

## A New Year's Message from God – For You!

1. Warm-up Question: What's something you want to do more of – or less of – as you move into the New Year? We'll talk about deep stuff in a second. For now keep it light and simple. What's something simple you want to do more (or less) of?
2. The start of a New Year is a good time to step back and evaluate how we're doing and what might need to change. Suppose God wanted to say something important to you at this moment in your life, as you take stock of where you are. Would you be able to hear it? Our Scripture passage this week is all about hearing God. Read First Samuel 3:1-10, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Verse 1 says, "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." When we read the Bible, we get a sense that God was very active in the earthly realm back then, often intervening with special messages and miracles. Do you think God is less active in our time? Why or why not?
  - b. Jeff suggested the word of the Lord was rare in the time of Eli and Samuel because people weren't paying attention. He noted a passage of Scripture where Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah as saying, "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them." Matthew 13:14. What kinds of things tend to interrupt our ability to hear God's voice?
  - c. I Samuel 3:3 says, "The lamp of God had not . . . gone out." What's the significance of that?
  - d. If God wanted to say something to Samuel, why didn't God just say it? Why was it necessary for Samuel first to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening?"
  - e. Jeff reminded us of a Bible story where the prophet Elijah got discouraged and fled to the wilderness to listen for God. Elijah encountered a windstorm, an earthquake, and a forest fire. He thought surely God would speak loudly through one of these dramatic events. But nothing. It wasn't until the sheer quiet that followed that Elijah was able to hear God's "gentle whisper." I Kings 19:12. What point is this Bible story trying to make?
  - f. Isaiah 30:21 says, "When you turn to the right or to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" Tell us about a time when you felt God was really speaking to you. How did you know it was God? What did God say? How did you respond?
3. As an experiment in listening to God, Jeff walked us through three different examples of things God might want to say to us. He asked us each to consider which of these

messages most resonated with our hearts. Let's walk through those three example messages. **Message #1 from God – Slow down and breathe.**

- a. In your life right now, do you feel you're moving too fast, too slow, or about right? Explain your answer.
  - b. If you feel you're doing too much, tell us why it's so hard for you to slow down?
  - c. If you feel you are, in fact, making ample room to breathe, rest, and renew, what suggestions would you have for those who struggle to slow down? What has helped you to set a good pace?
  - d. Hard work is virtue. And there are times when God wants us to hustle and be intense. How do we know when to be intense and when to pull back?
4. **Message #2 from God – I love what you're doing, how you're living, and the positive difference you're making. Keep doing what you're doing.** "Well done good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of the Lord." Matthew 25:23.
- a. Some of us have learned to think of God as a stern task master who is never satisfied, always harping on us, and no matter what we do, it's never enough. Seeing God that way can become exhausting. As best you understand, is God demanding? If so, how demanding?
  - b. As God looks down on your life right now, what two or three words do you imagine God would use to describe how God feels about your life?
  - c. Are you ever able to feel God's pleasure and appreciation? What's something you think God genuinely appreciates about you?
5. No matter how much God appreciates us, there are times when we need to be challenged. For some of us, we may need . . . **Message #3 from God – You're in a rut; you're stuck. You need to snap out of it and make some changes.**
- a. Is there an area of your life where you feel stuck? Tell us about it.
  - b. Think about times in your life when you were really stuck. When we get stuck, why is it so hard to break out and make positive changes?
  - c. Think about a time in your life when you were able to get unstuck. What allowed you to get unstuck?
6. Which of the three example messages above comes closest to what you think God might most want to say to you right now? How do you feel about that message? What's something concrete you can do to be responsive to what God's saying to you?



## **I Samuel 3:1-11**

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <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!" and he said, "Here I am!" <sup>5</sup>and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

<sup>11</sup>Then the LORD [spoke] to Samuel. . . .