

Helping Today's Hannahs Raise Up Tomorrow's Samuels

Leader's Guide

Introduction

In the past three years, the author of this Bible study has conducted just over 500 individual interviews with first-year and transfer students at MLC. One question he has asked each of them is this: "So, what led you to consider preparing for the public ministry?" While the details of their answers are unique, there are two overwhelmingly common refrains from those hundreds of new and transfer students. The students mention again and again the influence of parents and also of called workers who served them. As important as the work of MLC's Admissions Department is, admissions counselors are typically watering and nurturing a seed of public ministry service planted years before into the hearts of future called workers.

This faculty Bible study is intended to set the scene for the spiritual keynote at this fall's WLSTC. That spiritual keynote will seek to highlight joy in the ministry under the cross as found in the setting of Samuel's ministry in 1 Samuel 3. To get ready for that presentation, this Bible study will help us think about how God prepared to give the gift of Samuel to Israel. We will consider how we who are in public ministry are uniquely positioned by God to *help today's Hannahs and Elkanahs to raise up tomorrow's Samuels*.

An Unlikely Setting

God raised up Samuel when the time of Israel's judges was about to give way to Israel's kings. What would make this an unlikely time for a faithful prophet to arise?

- Here is a summary of that historical setting: "The book of Judges holds out little hope for Israel's survival. Violating religious, moral, and social principles, the nation appeared to be drowning in a sea of chaos. Family stability . . . could not long escape being drawn into the maelstrom of national dissolution" (Concordia Self-Study Bible, 185).

The influence of the unbelieving nations Israel had allowed to live around them was evident in the life of the nation as a whole. The corruption impacted every area of life from their government, to their worship, to the life of families. This would not seem to be a fertile seed bed from which would spring a faithful prophet like Samuel.

How does it testify to both the great patience and the deep compassion of God when we see him continue to give gifts like Samuel to his people even though we are often more impacted by the culture around us than we realize?

It is a powerful witness to how dearly our Good Shepherd loves his flock whenever he continues to send faithful messengers to his people despite how unfaithful we often prove to be. So he who saved us longs to keep us as his own as he graciously provides us shepherds after his own heart (Jeremiah 3:15).

How might we hear objections (from parents or from young people) to studying for the ministry from the historical setting of our day? How would you answer that objection?

The quotation from the Concordia Self-Study Commentary may have led many to think the author was writing about our culture today. [Extra note: remember that the United States is NOT the equivalent of ancient Israel. The equivalent of ancient Israel (the visible church of that day) is the visible Christian Church today.] What appears to be the loss of any spiritual compass that was evident in Israel during the time of the Judges certainly makes us think of the culture around us. In addition to humbly watching our own hearts for evidence that we are being impacted by that culture, some will also note that public ministry will be much more difficult at a time when so many seem to be closing their hearts to biblical truth.

Yet, Scripture knows that this will often be the case in the midst of a mostly unbelieving world, and especially as we draw near to the Last Day. Scripture certainly anticipated all of this (see 2 Timothy 4:1-5, for example). In the midst of all that chaos, God still knows how to rescue his elect from every nation through the preaching and sharing of his saving gospel. Just think, for example, of how God worked through Jonah in the midst of pagan Nineveh. God knows how to protect and prosper his public ministers as they carry out his work in every age.

An Unlikely Family

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20

At first glance, what would make the family of Hannah and Elkanah an unlikely one from which to spring a powerful prophet for Israel?

What stands out, perhaps most of all, is the polygamous marriage of Elkanah. As Scripture typically does, polygamy is not so much directly condemned for the distortion of God's plan for marriage that it certainly is. Instead, we see the sin rebuked as the biblical narrative shows us the discord in the family as God's plan for marriage is distorted.

As you ponder who might be the Samuels sitting in your class, how can the reality of Samuel's challenging home setting help you think more broadly about whom you might encourage?

It is tempting for us to assume that future Samuels will arise only from the apparently most strong and pious Christian families. As we consider whom God might use in the public ministry, how easy it could be to overlook the student from a more evidently spiritually struggling home. But God can raise up Samuels in either setting. Consider in the New Testament as God raised up Timothy as Paul's trusted co-worker from a family in which the father was an unbeliever. This Bible study's author, in his visits with new and transfer students at MLC, could offer plenty of surprising examples of God at work to raise up the next generation of workers from families who struggled considerably.

An Unlikely Mentor

Read 1 Samuel 2:12-36

What would make Eli an unlikely candidate to mentor the next leader of Israel?

There was much that would make Eli an unlikely candidate to mentor the young Samuel. Though what may stand out most is this: through the sins of his sons, only all too half-heartedly rebuked, Eli had allowed worship at the tabernacle to become a place of offense to Israel's faith rather than a place for their faith to be built up.

The application to our hearts, lives, and ministries is certainly *not* to be as consistently unfaithful in ministry as Eli was. Yet, when our conscience condemns us for those times our witness and example to our students has been far less than Christ-like (and honest, self-reflection will find us daily fleeing for forgiveness to Jesus' cross), what comfort can we take from how God used Eli?

We still have the treasure of the gospel in jars of clay “to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Our ministry at its heart has never been most of all about our faithfulness or our perfect ministry, but it is about our forgiving God’s faithfulness and about Jesus’ perfect ministry in our place which is our record of perfection.

Also, while we would never purposefully sin in the presence of our students (we know how seriously God takes causing offense to his little ones—Luke 17:1-3), yet when we have stumbled, and we show our students what it looks like to honestly admit our sin and delight in God’s forgiveness, God can even use that to shape in those we serve a love for the gospel and a desire to train for sharing that gospel with others.

Getting Ready for Hannah, Elkanah, and Samuel’s Objections

There are two ways we can encourage the next generation toward public ministry. The one—and easily the most persuasive—is a joyful ministry to our students that shows them what Christ-like, servant-hearted ministry looks like. Our spiritual keynote at the WLSTC on 1 Samuel 3 will explore that impact of Christ-like joy under the cross in our ministries both for our own good and for that recruitment purpose.

But it is true that the example of our lives is also wisely paired with the encouragement of our lips toward the next generation of Samuels who may be sitting in front of us. As you speak such encouragements directly to a particular student, those future Samuels in your classroom may raise some objections about pursuing the public ministry. Also, it may often be their parents in whom the objections may rise to the level that they might not encourage their sons and daughters to consider the public ministry as their vocation. Some parents, in fact, may go so far as to actively discourage their children from considering the public ministry.

Take one minute on your own to write down the objections you would anticipate from a student—or their parents—when you speak words of encouragement for a student to consider public ministry.

Now, spend three minutes sharing your lists with one another and choosing as a group your “top three objections” that you would be wise to be prepared to answer.

Now, spend five minutes together sharing how you’d answer each of those objections.

- Depending on what ended up on your list, here are some Bible passages that may be helpful in answering a few of the more common objections to pursuing the public ministry:
 - Psalm 37:25-26

One of the most frequent reasons that someone might shy away from the public ministry or from encouraging a child to serve in public ministry, is a misguided notion that those who enter the public ministry will suffer a significant financial loss for pursuing the ministry. The passage from Psalm 37 reminds us that God knows how to take care of the earthly needs of all his children—and that is certainly no less true for those who serve him in public ministry.

It may also be helpful at this point to make sure that we as public ministers no longer repeat the tired—and generally no longer true—refrain about public ministers being poorly cared for financially. In the last two generations, the lay leaders of our synod have led an effort to see to it that they honor Paul’s direction in Galatians 6:6: “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.” While we do not want to go to the opposite extreme of encouraging public ministry because of a selfish greed for gain (see 1 Timothy 3:3b), yet the reality today is that public ministers are compensated in a way that is competitive with those serving in similar roles in the public sector. At present, in the state of Wisconsin, the starting salary for a newly called MLC graduate, when a provided home or housing allowance is taken into consideration (a form of compensation no public school teacher receives), places them just *above* the average compensation for a newly graduated Wisconsin public school teacher.

- Matthew 19:27-30

In the midst of a very anxious rising generation, there is a well-documented fear in regard to moving far away from parents. And this concern also looms large for parents. In recruiting for ministry, it has become very clear at MLC that the real concern about distance away from home is not the location of our college (though that remains an issue for some) but the location of where their first call may be.

So how can we answer that fear about the family support they may lose if they are called far from home? Jesus' promise to Peter in this verse from Matthew deserves to be shared. Jesus knows how to make up for the "loss" of being near our families by supplying "family" we didn't even know we had where he calls us. It might be useful to have faculty members share stories of those who have proved to be the very additional "family" about which Jesus speaks at the various places they have served. While we know some congregations may be better at this than others, God knows how to provide at least some who love and support us like family—as family in Christ!—wherever we serve. And sometimes, the further we were called away from home to serve, the more we may have noticed just such family in Christ. We would never have known their love and support had we not been called to serve there!

- 1 Timothy 3:1; Isaiah 52:7

Another fear is that the public ministry is no longer a well-respected vocation in the eyes of our increasingly secular culture. And that is certainly true!

But these passages deserve careful attention in answering that fear. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul says that those who desire the office of an overseer desire a "noble task." The word "noble," more literally translated, would be "beautiful." While it is important to notice that Paul does not use the comparative (nobler or more beautiful) or superlative (noblest or most

beautiful), lest he seem to be belittling the nobility and beauty of serving Jesus in any godly vocation in life. We too need to be careful not to seem to give the impression that the public ministry is the only way for a Christian to serve Jesus. That would be saying far more than what Paul says—and it would not be true.

But remembering the setting can help us understand why Paul says what he does to Timothy (and to anyone who serves in public ministry). Remember that Timothy’s own father was an unbelieving Gentile. Just imagine what that “side” of Timothy’s family may have thought about Timothy’s vocation as a public minister of the gospel—and about the Roman Emperor’s “chained criminal” (Paul) with whom he served! And then consider how many of the early public ministers suffered a martyr’s death! And yet, despite all that, Paul reminds Timothy that the task in which he served was a “noble,” a “beautiful” task. So was the public ministry then, and so it still is true today!

And now add in the second passage (Isaiah 52:7). The feet of gospel messengers—which carry them into pulpits, classrooms, counseling sessions, and hospice settings—are beautiful. While all Christians can have such beautiful feet when they share the gospel with others, yet the public ministry is the only vocation whose sole reasons for its establishment is to have those in that vocation carry that gospel wherever they are called to the ends of the earth.

Closing Thought Behind Our Closing Prayer

For those of us nearing retirement, we may have noted that something had inadvertently been dropped from our regular public worship practice when our congregations moved from *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) to *Christian Worship* (1992). In *The Lutheran Hymnal*, every Sunday the repeating General Prayer had a petition asking the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest field. In *Christian Worship* (1992), in the seasonal Prayers of Church which replaced the repeating General Prayer, there was not a single, clear petition asking God to raise up a new

generation of gospel messengers. Thankfully, *Christian Worship* (2021) restored just such specific petitions for more workers in the harvest field in the suggested Prayers of the Church. We will use for our closing prayer part of one of those prayers from The Service Setting Three (CW21, 198).

The author of this Bible study would like to apologize for using the same closing thought for the Bible study as he used for a presentation at the synod convention this summer. For those who heard this twice, he hopes the encouragement was worthy to be considered a second time.

Leader: Instill in the hearts of our children a desire to follow you as they prepare for future days. Help them distinguish between what is passing and what is eternal, between instant thrills and lasting joy. Encourage more young people to prepare for service in the public ministry of the gospel.

Faculty: Mold us and move us to be good examples for our youth.

All: Amen.