How to avoid absurd living

By Chaplain John Swanson

In 1 Samuel 3:1-21, we read how the Lord called the boy Samuel. Because he was a miracle baby, his mother Hannah had dedicated him to the Lord. Samuel ministered before the Lord under the supervision of the elderly priest Eli in the house of the Lord where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.

One night the Lord called to Samuel. Thinking it was Eli who was calling for him he got up and went to Eli only to be told to go back to bed, as Eli had not called Samuel. This happened a second and a third time when Eli finally surmised it was the Lord who was calling the boy. Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down and if he calls you, say, 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.'" The Bible tells us that Samuel did not as yet know the Lord. The Lord called to Samuel a fourth time and this time Samuel did as Eli had instructed. Samuel became a great prophet in the land of Israel and anointed both Saul and David as Israel's first two kings.

The author Henri Nouwen writes, "We live absurd lives." He discusses the meaning of the word "absurd." "Surd," Nouwen says, is from the Latin word for "deaf," When you look up the word absurd in the dictionary you discover that it means, "Not to be heard, dull, deaf, insensible, laughably inconsistent with what is judged as true or reasonable." It is our inability and, or refusal to hear and listen that creates the conditions for an absurd life.

Nouwen goes on: "A spiritual discipline is necessary in order to move slowly from an absurd life to an obedient life, from a life filled with noisy worries to a life in which there is some free inner space where we can listen to our God and follow his guidance." Absurd living is simply not hearing and, or listening to God. We need to avoid absurd living.

Have you heard God's voice? Sometimes it comes in ways we least expect. Dr. Mickey Anders shares the following story about a friend who tells how he heard God in a totally unexpected way:

Eric had spent his adult life as a journalist. He was beginning to feel there was more to life than he had known. He took a course at his church where they studied spiritual gifts. Near the end of the course, his pastor asked this question: "If you knew you could not fail, what would you do?" Eric's answer was, "Well, I think I would preach."

After the final session, his pastor pulled Eric aside and told him that a small country church was looking for a supply pastor. Just that day, the area minister had asked that pastor if he knew anyone who was interested in preaching at Elkland Christian Church. Eric said, "No, you don't understand, I think I'm supposed to preach 'someday.'

He went home that night very confused and more than a little afraid. His oldest daughter Emily was about 10 years old. She picked up on his mood and asked what was wrong. He told her what had happened and they got out the state map to find Elkland. Emily said, "Dad, have you tried reading Psalm 91?" They got out her Bible and read it together. In case you're curious, Psalm 91 begins, "You who live in the shelter of the most high… will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust." Towards the end it says, "When they call me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation."

Those verses spoke to Eric. He asked Emily why she suggested that psalm. "Oh, it was just on my mind," she said. "Emily, you're 10 years old. Psalm 91 wasn't just on your mind," Eric said. "Yes it was," she replied. "No, it wasn't," her father insisted. Finally, she said, "Well dad, when we were at summer church camp a couple of weeks ago the boys came over and tried to scare all of us girls in the middle of the night. Our cabin counselor read us Psalm 91. I got a card from her today and she wrote, "Remember Psalm 91." Her name is Judy… oh, and Dad… she's from Elkland." Eric has now been the pastor of Elkland Christian Church for almost five years. He heard the voice of God through his pastor, his daughter and the words of scripture.

God calls us to abandon absurdity and live obedient lives. He calls out to each of us. The story of Samuel reminds us that God is persistent. He never gives up on his purpose and plan for our lives. May God open our ears and hearts that we may hear his voice, abandon absurd living and discover his purpose and peace.

Seaman to Admiral, cont. from pg. 4

If a Sailor does not meet minimum requirements the first time they test, they can take the test again. Sailors having been away from an educational environment for an extended time or not testing well on an initial attempt should consider taking an SAT or ACT test preparation course.

Having some college-level courses completed can significantly impact Sailors involved in a program allowing participants 36 months to complete a Bachelor's degree. Those students who may not have been strong high school scholars or in pre-service attempts at higher education, attending college courses while in an off-duty status and establishing a track record of continued interest in furthering an education can positively impact a Sailor's eligibility for the program.

As part of the STA-21 program application, Sailors must submit a personal statement, something which represents that candidates best opportunity during the STA-21 application process to tell the Navy why they think they should be selected for the program, and what they expect to do with the opportunity if provided the opportunity.

A Sailor's personal statement should provide specific, substantive comments on why they want to be a Navy officer and why they chose the particular officer career, and also demonstrate an understanding of the requirements of the chosen career field and a sense of what they can do for the Navy if selected for the program.

The most accurate STA-21 program information, including full details of the program, specifics for each of the program options and the on-line application, can be found on the STA-21 Web site at https://www.sta-21.navy.mil/.