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Gideon: Weak but Chosen

Scripture: Judges 6:1-7:25

Theme: God's power is made perfect in weakness

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Overview: "Samuel Learns to Listen" (1 Samuel 3:1-21 , Junior High, Ages 12-14) Context & Hook: Imagine you're just a kid, maybe not super brave, not always the loudest in class, but God wants to talk to you. In this story, Samuel is 12, too young to understand the big calls of his life, and God's voice sounds different than he expected. But Samuel's first reaction? "No way! I'm not listening to that!" That's okay, even when God's voice feels strange, we're taught to keep asking, "What does this mean for me?" Today, we'll explore how Samuel missed God's call at first... and how God won't give up on us, even when we're afraid. Key Truth + Life Application: God speaks to every heart, sometimes through whispers, sometimes through prophets, sometimes through quiet moments. Samuel's mistake? He didn't listen first, then thought. But God's command? "Don't sleep, Samuel! Answer!" That's the lesson: When God speaks, we don't wait for perfect timing or a "call sign." We answer, not because we're perfect, but because He loves us enough to chase us. Today, ask: Where am I waiting to be told I'm heard? God's voice is calling you, will you answer? Encouragement for Volunteers: This lesson is gold for junior high! Kids this age struggle with: - "Does God really want me to hear Him?" (Affirm: Yes! But we have to start small.) - "What if I miss the first time?" (Remind: Samuel did, God trained him for years.) Use real-life analogies (e.g., "What if your phone rings and you don't answer... but later you realize it was a text from someone who needs you?"). End with: "God's voice might sound like a whisper, but it's never a mistake. What's one thing you'll listen for today?" Tool Tip: If you want, share a short video clip of Samuel's first "wrong" answer (from a Bible animation or YouTube, e.g., "Samuel and God's Voice" by Bible Stories for Kids) to make it relatable!

Bible Story

Title: Samuel Listens to God's Voice

In the quiet, dusty town of Shiloh, where the ancient tabernacle stood as a place of worship and hope, a boy named Samuel lived. His parents, Eli and Hannah, had prayed for years to have a son, but when he was born, they gave him to Eli as a gift. Hannah, though heartbroken at first, trusted God's plan. Eli raised Samuel as his own, teaching him how to serve the Lord, not just in worship, but in the quiet ways of listening. Though Samuel was young, God had a job for him that he'd never expected.

One night, while the family slept, Samuel woke up to a strange voice calling his name. At first, he thought it was Eli, who slept next to him, so he ran to the elder's bed. Eli, still half-asleep, scolded him, saying, "Go back to sleep." But the voice came again. Samuel did it a third time, and this time Eli realized: "The Lord is calling you." Though confused, Samuel obeyed, sneaking out of Eli's room to pray. God wasn't just speaking to him, He was asking something of him. Samuel didn't understand yet, but he was learning that sometimes, God's answers come when we least expect them.

Years passed, and Samuel grew older. Eli saw his potential, so he taught him how to serve the priests in the temple. But God had something bigger in mind. One day, as Samuel was still young and eager to please, he heard God's voice again, this time, more clearly. This time, he didn't ignore it. Instead, he responded, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." That was the moment Samuel learned to listen actively, not just hearing, but truly choosing to hear. He realized that God's voice might sound like a whisper, but it always carries purpose. Eli wasn't wrong, Samuel was the one God had prepared for a role no one else could fill.

When Samuel became a man, he led Israel as their judge and king. But his first job had been to listen. He didn't just obey out of fear or duty, he obeyed because he trusted God's voice. When he was young, he might have thought God's commands were strange or confusing. But he learned that God's will isn't always easy, and sometimes it comes in the quietest moments. Samuel's story reminds us that listening isn't just about hearing, it's about willing to obey, even when we don't understand.

Why This Story Matters Today: Samuel's story challenges us to pay attention to God's voice, not just when things are loud, but when they're quiet. Just like Samuel, we might hear God's call in unexpected ways: through prayer, Scripture, or even a friend's advice. The key is to stay open, trust God's timing, and respond even when we're scared. That's how we grow closer to Him, and that's how we live with purpose.

(Think: Where have you heard God's voice lately? How can you be more willing to listen and obey, even if it's hard?)

Key Verse

Judges 7:2

Here's how you could explain 1 Samuel 3:10 to a 12, 14-year-old with honesty and real-life examples: "Imagine you're hiding in the dark under your bed, too scared to move, even when you hear a voice whispering, 'Satan, let's trick her!' But instead of fighting, you whisper back, 'Speak, for I'm listening.' That's what Samuel did when God called him at night. God knew Samuel wasn't afraid to answer because he trusted God could handle anything. This verse isn't just about hearing God's voice, it's about saying, 'Yes, Lord, even when it's scary, I'm here.' If you ever feel unsure or nervous about trusting God, remember: He's never too big for your little voice to reach Him." Life Application: - When: Ever feel overwhelmed by fear or doubt? Ask yourself, "Is God calling me to do something I don't want to do?" (Like Samuel, say yes!) - Why: God rewards honesty, even in hard choices. Your "weakness" (like Samuel's fear) becomes your strength in trusting Him. - Real Question: "What if I mess up?" God's not looking for perfect answers; He's looking for listening hearts. Start small, pray like Samuel did: "Speak, because I'm here."

Activities

Activity 1:

Students explore the difference between God's voice and distractions (loud noises, family chatter, social media) using a "detective kit" to identify "voices" in their own lives.

1. Set the Stage (2 min)

2. Ask: "What's the difference between a loud voice and a quiet one? How do you know which one to listen to?"
3. Write down the question: "When God speaks, does it sound like a loud shout or a soft whisper?"
4. Cut & Match (5 min)
5. Hand out index cards with distractions (e.g., "Phone buzzing," "A kind friend's advice").
6. Students cut out 3, 4 cards and glue them to their index card. Ask: "Which of these 'voices' would you ignore? Which would you listen to?"
7. Compare to Samuel (5 min)
8. Read 1 Samuel 3:10: "Then the Lord said, 'Go lay down and sleep...'"
9. Challenge: "Samuel didn't know who was speaking at first! How did God help him tell the difference?"
10. Discuss: "What 'whispers' or 'shouts' do we ignore? How can we practice like Samuel, waiting, praying, and trusting God?"
11. Apply to Life (3 min)
12. Group discussion: "Where have you felt God's voice lately? Where do you need to 'listen closer'?"
13. Prayer: Ask students to ask God for help in identifying His voice.
14. Life Application Hook:
15. "Samuel's obedience started with waiting, even when it was uncomfortable. What's one 'quiet voice' God might want to speak to you this week?"

Activity 2:

Students create a visual "promise jar" to remind them to wait for God's voice, like Samuel did in the temple. The jar becomes a tangible way to track their commitment to prayer and obedience.

1. Create the Jar (3 min)
2. Ask: "What's one way you can 'listen' to God every day? Writing it down? Praying? Drawing?"
3. Let students decorate their jar with markers or glue on Bible verses. Write on the lid: "God's Voice Jar , When I'm tempted to rush, I'll pause and pray!"
4. Fill with Promises (5 min)
5. Pass out index cards with prompts like:
6. "Today, I will wait for God's voice in prayer."
7. "If God speaks to me, I will ask for His guidance."
8. "I promise to trust Him even if I don't understand."
9. Students write one promise on a card, place it in their jar, and seal it.
10. Read & Reflect (5 min)
11. Read 1 Samuel 3:7: "The Lord was there, and Samuel called him."
12. Challenge: "Samuel waited despite his fear. How can we do the same?"
13. Discuss: "When God speaks, what's one thing we can do to answer? (e.g., pray, read Scripture, talk to someone who loves God.)"
14. Open the Jar (2 min)
15. Randomly pick a card to read aloud. Ask: "Which promise is hardest for you to keep this week?"
16. Close with prayer: "Lord, help us to hear You and respond like Samuel."
17. Life Application Hook:
18. "Samuel's story isn't just about hearing God, it's about doing what He says. How can we use our 'promises' to stay obedient, even when it's hard?"
19. Why These Work:

Discussion Questions

- Lesson: "Samuel Hears God's Voice"
- Samuel 3:1-21
- Context & Setup
- Imagine you're in your bedroom, the house is quiet, and your parents are out. You're tired, maybe even a little scared, what would you do if you heard a voice calling you from the darkness? For Samuel, a young boy in ancient Israel, that moment was life-changing. But Samuel wasn't alone in his confusion. Eli, his older priest and mentor, had to teach him how to listen when God spoke. This story isn't just about hearing voices; it's about learning to recognize God's voice in our own lives, even when it feels strange or hard.
- Today, we're going to explore how Samuel's experience can teach us how to listen for God, even when things don't make sense. And more importantly, we'll talk about how we can apply these lessons to our own lives, especially when we're not sure if something is God or just noise.
- Four Open-Ended Discussion Questions
- The Quiet Before the Call
- Samuel was asleep when God called his name three times, three times! How might you feel if someone (or something) called you at night, even when you weren't expecting it? What might make it easier or harder to respond to that call? Think about a time in your own life when you felt called to do something important (like helping a friend, volunteering, or even just paying attention to something you didn't understand at first). How did you handle it? What did you learn about yourself in that moment?
- Eli's Mistake: Not Teaching Samuel
- Eli thought Samuel was just dreaming, but he should have known better, Samuel was his son, his apprentice! Why do you think Eli didn't recognize God's voice at first? What might have happened if he had told Samuel, "Hear me, my son. This isn't just a dream, God is talking to you"? How can adults in our lives (teachers, parents, coaches, mentors) help us learn to distinguish God's voice from our own fears, doubts, or even silly thoughts? Give an example of a time someone helped you recognize when something was worth paying attention to.
- The First Response: Fear and Hesitation
- When Samuel finally answered, he said, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." That's not a bold answer, it's a humble one. What do you think made Samuel feel safe enough to say that? How might we avoid jumping to conclusions (like "This must be a mistake") when God speaks? Think about a time you almost ignored something important because it felt scary or unfamiliar. What would have happened if you had said, "Hmm... I'll listen to this for a second" instead of walking away?
- God's Promise: "I'll Be with You"
- The Bible says God told Samuel, "Go, as I commanded you." But Samuel was still nervous, so God reassured him: "I'll be with you." This isn't just a promise, it's a comfort. How can we trust that God is with us even when we're afraid? Think about a time you felt God's presence in a small way (maybe it wasn't a dramatic voice, but a quiet word, a kind gesture, or just knowing you weren't alone). How did that help you move forward? What's one thing God might want you to listen for right now, even if you're not sure how to respond?
- Why These Questions Work:
- They avoid "yes/no" traps by encouraging personal stories and reflections.
- They tie the story to real life, fear, confusion, and trust are universal emotions.
- They end with action: "What can you do now?" (e.g., "Listen to a friend who needs you," "Ask God a question today.")
- Would you like any of these tweaked to focus on a specific theme (e.g., obedience, fear, or trust)? Or would you prefer a follow-up activity (like a role-play or prayer time)?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus: "Where Do You Listen to God?" "Loving God, we come before You today not just with our ears open, but with our hearts searching, because sometimes we're too busy to hear what You're trying to say. Like Samuel, we need to learn to trust You even when we're confused or scared. Help us to pay attention when You whisper to us, whether it's in the quiet moments or through unexpected ways. Teach us to listen with open minds and hearts, so we don't miss the things You're leading us to, like how to love others, how to face challenges, or even just how to know You're there. And when we hear, help us to act, not just because we should, but because we choose to trust You. Amen." Why this works for students: - Relatable struggle: Taps into their experience of being distracted (e.g., phones, noise) and needing God's guidance. - Honest tone: Avoids overly formal language; frames it like a conversation, not a speech. - Life application: Connects Samuel's obedience to real choices (e.g., "how to love others," "how to face fears"). - Scripture tie: Invites them to think, "Where have I heard God lately?", a reflective moment before discussion. Teacher tip: Pause after the prayer to ask, "What do you think God might want us to listen to today?" to spark discussion!

>> Missions Spotlight

Among the Aymara people of Bolivia, who live at some of the highest altitudes on earth, there is a deep longing to hear from God. Missionaries share Samuel's story to show that the God of the Bible still speaks today through His Word and His Spirit.

-> To the Cross

As a boy, Samuel didn't yet know the Lord. God spoke, and Samuel responded, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' Jesus is God's ultimate Word, the final and complete way God speaks to us. When we read Scripture, God is speaking, and we respond in faith.