

Bible Study Topic: The good the bad and the ugly! Comparing Samuel, Eli and Eli's sons

Suggested Timeline:

- Welcome everyone – 1 minute
- Open with prayer - 1 minute
- Suggest feedback on answered prayer – 5 - 10min
- Closing prayer – 1 minute
- Time of Bible study – 40 minutes
- Questions – 10 minutes

This study comes with a table sheet which Bible study members fill in as you work through the material.

Area	Eli	Eli's sons	Samuel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing God • Hearing Gods voice • Recognising Gods voice 			
Doing God's work			
Honouring God			
Consequences			
Treatment of other people			

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Introduction

The story of Eli, his sons, and Samuel found in 1 Samuel is a powerful lesson about the way we serve God and the consequences of our choices. Eli, once a faithful priest, struggled to discipline his wayward sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who blatantly dishonoured God. In contrast, Samuel, who grew up in the temple, learned to listen to and obey God's voice, serving Him faithfully. Through their lives, we see the good, the bad, and the ugly—reminding us that God sees our actions, speaks to warn us, and ultimately rewards or disciplines based on our choices.

Choices we make have consequences. God talks and warns and will implement

1 SAMUEL 2:30 “For those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be disdained.

Key Verse: *1 Samuel 2:30* “For those who honour Me, I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be disdained.”

This Bible study focuses on the story of Eli, his sons, and Samuel as told in 1 Samuel. We will compare their lives and actions through the lens of several key themes: knowing God, hearing His voice, doing His work, and the consequences of our choices. Their lives serve as powerful reminders of how the way we serve God matters.

1. Knowing God

- **Eli** was the high priest of Israel and had a personal relationship with God, though he grew spiritually indifferent over time. While Eli "knew" God in terms of religious knowledge and tradition, he seemed to have lost touch with God's heart. His failure to correct his sons reveals a passive attitude toward God's holiness.
- **Eli's Sons (Hophni and Phinehas)**: Despite being priests, Eli's sons did not know the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12). They did not respect the sacredness of their position or the holiness of God, and their actions demonstrated their spiritual ignorance.
- From a young age, **Samuel** was dedicated to God and served in the temple. Though he initially did not recognize God's voice (1 Samuel 3:7), he was open to knowing and learning from Him. Samuel's life was characterized by a deep, growing relationship with God.

Knowing God is more than religious knowledge; it requires a personal and intimate relationship with Him. Eli's spiritual indifference and his sons' rebellion contrast sharply with Samuel's growing closeness to God.

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Group discussion points

- How does knowing God go beyond religious knowledge?
- What happens when spiritual leaders grow indifferent to God's ways?
- What are some ways we can personally know God rather than just know about Him?
- How can spiritual leaders today avoid becoming indifferent like Eli?

Practical Application:

Take time each day to deepen your personal relationship with God through prayer and reading His Word.

Write down one step you will implement to help deepen your relationship with God.

2. Hearing God's Voice

- **Eli** could still hear God's voice but was often passive in his responses. When God spoke a judgment over his household (1 Samuel 2:27-36), Eli accepted it without much protest, reflecting his spiritual complacency.
- **Hophni and Phinehas** were completely deaf to God's voice. Their disregard for their priestly duties and the people they served showed that they did not care to hear or follow God's will.
- **Samuel** initially did not recognize God's voice but, under Eli's guidance, he learned to listen (1 Samuel 3:1-10). Samuel became a prophet who faithfully conveyed God's messages to Israel throughout his life.

Think about:

- Hearing God's voice requires attentiveness and a heart open to His leading. Eli's sons ignored God, leading to their downfall. Samuel, on the other hand, learned to recognize and respond to God's voice, making him a faithful servant.
- Eli could hear God's voice but was passive in his response.
- Hophni and Phinehas ignored God completely and lived sinfully.
- Samuel learned to recognize and obey God's voice, becoming a prophet who guided Israel.

Points to think about:

- How do distractions prevent us from hearing God?
- Are we open to correction when God speaks?
- How do we train ourselves to recognize God's voice?
- Why is it dangerous to ignore God's voice like Hophni and Phinehas did?

Practical application:

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Spend quiet time in God's presence, actively listening for His voice.

When you feel God is speaking, respond in obedience rather than ignoring His guidance.

Is there something that has been highlighted? Write it down here

3. Recognizing God's Voice

- While **Eli** was familiar with God's voice, his ability to guide others was weak. When God first called Samuel, Eli failed to recognize immediately that it was God speaking. However, he eventually realized this and instructed Samuel on how to respond to God's call (1 Samuel 3:8-9).
- **Eli's sons** were spiritually blind and unable to recognize God's warnings. Their actions reflected their inability to discern spiritual truth.
- **Samuel** learned to recognize God's voice and became known as a prophet who God spoke through. His sensitivity to God's voice shaped his ministry.

Application:

Recognizing God's voice requires both spiritual awareness and a willingness to listen. Unlike Eli's sons, who were spiritually insensitive, Samuel grew in his ability to hear and discern God's direction.

Reflection questions:

- What keeps us from recognizing when God is speaking?
- Are we spiritually aware or spiritually blind?
- What practical steps can we take to grow in recognizing God's voice?
- Have there been times when you missed recognizing God's voice? What was the outcome?

Write down one step that you can take personally in recognising God's voice

4. Doing God's Work

- As a priest, **Eli** performed his duties but grew lax in enforcing God's standards. His failure to discipline his sons showed that he did not fully uphold God's commands.

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- **Eli's sons** abused their priestly office, committing sins such as taking advantage of the offerings and behaving immorally (1 Samuel 2:17, 22). They used their position for personal gain rather than serving God.
- **Samuel** faithfully served God throughout his life. He acted as a judge, prophet, and leader of Israel, consistently upholding God's work and leading Israel according to God's will.

Serving God requires faithfulness, integrity, and diligence. Eli and his sons failed in this regard, while Samuel's life exemplified commitment to doing God's work.

Points to think about:

- What does it mean to serve God faithfully?
- Are we more concerned about our own comfort or about fulfilling God's calling?

Practical application:

- Look for ways to serve God with integrity, whether in ministry, work, or daily life.
- Be accountable to others to help you stay faithful in serving God.

Reflection Questions:

- How can we ensure we are serving God with pure motives?
- In what ways can we apply Samuel's example of faithful service?

5. Honouring God

- Though **Eli** respected God, his failure to discipline his sons showed a lack of full honour for God's holiness. His reluctance to take decisive action against their sin contributed to the eventual downfall of his house (1 Samuel 2:29).
- **Eli's Sons** openly dishonoured God by disrespecting their priestly duties. Their sinful behaviour in the temple was a direct affront to God's holiness, leading to their eventual destruction (1 Samuel 4:11).
- **Samuel's** life was one of honouring God through obedience, prayer, and service. He honoured God not only in his public role but in his personal devotion.

To honour God means to obey and revere Him in all aspects of life. Eli's sons dishonoured God and faced severe consequences, while Samuel's reverence for God resulted in God's favour upon his life.

Points to think about:

- Honouring God is not just about words but about our actions and decisions.
- Disobedience brings consequences, but faithfulness brings God's favour.

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Practical application:

- Make decisions that honour God, even when it's difficult.
- If you have dishonoured God in any area, repent and commit to honouring Him moving forward.

Reflection Questions:

- What are some daily actions that reflect honouring God?
- What are the dangers of dishonouring God like Eli's sons did?

Conclusion

The comparison between Eli, his sons, and Samuel serves as a sobering reminder of the importance of honouring God. Eli's failure to act, his sons' disobedience, and Samuel's faithfulness all had clear consequences. God speaks to us and calls us to serve Him with integrity, as seen in 1 Samuel 2:30: "For those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be disdained." How we serve God matters, and the choices we make in responding to His voice will shape our lives and those around us.

Final Reflection:

- How will you apply the lessons from Eli, his sons, and Samuel to your own life?
- What steps will you take this week to hear and obey God's voice?