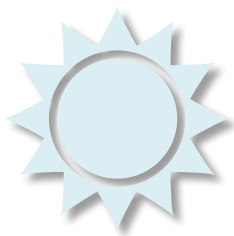


Transformational
Relationships



JUBILEE SERIES

ADULT TEACHER'S MANUAL
LARGE PRINT
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Adult Teacher's Manual Large Print

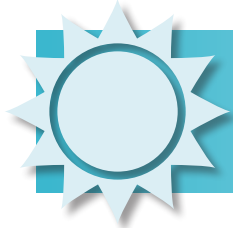
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IT IS NOT GOOD . . .

by Robin Johnston

Readers do not get far into Genesis before they encounter a cadence crafted by the writer, “And God said . . . and it was good.” The writer uses this refrain as an organizing principle as he succinctly captures the entire Creation week into one chapter. That rhythm continues into chapter 2 until readers run into “It is not good . . .” (Genesis 2:18). The cadence abruptly stops. The writer’s jarring ending to the soothing rhythm of Creation draws readers up short. He wants readers to know that something is wrong in Paradise. That something is this: it is not good for man to be alone. And what follows is the creation of Eve from Adam’s side. Without doubt this passage is fundamental to understanding the purpose and nature of marriage, but it has a wider application.

Humans were designed for relationships and not only relationships with God. Humans were designed to be in relationship with each other. We need each other. We are by nature social creatures. It is one of God’s gifts to humanity. And like all gifts it has two sides.

Not all relationships are equal. In fact, some tend to be detrimental. Samson’s relationship with Delilah serves as a prototypical harmful relationship. His involvement with her led to a series of poor choices by Samson, and as a result he reaped the painful consequences of those choices. All of us have at one time or

another experienced difficult and sometimes even harmful relationships.

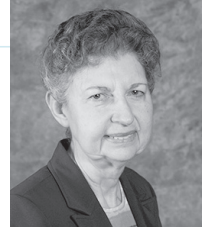
However, the Bible is filled with stories of relationships that had the opposite effect. Those relationships demonstrated how believers helped to draw each other closer to God, they showed how to encourage others to reach their full potential, and they offered comfort during difficult life situations.

This quarters’ lessons focus on transformational relationships across a wide spectrum of time and situations. They speak to issues such as the proper mentoring of protégés, how to believe in and reclaim someone who has made bad choices, and how to encourage someone to take a stand in a potentially difficult circumstance. Overall they demonstrate how much we need each other and how the investments we make in relationships yield impressive dividends.

We should never forget, however, that relationships are costly. They often force us out of our comfort zones. They have a tendency to intrude into what we think of as our “private” space. They are often messy and don’t work out the way we thought they should. But we should remember that a lack of relationships has its own very real cost. In the end, life is vastly better with them than without them. For this reason we can echo those long-ago words in Genesis: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

COMMITMENT

by Karen Myers



Lasting relationships require commitment. Although it may seem that commitment is waning in today's society, it is still alive and well, especially in the lives of Christians. Marion Gunn, father of our children's editor, Melanie Claborn, is an exceptional example of being committed to his wife, even after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. For approximately three years, Sister Gunn lived in the Alzheimer's ward of a care facility near the family home. Nearly every day, Brother Gunn would go to visit her in the morning and would feed her breakfast. Then he would spend the remainder of the day with her, feeding her each meal. On days he was unable to go, he arranged for someone else to take care of feeding her.

Because of Brother Gunn's faithful attention to his wife, someone notified the newspaper and a news reporter wrote about them in an article published in the local community paper. Brother Gunn could not understand why anyone would think his actions were so unusual. He thought any husband in that situation would do the same.

Although as of this writing it has been more than ten years since Sister Gunn passed away, he still sometimes dreams about her. In reporting the event to his daughter, he will say, "I dreamed about my angel last night." As the Song of Solomon 8:7 says, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

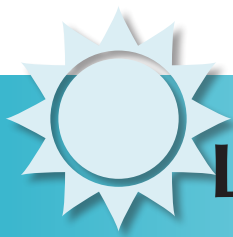
In this quarter's lesson "Back to Bethlehem," why was Ruth willing to leave her father, her mother, and her native country to accompany Naomi, her mother-in-law, to a strange land and an uncertain future? Ruth was committed to Naomi because she loved her. And

because of Naomi's witness, Ruth embraced Naomi's God as her own: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). When the two women arrived in Judah, Ruth willingly went to find a field in which to glean barley for their sustenance. God directed her steps to the field of Boaz, where the servant in charge of the reapers allowed her to glean. While in the field that day, she met Boaz, who became her kinsman-redeemer. God rewarded Ruth's commitment.

How was Joshua able to keep his faith that the Israelites would one day go into the Promised Land, though the majority of the Israelites let fear and unbelief hold them back from God's promise? They were right at the border and could have entered in at that time, but they refused. Instead of enjoying those colossal grapes, honey, milk, and other bounty of the land, they had to wander in the wilderness for another forty years. And Joshua had to walk along with them even though he had faith to believe they could conquer the land.

Joshua was committed to God and to his mentor, Moses. His faith, love, and commitment brought him back to the Promised Land forty years later, not as a spy, but as the new leader of the Israelites. The unbelievers had died in the wilderness. Those at the border this time were willing to cross over and, with God's help, to conquer the land. Joshua's faith and commitment were rewarded, though the reward was delayed.

In studying the biblical characters spotlighted this quarter, we can learn valuable life lessons from their experiences. When our love for God is the foundation of our commitment, we will develop a lasting relationship with Him.



FOCUS VERSE

I Samuel 3:9

Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

LESSON TEXT

I Samuel 3:1-10

1 And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.

2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;

4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.

5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.



FOCUS THOUGHT

When we learn to listen to the voice of authority, it is much easier to hear the voice of God.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Biblical Submission to Authority

The decade of the sixties was a time of much cultural rebellion and resistance to—and often defiance of—authority. It was a time in North American history when the clothing styles, music, and cultural mores were challenged, changed, and stretched to the limits because of a disbelief in obeying or submitting to authorities.

One essay author observed, “Historians tend to portray the 1950s as a decade of prosperity, conformity, and consensus, and the 1960s as a decade of turbulence, protest, and disillusionment” (“The ‘50s and ‘60s: Decades of Prosperity and Protest [DBQ],” www.apstudynotes.org, accessed February 24, 2015).

Paul wrote, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1). (See also I Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 5:1;

I Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; Hebrews 6:12; I Peter 3:13.) Interestingly, the Greek word translated in these verses as “follow” or “followers” means “to imitate” or to “be imitators.” We are to “imitate” those who lead us as they “imitate” Jesus Christ.

Now more than fifty years later, cultural problems have raised new reasons to view authority figures with suspicion—sexual misbehavior among church and public authority figures; scandals involving the Roman Catholic Church priesthood and the hierarchy’s efforts to cover up or deflect the problem; and lack of trust in lying politicians. How are we to obey the Scriptures with respect and obedience and yet balance our obedience with reason?

The solution is straightforward: Follow authorities as they follow acceptable, godly principles.

OUTLINE

I. TRAINING FOR THE CALL

- A. Served Eli
- B. Served in the Tabernacle

II. GOD’S CALL

- A. Samuel Did Not Recognize the Voice of God
- B. God Was Persistent in Calling
- C. Eli and Samuel Learned to Listen
- D. Samuel Accepted the Call
- E. Eli Sought to Hear the Message from the Lord

III. GOD STILL CALLS

- A. The Value of Being Available
- B. The Value of a Spiritual Mentor
- C. The Value of Listening

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Samuel owed his life to the fact that God listened to his mother’s prayers. Like many barren women such as Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, Hannah desperately wanted a child.

Although loved by her husband, she faced the constant taunts of her adversary Peninnah. Hannah’s yearly visit to the house of the Lord was a time for weeping and fasting rather than a celebration of the gift of life.

Wrestling with the bitterness of her barrenness rather than tasting the food and drink of the feast, Hannah prayed for a son, promising that the boy would serve the Lord all the days of his life. Even in the act of pouring out her soul to the Lord, she faced Eli’s rebuke when he mistook her desperate prayer for drunkenness. However, when Eli truly understood her plight, he felt compassion for her and said, “Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (I Samuel 1:17).

The Lord took note of Hannah and responded to her request. When He gave her a son of promise, she honored her vow. She dedicated her son Samuel to the service of the Lord. Now that the Lord had listened to Hannah, it was time for Samuel to hear the voice of the Lord at a time when prophecy was rare.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. TRAINING FOR THE CALL

A. Served Eli

“And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision” (1 Samuel 3:1).

Before Samuel could learn to hear the voice of the Lord and become a great prophet, he had to follow the instructions of Eli. At first, Samuel must have felt confused at having this new authority figure in his life. Although his mother had probably told him the story of her vow many times, he now had to fulfill the commitment she had made. But Hannah’s obedience to God set a fine example for Samuel. He learned to obey the voice of Eli, and ultimately to hear and obey the voice of God. Samuel’s miraculous birth made him unique, but his ability to tune into the divine frequency would further set him apart from others. At this time, the word of the Lord proved to be a rare and precious commodity. Few people saw visions or heard from God. But as Eli’s eyes began to dim spiritually and physically, God gave Samuel special insight into His plan.

B. Served in the Tabernacle

Not only was Samuel different from Eli and his two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, but also he was different from the other children in the Tabernacle. It is highly possible Samuel was not the only child dedicated to the service of the Lord. Other parents may have committed their children to godly service, and perhaps orphans had found a home in the house of God. Each of them worked for the Lord, but Samuel had a higher purpose.

Samuel’s Tabernacle service did not end when he came of age. Even though Samuel might have reasoned he could break a vow he did not make, he chose to honor his mother and his God. Just as the Lord opened his mother’s womb so she could conceive, God opened Samuel’s ears so he could hear the word of the Lord and be more than just another child or adult serving in the Tabernacle. Samuel would be a prophet who heard, obeyed, and spoke the word of God.

II. GOD’S CALL

A. Samuel Did Not Recognize the Voice of God

In spite of his godly heritage and his work in the Tabernacle, Samuel did not recognize the voice of the Lord when He called to him one night. Each time the Lord spoke to Samuel, he thought Eli was summoning him. Samuel had to learn that being in the house of God and submitting to his parents and the man of God did not mean he completely understood the things of God. Yet the Lord chose to reach out to him. In obedience Samuel submitted himself to authority and came running when he thought Eli had called. But God had a higher calling for Samuel. The eyes of Eli had begun to fade, but God wanted to open Samuel’s eyes and ears to spiritual realities.

B. God Was Persistent in Calling

In repeatedly calling Samuel, God matched the dogged determination of Hannah’s prayer. She had implored God for a son, and now God had something important to share with the boy. God continued reaching out to Samuel even though Samuel failed to fully comprehend the message. When God has a call on our lives, He will not give up. He will continue to pursue us. God is not content for us to faithfully serve Him and spend time in His house. God wants us to get to know Him. Samuel did not know the Lord, and the Lord desired to change that. He had big plans for Samuel, and he kept calling until Samuel answered.

C. Eli and Samuel Learned to Listen

Samuel knew to come running when he was called, but God wanted to transform his obedience into the ability to hear and understand the voice of God. Somewhere along the way, Eli had lost this ability. When Samuel mistakenly thought Eli had called him, the old priest sent the boy back to bed. Although the Bible does not state that Eli was as wicked as his sons, he had fallen short of God’s plan for his life, his sons, and for the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Samuel’s arrival presented Eli with a chance to reconnect with God. Although the Lord did not speak to him, he could guide the young man God had sent to him.

Eli learned an important lesson by listening to Samuel. Although Eli held prestige

because he was God's priest at the Tabernacle of Shiloh, his pedigree and his lifetime of experience had not brought him as close to God as he should have been. Eli's plight calls to mind Jesus' words about children when His disciples questioned Him concerning who was the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven: "And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" (Matthew 18:2-5). As a little child, Samuel had shown the humility Eli's sons lacked. Listening to Samuel brought Eli closer to God.

Unfortunately, many have failed to respond properly to children who recognize the work of the Spirit. Jesus criticized the chief priests and the scribes for being dismissive of children. When the children saw the healing power of Jesus and cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David," these religious leaders became upset (Matthew 21:15). In response to their bad attitudes, Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2, "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" (Matthew 21:16).

Although some individuals may fear to bring children into a world filled with grief and troubles, perhaps it would be better to realize the power of children to perfect praise in an imperfect world. Maybe children should be seen as restorers of visions and the prophetic voice. When Eli perceived that God was calling Samuel, he began to see Samuel's potential.

Being a child, Samuel did not know who was calling or how to respond. Credit Eli with being a good mentor who recognized that God wanted to do something in the life of his young charge. For all the criticism we might level at Eli, we should remember he served as a pivotal figure in the life of Samuel. Although Eli failed his own sons, God gave him another chance to mentor a young man.

Samuel looked to Eli for guidance, and Eli told him the proper response: "Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth" (I Samuel 3:9). God not only wanted Samuel to hear Him, but He desired to have his full attention. By learning

to devote himself to the things of God and by listening to Eli, Samuel was able to focus on the special word the Lord had for him.

D. Samuel Accepted the Call

God desired that Samuel be a prophet. The Bible describes the call narratives of several prophets in the Scriptures. Elijah called Elisha into God's service (I Kings 19:19-21). Isaiah envisioned a majestic scene, causing him to declare himself unworthy because of his unclean lips (Isaiah 6). Samuel, however, was much younger when he received his call to become a prophet of the Lord. We can only imagine Samuel's surprise at learning the Lord was the one speaking to him. His pulse must have quickened, and he probably felt nervous when he returned to his room. Nevertheless he accepted his call to enter the ministry as God's prophet. Whereas Isaiah received a splendid vision of the glory of God, Samuel received a word of judgment against the house of Eli.

E. Eli Sought to Hear the Message from the Lord

The next morning when Eli called for Samuel, the old priest implored the young prophet to tell him the word from the Lord. Perhaps nervous about his first prophecy being so negative, Samuel "feared to shew Eli the vision" (I Samuel 3:15). But when Eli insisted, Samuel shared the sad message of judgment God had directed toward his mentor.

Samuel need not have been fearful to tell Eli what God had revealed to him, for a man of God had previously informed Eli of the coming judgment upon his house. (See I Samuel 2:27-36.) The sins of Eli's sons are described in I Samuel 2:12-17, 22. In I Samuel 2:23-25, Eli made a feeble attempt to reprove his sons, but they showed no remorse and did not change their ways. Yet Eli allowed them to continue in their positions.

The prophecy against the house of Eli had a dreadful finality to it. Not even sacrifice or offering could purge iniquity from the house of Eli. This fixed sentence may have resulted from the fact that Eli's sons had no regard for the laws concerning sacrifice or the people who humbly came before the Lord. They caused the people to abhor the offering of the Lord (I Samuel 2:17).

Perhaps because Eli had already heard of the coming judgment, he did not appear to be surprised when Samuel told him what God had revealed to him during the night. Eli responded, “It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good” (1 Samuel 3:18). Eli recognized the word of the Lord and accepted His will, modeling obedience in the face of being rejected by the Lord. Perhaps Samuel remembered Eli’s reaction when he felt that the people rejected him in favor of a king and when Samuel’s own sons proved to be unworthy successors to his prophetic office. (See 1 Samuel 8:3–5.)

III. GOD STILL CALLS

A. The Value of Being Available

In the age of cell phones, social media, and other rapid-fire forms of communication, we can forget God still calls us. But like Samuel, we must make ourselves available to hear the voice of the Lord. Sometimes connecting with God means disconnecting ourselves from the rest of the world.

We cannot allow visions to become rare as they were in the days of Samuel. Visions and prophecies are our Apostolic birthright. Acts 2:17–18 speaks of the young seeing visions, the old dreaming dreams, and sons, daughters, servants, and handmaids prophesying. Acts 2 lets us know everyone should be in a position to hear the voice of God—young, old, male, female, in the ministry, or simply a supporter of the work of the Lord.

How much greater the story of Samuel would have been if it had featured both a powerful young prophet and a wise priest who could still hear the voice of God. Unfortunately, Eli had gradually allowed his ability to hear the voice of the Lord to erode. Living in the Tabernacle gave him the perfect location to hear from God, but his spiritual ears had grown dull. In contrast, Samuel came to the Tabernacle out of obedience to his mother, learned to listen to Eli, and ultimately heard the voice of the Lord and received his calling.

B. The Value of a Spiritual Mentor

Even though he heard the voice of the Lord, Samuel still needed a mentor. Eli would not seem to be the best mentor because he had failed with his own sons. But perhaps

God wanted to give the old priest one last chance to make a lasting difference in the life of a young person. Maybe some of us feel as though we cannot offer much to young people because we have failed in the past. However, God may be asking us to look past our own shortcomings and reach out to help someone hear the voice of the Lord.

Although the Lord will, through the power of the Holy Spirit, teach our children and young people many of the things they need to know, we need to keep in mind that Samuel knew how to listen, but he did not know how to respond to God. We still need to teach our children how to respond to God’s voice. Are we teaching our children lessons from the Bible without teaching them how to pray? Are we teaching them to listen to rules and obey them without teaching them to listen for the voice of God? Do we just expect young people to figure out God is calling them and has a message for them?

We should consider taking a more proactive role in mentoring others. When children and youth come to us with questions, we must help them find answers in the Word of God and encourage them to pray and seek the face of the Lord. We need to develop a sensitivity to the Lord and a belief that our children can hear the voice of God. Eli dismissed Samuel before he finally realized what was happening. To avoid the same mistake, we should be careful not to be dismissive of children or youth when God is speaking to them. Rather, we should listen to them, encourage them, and help them recognize the voice of the Lord. We can have a great impact on future leaders in the kingdom of God.

C. The Value of Listening

We cannot underestimate the value of listening. The first word of Deuteronomy 6:4 is “Hear.” The Jews refer to this verse as the *Shema* (pronounced shə-’mä), and they regularly quote it. Perhaps this key word reminds us that before we can understand the oneness of God or other key doctrines, we must be willing to hear.

The word *shema* in Hebrew is significant because it means both “to listen” and “to obey.” Without hearing there can be no obedience. Without obedience we cannot know the one true God.