

“You’re Invited To...Yield” (Prayer: The Extraordinary Invitation – Pt. 5)
(1 Samuel 3:1-10)

- **A Praying Mother & A Yielded Son**

- This is our last Sunday in this series on **Prayer**, so let’s *pause* and *pray* **The Lord’s Prayer**.
- *Picture this:* it’s a chaotic crossroads in Israel’s history, when God begins to intervene through the desperate prayer of a woman who wants to be a mother—and once she *becomes* a mother, she *completely yields her son into the hands of God*. She lived in the final days of *the Judges*, when it was said: **“In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” (Judges 21:25 NLT)** In those days, God finally raised up a new leader who’d pave the way for the next era. 1 Samuel begins with the story of Hannah; she was downcast and heartbroken after years of ridicule for being unable to have children. One day, she went to the Tabernacle to pray. In desperation, she *poured out her heart to the Lord* and made a vow: **“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...” (1 Sam. 1:11)** She prayed with such anguish that the Priest Eli scolded her for being drunk—but once she explained, he blessed her. God answered her prayer with a yes. Hannah bore a son. Once he was weaned, she returned to Eli, dedicated the boy to the Lord, and he remained there all his life to minister in God’s house.
- This is how we meet *Samuel*, whose name means “*heard by God*.” Samuel was the last Judge and one of the greatest prophets of Israel; he’s the one who raised up the first king, Saul, and after Saul failed, Samuel anointed Israel’s greatest king, David.
- When Samuel was still a young boy, we get one of the greatest stories of *listening prayer* in the Bible: **The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 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. Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 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. 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." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Sam. 3:1-10)

- What a story, and what a prayer: **"Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."** Now, the message that Samuel got from the Lord was not an easy one—he had some bad news for his mentor, Eli. But ultimately, Samuel listens, and obeys, and grows to become a great prophet and leader of Israel, and even more, a friend of God.
- **Hearing From & Yielding To God**
 - Today, we come to the final part of our prayer series, **P (Pause & Praise) R (Repent) A (Ask) Y (Yield)**. *Yielding to God*, is such a crucial aspect of prayer, that if we engage in these other types of prayer, but we neglect this, we could almost *miss the whole point*. John Eldredge said it well: **"What God is after is a person so yielded to Him, so completely surrendered, that his (or her) heart is easily moved by the Spirit of God to the purposes of God."**
 - If *"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done"* is the heart of Jesus' prayer, if this is the destiny we were created for—then we are *desperately dependent* on God to lead us. But how can we follow God if we're not hearing from Him? And how can we hear from God if we're not listening to Him? And how can we listen to God if we're not seeking Him? And how can we expect God to direct us if we really don't have a heart ready to *yield* to Him in the first place?

- How many people in this world, entrusted with responsibility and influence of any kind, even in the Church, go through their daily lives more or less doing what they think is best *in their own eyes*—never really checking in with God for direction, just following the next best idea and occasionally asking God to bless it? Compare that with the great leaders of faith, people they called “friends of God”: Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, all the way to *Jesus the Son of God*. How did *they* model a life *yielded* to God? Look at this example from David: ***In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord. “Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked. The Lord said, “Go up.” David asked, “Where shall I go?” “To Hebron,” the Lord answered. So David went up there... (2 Sam. 2:1-3)*** There weren’t *many* good kings in Israel—but all the good kings were the ones who *inquired of the Lord*.
- Maybe it was *rare* in the days of Israel, but when you read the whole Bible, as it culminates with Christ and the Church, it’s obvious: *God wants this kind of relationship with all of us!* Adam and Eve were designed for *friendship with God*. Jesus came to restore that! Listen to His invitation to us: ***“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” (Rev. 3:20)*** We’re called to closest fellowship with God—but you can’t have fellowship without conversation and listening—this is where *Yield* comes in.
- Now, if this is the case, why does it sometimes seem so *hard* to hear from God? How many of us hear a story where someone says, *God said this to me*, and we think, *well that’s nice but God doesn’t really speak to me like that*.
- Dallas Willard wrote a spiritual classic, *Hearing God* where he reflects on all of this. He said we tend to reduce prayer to a *transactional* enterprise—we want it to be a cosmic ATM or vending machine, a crystal ball. We want to give an input, get an output, on our terms and timeline. But God wants so much more: He wants lifelong partnership. Dallas calls it *developing a conversational relationship with God*. That’s the real meaning of *praying without ceasing*.
- The difficulty is right there in Samuel’s story: Samuel got what so many of us beg for—*God, if just speak to me plainly!* But Samuel couldn’t recognize it! He had

never heard from God, it took time for him to even realize it. That's how it goes with us: it actually takes *practice*, in a sense, to hear from God—it takes trial and error, ongoing experience to recognize God's voice, all the ways He speaks to us. A child is not born with the capacity to hold a conversation with her parents—it takes time, growth, experience to recognize their voice, to understand, communicate, obey. It's not so different with God: it takes time learning His Word, recognizing His voice in our lives—time that some are never willing to give, with the result being, they're not very attentive or yielded to His communication.

- You see, God will on special occasions get our attention through a “burning bush”—something *shocking and unforgettable*—but the whole point of that *burning bush* is to get us into a daily walk with Him where we're listening to His (often) *still, small voice*. God's desire as we mature is that we become aware of the simple, daily *conversation*—where we learn to differentiate between the voice of our flesh (because it's sinful), and the voice of the Enemy (because it's a lie), and the voice of Truth—His voice (because it carries that gentle, holy weight that we've become accustomed to, because it aligns with His revealed will in Scripture, and because we've come to know by experience the fruit of *yielding* to it.)
- That's not all: along the way, we need lots of *Eli's* in our life—models who are further along, who help us come to understand, test, and practice this in our lives. We need the whole community of faith God has provided in order to grow in a conversational relationship with God.
- Eli the Priest was by no means the *ideal* role model, he had lots of flaws and mistakes—but he knew enough to give Samuel this crucial advice. He told him to respond: **“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”** “Listen” in the Bible means more than just *hear*. You can *hear* something, and be nowhere near responding properly. When the Bible says “listen” it really means *hear and obey*. Maybe you've heard the word, **“Shema”**—it describes the greatest commandment in the Bible: **“Hear (Shema) O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.”** (Deut. 6:4-5) It's the same word, *Shema*, when Samuel prays, *Speak, Lord, your servant is listening—I'm ready to hear you and follow you.*

- **Blank Check**

- The goal is that we become so attuned to His presence and His guidance, that we *give God a “blank check” of obedience, we give Him a “preemptive Yes.”* This doesn’t come naturally. It takes lots of growth, lots of grace, and lots of trial and error.
- I can think of profound moments of decision that changed the course of my life, and I don’t know *where I’d be* without His guidance! Emily and I had been dating throughout high school and college, we were head-over-heels, we knew this was “it”! But I wanted to know *when*. Lord, *when is the right time to propose and take the next step?* I could easily follow my *feelings*, they were LOUD—but that’s not the way of wisdom, I wanted *God’s timing!* (Even if it drove Emily crazy waiting for me to figure it out!) It was kind of stressful for a college kid, to be honest. But I just kept praying, and telling her to wait—I knew somehow, God was going to make it clear on His terms when the time was right—and it happened when I wasn’t looking for it. We were serving together on a youth mission trip in the Bronx. One night at the host home we were all staying in, I had to do my summer homework in our down time. Emily saw me working overtime, kind of worn out and probably trying too hard. She sat down beside me and said, *How can I help you?* She grabbed my book and said, *Here, let me read it to you.* And as she was sitting there, helping me *not* pay attention to my homework—I looked at her, *and out of nowhere, deep inside I felt that nudge from God saying, “It’s time.”* That was it! It was the *most gentle impression*, but the peace that surpasses understanding was so clear *I knew* God was giving me the green light. Within a week, we were engaged!
- **God will speak to you, in His way, in His timing, if you are willing to yield to Him.** Sometimes it’s an image, a vision, a dream. Sometimes it’s a word, a phrase He puts in your mind. Sometimes it’s just a *sense*, an impression, with no words. Sometimes it’s external, sometimes it’s internal. And we always need to test in against His Word—personal words from God will never contradict His revealed Word in Scripture. And we need to seek the wise counsel of the faith community He places around us. It’s a journey. But God wants us to grow in a conversational

relationship with Him. Because by the redeeming work of Christ, we are now His servants, His children, His *friends*. And it's not just for our sake; it's for the sake of *His Kingdom*. Dallas Willard wrote: **"Individually, the disciple and friend of Jesus who has learned to work shoulder to shoulder with their Lord stands in this world as a point of contact between heaven and earth, a kind of Jacob's ladder... Thus the disciple stands as an envoy or a receiver by which the kingdom of God is conveyed into every quarter of human affairs."** (D. Willard)

- **A Commitment to Pray**

- The goal in this series was to inspire use to see *the power of prayer* for God's people and to *equip us* to walk it out. This coming year, we want to launch more prayer groups and increase our prayer ministry. We're forming a team this June to lead our prayer ministry at Connection. Looking ahead, as we conclude our 25-year celebration this fall and step into the next 25, you're going to be invited to Pray365: we're going to take shifts to cover our church and community in prayer at least 1 hour every day, all year. If any of this interests you, if you feel God tugging you, here's an opportunity to *yield* and get involved! Every P.R.A.Y. bookmark has a **QR code**, it's on the screen too—scan it, and we'll get in touch with you to get involved in the work prayer. Because when God's people live a life of prayer, *we will see God's Kingdom in tangible ways*.
- Let's finish with one last of how powerful this can be: when you have time on your own, do yourself a favor and look up the *extraordinary* story of the **Hebrides Revival**. On these small islands in Scotland, in the devastation WWII, 2 elderly sisters were heartbroken by the spiritual wasteland around them. Churches were empty, young people were nowhere to be found, challenges were everywhere. At 84 and 82, Peggy Smith was blind, Christine was crippled with arthritis. They couldn't even leave the house. But they had big faith and they knew how to pray. They began to pray in earnest, based on the promises of Scripture, several days a week, hours at a time, even late into the night—that God would bring revival and reach the next generation on their island. One night, God showed them *it was coming soon*, so they mobilized people from church to pray with them. Sometimes, the prayers would last from 10pm to 3am. When the time was right, they invited an

evangelist named Duncan Campbell to come preach for several weeks. The turnout was small the first night at their country church. But at the end of the sermon, they felt led to stay again and to pray into the night. And by His own mysterious will, God brought a profound breakthrough: late that evening, as they left the service, something literally shifted in the atmosphere of their community. People all over the island, in homes, on roads, in prisons, in bars, felt this inexplicable *awareness* of God's presence and the need for repentance. They showed up to churches in droves the next morning, hundreds and hundreds of people, with *no invitation whatsoever*, just ready to surrender their lives to Jesus! The waves of this spontaneous revival went on for years, utterly transforming the islands—to the point where night clubs were shut down, prisons were emptied, and many of the next generation *gave their lives to ministry*. I would have trouble believing it myself, if it weren't for the hundreds of documented testimonies and the obvious, measurable transformation—and the other examples of similar moves of God through history! But the whole point is, this historic revival began with *2 praying sisters, who had no physical strength*, but they knew the power of prayer. **What could happen if we believed that we could pray like this too?** I'm willing to learn, and wait, and do whatever it takes to find out.