

# Sermon Notes: Why Be Christian?

## Week #2

### Introduction

This week we continue our post-Christmas sermon series called “Why Be Christian?” Liturgically, this is also the beginning of *Ordinary Time* (named for ordinal numbers), though we can also remember that being Christian is not necessarily ordinary. It is good, then, that we choose to focus this week on listening. I would suggest that choosing to prioritize listening is indeed extraordinary, given that our U.S. culture seems largely focused on isolated sound-bites, self-promotion, and greed. Perhaps taking more time to listen to those around us, to listen to those who are “the least of these,” to listen for God’s call; perhaps this moves us beyond ordinary toward extraordinary.

### Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQKi3mlcQN4>

A clip from the 2003 film *Bruce Almighty* where Bruce has lost his job and is asking God for a sign.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. In this clip, Bruce has been through quite a lot! He has recently lost his job after responding poorly to a decision from management. Then he crashed his car. It seems as though he has a sense that nothing is going his way. Have you ever felt this way? If so, how did you respond?
2. Bruce’s emotions continue to escalate, and he finally utters the hilarious line, “Smite me, o mighty smiter!” He then angrily says that God is the one who should be fired. Have you ever been angry with God? How did you express your anger? Did (or do) you have a sense that God responded in some way to your anger? If so, how?
3. Bruce clearly feels as though God is absent from his life. But watch the video... do you see the signs? Has there been a time in your life when God had been guiding you but you didn’t notice? Why do you think you didn’t notice? What can you do differently in order to notice God’s guidance?

### 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (CEB)

<sup>1</sup>Now the boy Samuel was serving the Lord under Eli. The Lord’s word was rare at that time, and visions weren’t widely known. <sup>2</sup>One day Eli, whose eyes had grown so weak he was unable to see, was lying down in his room. <sup>3</sup>God’s lamp hadn’t gone out yet, and Samuel was lying down in the Lord’s temple, where God’s chest was.

<sup>4</sup>The Lord called to Samuel. “I’m here,” he said.

<sup>5</sup>Samuel hurried to Eli and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

“I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go lie down.” So he did.

<sup>6</sup>Again the Lord called Samuel, so Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

“I didn’t call, my son,” Eli replied. “Go and lie down.”

(<sup>7</sup>Now Samuel didn’t yet know the Lord, and the Lord’s word hadn’t yet been revealed to him.)

<sup>8</sup>A third time the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, “I’m here. You called me?”

Then Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>So Eli said to Samuel, “Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down where he’d been.

<sup>10</sup>Then the Lord came and stood there, calling just as before, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel said, “Speak. Your servant is listening.”

### **John 1:43-51 (CEB)**

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus wanted to go into Galilee, and he found Philip. Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” <sup>44</sup>Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.

<sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph’s son, from Nazareth.”

<sup>46</sup>Nathanael responded, “Can anything from Nazareth be good?”

Philip said, “Come and see.”

<sup>47</sup>Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, “Here is a genuine Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

<sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, “How do you know me?”

Jesus answered, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.”

<sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are God’s Son. You are the king of Israel.”

<sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these! <sup>51</sup>I assure you that you will see heaven open and God’s angels going up to heaven and down to earth on the Human One.”

### **Scripture Discussion Questions**

1. Why was Samuel unable to recognize the voice of the Lord the first three times the Lord called him?
2. It’s loud in our world with distractions aplenty, voices calling, blaming, warning, vying for our attention. It’s loud in our souls, where we are filled with our own questions and fears, filled with our own failures and inadequacies. What noises impede us from listening to the voice of God when God speaks to us?
3. What kept Nathaniel from believing Philip when he told him that Jesus from Nazareth was the Son of God?
4. What does it take to recognize God’s voice and receive God’s message?
5. Do our biases and prejudices impede us from recognizing God’s voice proclaimed through other humans? What might you do this week to listen to God?

### **Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration**

1. Name several people you follow either on a social media app or by keeping up with stories about them in the news. Why do you follow them? Who should people start to follow to better understand what’s popular today?
2. What are some assumptions made in the John passage? Do others seem to make assumptions about us based upon where we are from? Do we make assumptions about others based on where they are from?
3. Have you ever had an assumption that proved not to be true? How did it feel to figure that out? Discuss this with a family member or conversation partner. Explore what you learned from this experience and how you think you’ve grown.
4. Jesus invited Phillip to follow him. What do you think it means to follow someone? Does the John passage qualify Jesus as an “influencer” in the same way we think about influencers on social media? Why or why not?

### **Weekly Action**

Take several times this week to be in a quiet place and listen for God. Don’t replace other spiritual or prayer times to do this; instead, set aside time different from your regular spiritual activities. Keep some paper or a digital device with you. Keep notes on what you hear during this time of listening and how you hear it. Perhaps your experience is like a still small voice. Perhaps, like John Wesley, it’s a strange warming of your heart.

At the end of the week, look through your notes for similarities and differences. Perhaps you heard the same message or guidance every time. Perhaps you heard different messages but heard them all in the same way. Perhaps it was all different! Take time to pray specifically over what you heard and what you need in order to respond. Consider sharing this experience with a loved one or trusted spiritual partner. Then consider doing this on a regular basis!

### **Prayer**

God, our guide and comforter, help us recognize your voice amid the many noises that distract us. Please give us the wisdom to listen attentively to your voice and respond to your call. Amen.