



# Community Group Discussion Guide

September 1, 2024

1 Samuel 2:11-26 | Faithfulness Among Wickedness

## MOTIVATE

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Starter Question:

- ⇒ *What does God expect from us as believers?*
- ⇒ *Should ministers be held to a higher standard of accountability? Why or why not?*

## DISCUSS

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The opening chapters of 1 Samuel explain Samuel's family background and the situation into which he was born. His mother Hannah was childless, yet the LORD heard her petition and answered her prayer for a son. Hannah had vowed to give the child Samuel to the LORD's service and at a young age she brought him to serve at the worship site in Shiloh with Eli the priest. This was a pivotal point in Israel's history. The period of the judges was ending and the period of a monarchy will soon begin (see [1 Samuel Overview](#) and Synopsis for additional information).

Following the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-11), which celebrated God's wise rule of history and invoked His blessing on the coming monarchy, 1 Samuel 2:11-26 moves the storyline back to a time before the rise of kingship and picks up the life of Eli's family and the boy Samuel. Samuel, whose birth came from God's special favor and who had been dedicated to His service, led a model life in sharp contrast to his priestly colleagues at Shiloh.

- ⇒ *What are things that can either harm or protect your witness and your testimony?*

**1 Samuel 2:11b-12** *And the boy was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest. 12 Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD.*

The contrast could not have been greater between the two houses: the house of Eli, meant to be the house of faithful service to the LORD, was descending deeper into wickedness and sin, while the house of Elkanah and Hannah was ascending in honorable service. Samuel's parents faithfully honored Hannah's vow by leaving their son to serve the LORD under Eli.

Since Eli was too old to serve as an officiating priest, the task fell to his sons, Hophni and Phineas. While these two were despising the LORD, Samuel was serving Him. The sons of Eli, who up to this point had simply been mentioned (1 Samuel 1:3), now become the focus of attention. In short, they were "worthless men" who had no regard for the LORD. They were the picture of sinful men who had given themselves over to the carnal desires of the flesh. These men were meant to love the LORD and to lead the people in their worship of Yahweh. They were the opposite of everything God desired.

The righteousness of the house of Elkanah and the innocence of Samuel as he ministered faithfully to the LORD even at a young age (verses 11, 16, 26) show the different course ahead for both families. Even as Eli's sons had little regard or thought for the way of God, Samuel was faithful to the call of God on his life and was supported by his family in his ministry to the LORD. In his devotion to the LORD, Samuel remained undistracted by the world's temptations and was committed to honoring God with his life.

- ⇒ *Discuss similarities between young Samuel and the child Jesus.*
- ⇒ *Why is it important to note the differences between the houses of Eli and Elkanah?*

**1 Samuel 2:13-17** *The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, **14** and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. **15** Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." **16** And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force." **17** Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.*

These verses focus on the flaw in the priestly practices at Shiloh, Israel's place of worship. Hophni and Phinehas were taking the priests' share of the Fellowship Offerings "before the fat was burned"—that is, before the LORD had been given His portion (Leviticus 3:3–5; 7:30). Furthermore, they were consuming fat from the sacrificial animals, an act explicitly prohibited in the Torah (Leviticus 7:22–26). This was a breach of faith in service. The fat of the offering belonged to the LORD and was supposed to be burned upon the altar. Even the people presenting their sacrifices knew that this was wrong, but when they protested, Eli's sons threatened force and violence to get their way.

⇒ **How did Hophni and Phineas' priestly abuse give religion a bad name in Israel?**

Not only were Hophni and Phineas taking some of the people's portion from the sacrifice, but they were also taking from God's portion. What was meant for God, they took for themselves, and in doing so, they violated the Mosaic Law, which they were meant to uphold and live by.

⇒ **What does it mean to "treat the offering to the LORD with contempt?"**

⇒ **What are some ways you might show contempt for the LORD in your actions or worship?**

⇒ **How can your contempt for God affect the reputation of Christianity?**

**1 Samuel 2:18-21** *Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod. **19** And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. **20** Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD." So then they would return to their home. **21** Indeed the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.*

In contrast to Hophni and Phineas, Samuel grew up into a God-fearing young boy, unsullied by their influence. Elkanah and Hannah made their pilgrimage to Shiloh every year to worship God and support their son in his ministry. Each year Hannah brought Samuel a new robe.

⇒ **What is the significance of Hannah making Samuel a little robe each year? How might this act symbolize her continued faith and dedication to God?**

⇒ **In contrast to Eli's sons, how is Samuel described in this passage?**

A linen ephod was a distinctly priestly garment (1 Samuel 22:18). An elaborate form of the ephod was reserved for the high priest (Exodus 28:6–14; 39:2–7). The robe which Hannah supplied for Samuel was a "little coat" (Hebrew, m'il) that he most likely wore over his ephod. In his service at Shiloh, Samuel wore the ephod, a sleeveless, hip-length garment that only members of the Levitical tribe were authorized to wear. The clear implication is that Samuel was a member of the priestly tribe of Levi. The ephod shows that he was brought up in the daily practice of holy duties.

Samuel's unique childhood, one marked inwardly by his unique relationship with the LORD and outwardly by his priestly attire and his presence at Shiloh, contrasted sharply with that of Hophni and Phinehas. Samuel grew up "in the presence of the LORD," literally, "with Yahweh" again emphasizing the difference of these young men.

Hannah had not asked simply for a son, but for a son whom she might dedicate to God. Seeing her continued faithfulness, Eli prayed that the LORD would give Hannah and Elkanah additional children. Eli's prayer of blessing on the couple was abundantly answered. For the one child they gave to the LORD at the sanctuary, they received five others.

- ⇒ **What do Samuel's actions and the descriptions of him reveal about his character?**
- ⇒ **What is the significance of repeated statements that Samuel was in the presence of the LORD and ministering before the LORD?**

**1 Samuel 2:22-25** Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. **23** And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. **24** No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. **25** If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.

- ⇒ **How formidable is Eli's question to his sons: "If someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?"**

Hophni and Phinehas were morally corrupt and were not worthy of their priestly duties. These abuses by God's earthly representatives displeased the LORD. Their misconduct was evidenced in two ways:

- The improper way they handled the animal sacrifices made to God.
- The way they abused the women who served voluntarily in maintaining the worship center. They took advantage of women who were trying to serve the LORD at the tent of meeting by turning their service into some form of cult prostitution.

The situation had become so dire that the sins of the sons of Eli were spreading among the people and causing them to disobey the LORD by giving themselves over to sin. Hophni and Phinehas were leaders of the people, and rather than leading them to the LORD in worship, they were turning the people from the LORD by their disregard for God's ways and His honor.

Eli rebuked his sons, but he knew that Yahweh would act to protect the honor of His name among His people. The sons heard the words of rebuke from their father, yet continued to display the fruit of their immorality. In doing so, they had handed themselves over to the judgement of the LORD – death.

Eli's first recorded rebuke of his sons' misconduct came when he was "very old." The writer may be implying that Eli neglected his parental responsibilities earlier in life. Eli reprimanded them because he "heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel."

The phrase "it was the LORD'S will" in verse 25 also can be translated "the LORD was pleased." Although it would be misleading to say that the LORD takes pleasure in killing people, it is certainly true that He delights in bringing justice to the world order. Justice is a central trait in God's character, and the implementation of divine justice always brings satisfaction.

- ⇒ **How does the narrative contrast between the wickedness of Eli's sons and Samuel's faithfulness help in understanding the broader message of the passage?**
- ⇒ **What does Eli's failure to effectively deal with his sons' behavior suggest about his leadership?**
- ⇒ **What are the consequences of spiritual leaders failing to address sin within their ranks?**

**1 Samuel 2:26** Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.

Verse 26 presents a contrast to verse 25. Samuel's life certainly contrasted sharply with Eli's sons. As God and society were condemning Hophni and Phinehas, Samuel was being commended. Through Samuel, God had preserved a remnant of faithful servanthood at Shiloh. This commentary on the growth of Samuel in favor with the LORD and with men serves as a parallel to the development of the boy Jesus (Luke 2:52), who like Samuel had to recognize God's way in an evil world, and resist temptation.

⇒ **What personal lesson can you learn about the importance of living in a way that honors God, especially when given a position of influence?**

## TRANSFORM

**1. Make personal application:** God is serious about His own honor and how His name is made known to the world. While God is gracious and kind, He is not a fool. God will act to protect the honor and glory of His name. In the days of Eli, God was approached through the sacrificial system and was known by His name Yahweh. He was made known by the ministry of the priests Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. Thus, if the two sons were acting in a way that displayed other loves and loyalties, it did not show the name of the LORD positively.

- ⇒ **What are the broader implications of the contrasting fates of Eli's sons and Samuel for the nation of Israel? For us today?**
- ⇒ **What parallels can be drawn between the behavior of Eli's sons and issues faced in spiritual communities today?**
- ⇒ **How do you believe you are currently representing the name of the LORD?**

**2. Pray:** Ask God to show you how you can pray for the children in your life--be it your physical family, your church family, your neighborhood, etc. Ask that He would raise up "Samuels" in our time. Praise Him that He is worthy of our best worship and our best offerings. Confess your failures in specific ways you are misrepresenting God to the world.

## STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- Klein, R. W. (1983). *1 Samuel* (Vol. 10, pp. 23–28). Word, Incorporated.
- Baldwin, J. G. (1988). *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 8, pp. 59–67). InterVarsity Press.
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- Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. (1909). *1 Samuel* (pp. 39–54). Funk & Wagnalls Company.