? If so, then you will be a great servant as Samuel.