

March 30, 2014 (1 Samuel 16:1-13)

Can someone be called and not know it?

by [Brian K. Blount](#) in the [March 19, 2014](#) issue



Samuel and David, Castro Center, Haifa. Photo by Dr. Avishai Teicher, [PikiWiki - Israel free image collection project](#), [some rights reserved](#).

Can someone be called and not know it, at least until God does something to reveal God's intentions? Apparently David is an example of this—and yes, one can lose connection with God's call and not know it. When God's intentions were revealed to Saul, for example, he was in total shock. As Samuel knew, it's a very difficult challenge to help someone recognize a call that's been lost or to grow into a call that's been issued. But having received his own call, Samuel understood how God works. He surprised Saul by revealing that God intended Saul to be king (1 Sam. 9–10); later he was sent to rescind the kingship that had been given to Saul and deliver it to David. Samuel's work was difficult, demanding, sometimes heart-

wrenching, and necessary.

We are not Samuel. I doubt that any of us would want to carry the agonizing weight of responsibility that burdened him as he made the trek between Saul and David. And yet as part of God's community of faith, as members of the body of Christ, we too have a role to play in helping those around us recognize how God is moving people in ways that they may not see. And when they do recognize God's presence and even God's call, we have a role to play in nurturing these persons as they process what God is saying and how they should respond.

Theological education plays an important part in this critical process of identifying, developing, and nurturing leaders in God's community. In seminaries, divinity schools, and schools of theology, we teachers and leaders do our best work when we not only teach content but also assist students in their quest to identify more clearly God's call and learn in ways that will enable their most capable response to that call.

In the most difficult moments we help a select few realize that God has gifted them in areas other than Christian communal leadership. Sometimes a sense of call can and needs to be redirected. Some recognize, even after time spent in seminary, that God has called them to use their gifts in another way. And then there are the most joyous moments: when we stand with our graduates as a church confirms God's call to them through ordination. Like theological educators across our country and throughout the world, I am tremendously blessed to be called to the work of nurturing and equipping those whom God is directing toward leadership.

And yet this work is not the work of professional theological educators alone. It is the work of congregants who notice a potential for faith leadership in a member of their congregation. It is the work of secondary and undergraduate teachers who recognize an intellectual inquisitiveness and a sensibility in certain students and suggest to these students that God is on the move in their lives. It is the work of all of us in Christian community who use our resources to give guidance and assistance to those who have questions about what God is doing in their lives and who point them to faith leaders who can give them counsel. We all have a role to play.

While not one of us can be Samuel, all of us can follow Samuel's lead. We can watch and listen for how God is moving in the lives of those who populate our faith communities, and we can help them figure out if that movement is the result of a particular call. Who knows, perhaps some of us have been called by God to help

someone else realize his or her call.

In Charlotte and Durham, North Carolina, and in Richmond, Virginia, communities of faith are pooling their resources and their counsel to do this work. These congregations network with church members, business leaders, college chaplains, and local pastors to provide communal space for those who are sensing God's call into ministry. They help these people to reflect on that sensibility and allow it the opportunity to breathe. They encourage those who are sensing God's call to consider theological education. And they provide scholarships for a year of theological study so that these students can have the space, the time, and the teaching to ascertain the depth and fullness of that call. These communities are not Samuel—but they are Samuel-like.

Be like Samuel. This is a calling. In a time when the church, like Samuel's Israel, needs strong leaders, we all have a role to play in God's choreographed design for the future of God's church. As we reflect upon all that God has done and is doing in our lives during this season of Lent, we acknowledge that God issues a specific and special call to some individuals. We can, even in a small way, help clarify and amplify that call.