



Study #2: Shattered Families

1 Samuel 2:12-17;
22-36
Week of 9/27

A Parenting Lesson from a Passive Priest

You don't have to do anything to do something very bad. Such is the case with Eli and his two sons in 1 Samuel 2:12–36. Eli was a priest of the LORD at Shiloh at the time of Samuel's birth. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were also priests, but you would never know it. They were called "worthless men" due to their wicked deeds. Eli let their sin go on too long without doing anything to stop it. Therefore, the LORD judged Eli, his sons, and the generations after them, and cut them off from their priestly duties. In doing nothing to restrain the wickedness of his sons, Eli did something very bad and the house of the LORD suffered for it (1 Samuel 3:1–14).

Bad examples of people in Scripture are meant for our good that we might learn from their mistakes and move forward in hope (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4). Eli's passivity encourages our activity. No matter what we do we cannot guarantee that our children will not grow up to be like Eli's sons. But we can instruct them according to the grace given to us and pray that they will grow in that grace. The grace of God saves and it also transforms. Part of the transformation is restraint from sin. Amazing grace is restraining grace.

Parents who know Jesus have the special grace of the Spirit's work within them. When the Spirit bears the fruit of restraint in us it is called self-control (Galatians 5:23). The Spirit-wrought conscience says to us, "Don't do that. Do this instead." Our Heavenly Father expresses love to us in His restraint and we do well to do the same for our children.

In a culture of endless freedoms many parents could feel like they need permission to say something that holds their children back from something they want. But when we ask ourselves where a behavior might lead in the long run we gather courage to say once again, "Don't do that. Do this instead." We can address sin and point them to Jesus for forgiveness. We can pray with them and ask the Holy Spirit for the help they need to change. God is gracious to restrain us from and forgive us for countless evils each day as our hearts are prone to wander. It is to God's glory when we extend His restraining and forgiving grace to our children for their good that they might move forward in the hope of Christ.¹

¹Gil McConnell, Pastor for Child & Youth Discipleship, Bethlehem Baptist <http://www.hopeingod.org/document/parenting-lesson-passive-priest>

Open It

1. Describe a time where you got caught red-handed doing something you shouldn't. How did you respond when you got caught?

Read It: 1 Samuel 2:12-17; 22-36

Explore It

2. According to our text, in what two ways does God describe the two sons of Eli?
3. God indicts Eli's sons of two offenses. What were they?
4. Describe the life of Eli as seen in this text.
5. How does Eli respond to the sinful actions of his sons?
6. How does God respond to the sinful actions of Eli and his sons? Be specific.

The women referred to were evidently volunteer helpers in the service of the sanctuary (cf. Exodus 38:8). The Hebrew word tsaba' also means "assembled," but here it probably means "served." Unintentional sin was pardonable under Mosaic Law, but highhanded, deliberately rebellious sin was not, particularly ritual prostitution (cf. Numbers 25:1–5; Deuteronomy 23:17; Amos 2:7–8). The punishment for highhanded sin was death (Numbers 15:30). God initially judged Eli's sons by giving them hard hearts as a result of their sin, before He brought final destruction on them (cf. Exodus 7:3; Romans 1:24).

Earlier in Israel's history another Phinehas, the godly son of another priest, Eleazar, had executed an Israelite named Zimri and a Moabite woman named Cozbi for practicing sexual immorality in the tabernacle (Numbers 25). Now this Phinehas, a priest and the son of another priest, Eli, was practicing sexual immorality in the tabernacle. How far the priests had departed from the Lord during the approximately 300 years that separated these incidents?³

10. How could Eli's sons legitimize open sexual immorality while being men who were called to serve God?

How might this have affected the entire nation of Israel?

11. What does this tell us about the importance of dealing with sin before it becomes a public spectacle that destroys our reputation as believers?

12. What causes a society to be so comfortable with sexual immorality even amongst those who are called to lead God's people?

³ Constable, Thomas. DD. "Commentary on 1 Samuel 2:1". "Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable". ["http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/view.cgi?bk=8&ch=2"](http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/view.cgi?bk=8&ch=2). 2012.

13. What should we be doing in light of our present circumstances where sexual immorality is common and accepted among Christians, and yes, even their leaders and pastors?

This section reveals the importance and power of parental influence, though this is not the primary lesson. Eli had placed more importance on his sons' personal preferences than he had on God's preferences; he had honored them more than Him (1 Samuel 2:29). Consequently they became worthless men (1 Samuel 2:12) whom God finally killed prematurely. Hannah, on the other hand, encouraged her son, Samuel, to value the service of God. Consequently he developed into a godly man whom God and other people honored and respected (1 Samuel 2:26). Eli's sons despised God and abused other people (1 Samuel 2:17; 1 Samuel 2:22). Samuel feared God and became a great blessing to other people.⁴

14. Read 1 Samuel 2:22–25. Would you give Eli a commendation or a critique when it comes to his parenting style? Explain why.

15. According to verse 29, God calls Eli out for honoring his sons over honoring the commands of the LORD. How can parents fall prey to this same temptation today?

16. What things do parents allow to get in the way of their leading their children to a closer walk with God and His Word?

What specific things are getting in your way and keeping you from being a bright light for those around you?

⁴ Constable, Thomas. DD. "Commentary on 1 Samuel 2:1". "Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable". ["http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dcc/view.cgi?bk=8&ch=2"](http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dcc/view.cgi?bk=8&ch=2). 2012.

17. What causes parents to be more devoted to their children than to Christ? How do we keep from doing such things?

What causes children to be so quick to dismiss parental guidance for the sake of sin?

When has this been seen in your own life?

This chapter also shows that godly influence can be more powerful than ungodly influence and can overcome many natural obstacles. God enabled Hannah to influence Samuel for good even though she seldom saw him, lived miles from him, and could not prevent the daily wicked influence of Eli's sons over him. Her previous dedication of him to the Lord was undoubtedly a factor in her success. Other important factors were her continuing encouragement to serve God and her prayers for Samuel.

God has not blessed with godly offspring all parents who have had the same desires for their children that Hannah did. Children are responsible for their own decisions as they grow up (Ezekiel 18:4; Ezekiel 18:20). Some choose to turn away from the LORD. Nevertheless this story shows what can happen. Children can grow up in an ungodly environment away from their parents' personal supervision and still become godly. The influence of a wise and godly parent can overcome many other ungodly influences in a child's life.⁵

18. How did Eli's lackadaisical approach to parenting adversely affect the lives of his sons?

19. What lessons can parents and children draw out from this truth?

⁵ Constable, Thomas. DD. "Commentary on 1 Samuel 2:1". "Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable". "http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dcc/view.cgi?bk=8&ch=2". 2012.

20. What advice would you give parents who have sought to faithfully “raise their children in the fear and admonition of the LORD,” only to see their children rebel from it?

21. Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. What practical things can you do to help strengthen your child’s, grandchild’s, or your own walk with God this week?

Ask your group to pray for you in this endeavor.