

I was sixteen and on a mission trip. It was the end of the day and I was dog tired. It was finally my turn to take a 3-minute cold shower. As I was about to leave the bathroom, I noticed the toilet paper was sitting on top of the roll so I changed it out to be ready for the next person coming in.

Later that night at dinner my youth, pastor Fran asked me: “Jessie, did you change the toilet paper roll?” “Yes?” I said. “I knew it was you!” This was just one of the many reflections of my call to ministry that happened with my youth pastor. You see Fran could take what seemed to be a mundane and ordinary day and point out how God was at work. That was her gift, recognizing the movement of God.

Fran was the first person who told me that I may want to consider being a pastor since she thought I had some gifts for ministry. It is because of her that I started my discernment process of wrestling with God over becoming a pastor.

Before I even realized it, Fran had started me off on the trajectory to answer God’s calling upon my life. She encouraged me to take part in my local church, she nominated me for leadership positions, she freed up funds for me to partake in conferences. I just thought I was trying some new things, but Fran knew I was called and she had helped me begin to answer God’s calling upon my life.

All these experiences shaped me were invaluable to my discernment process, and now help me fully understand the many ministry opportunities that are available to young people in our conference.

Looking back, she was preparing me for ministry. My favorite picture of my ordination is her standing beside me looking up at me and beaming, because she knew my journey to get there.

I am still in contact with Fran. This past week I just wrote her a letter thanking her for recognizing my call to ministry and to tell her that my book that will help others recognize God’s calling upon their lives will be dedicated to her. In the letter I remind her that the fruit of her ministry continues to grow.

The most beautiful thing about my relationship with Fran is that she was the first to confirm for me the calling that God had placed upon my life.

God’s greatest gift to all of us was of course Jesus Christ, but the second greatest gift is the gift of the church, our Christian community. **Through our scripture today from 1 Samuel we celebrate that we are called in community.**

You see, Samuel didn't realize he was being called by God and he needed a mentor to tell him how to hear God's voice.

It has always been interesting to me that Samuel was unable to decipher the voice of God. I mean you think he would have received faith by osmosis through all the prayers and tears of his mother Hannah, who wanted to have a child so badly.

Through the faith of his mother, he was surrendered to the church as she fulfilled her promise to God. As a young boy, Samuel was shaped by the traditions and liturgy of the church. He was a priest from the line of Levi and took part in making ritualistic sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people of God.ⁱ

Eli knew God's voice. He may have been blind, but his deep relationship with God allowed him to recognize what was happening with Samuel.

At first, Samuel thought the voice belonged to Eli. I do not fault Samuel for this. I mean Eli was the only person there with him in the room and sometimes don't our mentors voices sound like the voice of God? They are the people in our lives that can help us discern what God is calling us to do.

This was an amazing moment in the life of Samuel and the people of God, the moment that Samuel would hear and respond to God voice. Just as we were reminded that God is the Potter and we are the clay in Psalm 139, Samuel was being molded to become a prophet for this important moment in time.

Scripture tells us that during that time there had been a lack of visions and commentary tells us that “Samuel has no basis on which to recognize the Lord's summons.”ⁱⁱ Also it was only Samuel who was hearing the voice of God and not Eli so Eli could only respond to Samuel's behavior.

I think this is where mentors get all the credit. They are spiritual bystanders who can name that God is working within us and through us. Like Eli, my mentor Fran was able to do this. She didn't know specifically how God was calling me, but she knew that God was calling me to serve in some kind of official capacity.

The most important thing that Fran did for my life was voice the call that she witnessed. I often wonder if I would have continued to pursue ministry, had she not shared she felt that God had called me to serve in this way.

We are called in community. God's calling upon our lives are not insular.

They exude from within us even when we are trying to hide them from ourselves and others. So often we try to run away from God's calling upon our lives, but God is relentless and continues to pursue us to call us to serve and make disciples.

Fran was able to pick up on these clues of my calling from the smallest things like changing of the toilet paper roll to me seeking out other youth of all ages going through difficult times. The blessing of my life is that Fran was not my only mentor. I have had many of them and am still collecting these blessings from God.

Call is affirmed in community. We are always called to be on the lookout for how God is moving and then voice that movement to others, encouraging them to use their gifts to serve.

Affirming the call of another person also means that we must create room within our lives for some endings. Commentary also shares that this passage of Scripture "is a story of endings."ⁱⁱⁱ Life as we know it cannot be the same when we live and breathe in the kingdom of God on earth.

We must sacrifice our time to recognize the gifts of others. To sit with them, to pray with them, to help them discern next steps. When we mentor other people, we surrender to God's will for our lives. Our call to ministry is reaffirmed as we see the excitement and joy of another responding to their call.

We are all called to have a mentor and be a mentor. We have a mentor because like Samuel throughout our lives we will continue to need others to help us further discern what God is calling us to do.

We are called to be a mentor like Eli, because in so doing, we are taking part of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Eli knew that his time being the priest was ending, but he was invited to be part of this new beginning, this new thing that God was doing to bring about redemption in the world through Samuel.

The good news for our lives today is that as mentor and mentee we are called to be part of God's redemptive work.

We take part in God's redemptive work when we surrender. God is always molding and shaping us into the image of God, but so often we don't want to be molded. We want to take the pottery wheel ourselves and make our own beautiful creation instead of what God intended.

But we cannot run away from our Creator God. Psalm 139:8-12 tells us there is no where we can go where we will not be pursued by God:

“If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night’, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

God created us from the breath of the Spirit and the dust of the earth. We are created with a purpose to serve God each and every day fully. We do this when we answer God’s calling upon our lives: to serve in the unique ways God calls each and every one of us.

We are able to serve God when, like Eli, we can recognize the movement of God.

How are you able to recognize the movement of God in your life or the lives of others? When is the last time you have affirmed the gifts of someone in this church community?

Our gifts from God are to be celebrated and used to glorify God. If you feel God is calling you to a particular ministry, please share that with me so as your pastor I can celebrate that with you.

Like Samuel, we too have been prepared to serve. Our Gospel lesson from Luke 14 reminds us that we respond to God’s calling upon our lives when we follow Jesus’ Christ model of servant ministry. As we follow Jesus Christ, we take part in worship and this Christian community, we receive God’s hope and grace so that we can go and share it with others. This is the foundation of our faith.

This spiritual formation and call happen in community! We are called to serve together. Jesus sent out the disciple two by two, we don’t have to do this work alone. Thanks be to God for the gift of the church, the place we journey in our discipleship in community.

My prayer for all of you is that you will be like Eli, and able to affirm God’s calling upon your life and within the lives of others. I hope you will be like Samuel, open to God calling you to serve in many ways. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ <https://overviewbible.com/facts-prophet-samuel/>

ⁱⁱ New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol 2. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1998. P. 992.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, P. 994.