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**Relationships - Bible Study Task**

1 Samuel 3:1-10

3:1 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; 3 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. 4 Then the Lord called, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’\* and he said, ‘Here I am!’ 5 and ran to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you called me.’ But he said, ‘I did not call; lie down again.’ So he went and lay down. 6 The Lord called again, ‘Samuel!’ Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you called me.’ But he said, ‘I did not call, my son; lie down again.’ 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8 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. 9 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.’

**Commentary**

What is it about grandparents and grandchildren that just seems to work? Why do they often have an ability to relate to each other, even though they are quite often well out of touch with the each other’s cultures? I know it’s not always like that, but for many people grandparents occupy a special place in their lives. And looking at some tribal cultures, quite often it’s the elders who initiate the young at adolescence.

In the Old Testament, the story of the call of Samuel is also an intriguing mix of old and young interacting. There’s quite a bit in common between the two characters, the older man Eli and the adolescent boy, Samuel. They both work in the temple, Eli, as the high priest, Samuel as his disciple. They’re both lying down to sleep but that’s about where the commonality ends.

Eli’s eyes are growing dim and lying down on his bed at night, it feels like he’s tired with sleep not too far away. Samuel is also lying down but the story gives the impression of a bundle of energy not really needing or wanting to sleep. Then a voice calls his name and understandably he thinks it’s Eli. He runs and ask what he wants but Eli denies the call. It wasn’t him. A short while later the same thing happens and Samuel runs again. Now if I was Eli, I might react a little differently. I suspect I would get slightly more annoyed that he has woken me yet again. But Eli’s reaction is better than mine, and he responds with an affectionate turn of phrase, ‘My son, go back to bed it wasn’t me’. When it happens the third time I would be possibly losing the plot, but that’s precisely where Eli scores. The text says ,’Eli perceived…’ In other words, even though we’re told his eyes were growing dim his inner eye was seeing more clearly now. He fathomed out what was happening, God was calling Samuel and he tells him how to respond.

Eli is a listener, but more than that, he perceives. Samuel, we’re told, did not yet know the Lord, and through Eli’s perception he is able to lead him gently to a place where he can discover the meaning of the voice. He is skilled in helping Samuel to discover for himself what he needs to do. He doesn’t do it for him. He knows that the way to learn is to enable Samuel to make his response and then take it from there. All this is because Eli knows himself well enough not to intervene too much. He lets Samuel find his way but where he has been given insight he offers it in response to Samuel’s questions.

Although Eli had known the Lord for many years his vision had grown dim. Samuel had just come to know the Lord and straight away God spoke through him. Crucially it was in the dialogue between them that God was revealed. Without Eli, Samuel wouldn’t have learned how to respond to God. Without Samuel, Eli wouldn’t have heard God’s word for him. Somehow the gap in years just seemed to work for them.

**Questions**

What’s the difference between hearing, listening and perceiving?

What are the essentials when listening to someone?

How might this passage be useful in a headteacher/clergy relationship and a teacher/student/pupil relationship?

What examples could you think of when you listened to someone and helped them find a new insight/a word from God/ a different way of seeing and doing something? How did that come about?