

Rising to the Call of Leadership



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4minute
BIBLE STUDIES

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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

RISING TO THE CALL OF LEADERSHIP
PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

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ISBN 978-0-307-45769-1

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

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Printed in the United States of America
2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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RISING TO THE CALL OF LEADERSHIP

What makes a leader a leader? What is it that makes some people leaders while others are just the person in charge?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote: “There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”¹

In leadership what makes the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat? A thermostat sets the

¹ Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” 16 April 1963. Copyright © The Estate of Martin Luther King, Jr.

agenda; a thermometer simply represents what is already in place. Dr. King was describing the church, but the description fits the individual leaders within the body also.

Leadership is tough. But God calls us to be leaders—in our homes, in our communities, in our churches, and ultimately in our world.

So what does God expect of those He places in positions of authority? What characteristics set apart the truly effective leader in contrast to the person who just happens to be out front? And how can you be the leader God has called you to be?

These are some of the questions we want to examine by the light of God's Word as we look at the lives of four Old Testament leaders. Their examples offer powerful insights about the hallmarks of great leadership as well as the pitfalls that can undermine our influence and effectiveness.

Our prayer is that this study will give you a basic understanding of the characteristics we need as men and women of God who are called to live with biblical authority and strength in a world that desperately needs trustworthy leaders.

WEEK ONE

One of the greatest difficulties a leader faces is choosing the right course of action when others challenge the rules or undermine his authority. This week we're going to look at two men who faced this situation and responded in very different ways.

OBSERVE

In the last days of the times of the judges of Israel, Eli served as the high priest at Shiloh. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served as priests under his leadership.

Leader: Read aloud 1 Samuel 2:12–17.

- *Have the group say aloud and mark every reference to **the sons of Eli** or **the priest's servant**, including pronouns and synonyms, with a **P**.*

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure to mark every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

1 SAMUEL 2:12–17

¹² Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD

¹³ and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand.

¹⁴ Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself.

Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw."

16 If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force."

17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.

DISCUSS

- What did you observe about Eli's sons from the vivid description in verses 12 and 13?
- Briefly discuss the behavior of Eli's sons as described in verses 13–16. What does this reveal about their character?

INSIGHT

The book of Leviticus describes in detail the Law of Moses and the sacrificial system. Leviticus 7 tells us the fat of the sacrifices belongs to the Lord and is to be burned. Leviticus 10:14–15 explicitly describes the priest's portion of the sacrifice. The practices described in 1 Samuel 2 are clearly in violation of God's instructions.

- According to verse 16, even the ordinary worshiper knew that God's portion took precedence over the priest's share; yet how did Eli's sons respond when confronted about their violation of the Law?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read aloud 1 Samuel 2:22–25.

Have the group...

- mark each reference to **Eli**, including pronouns, with an **E**.
- mark each reference to **Eli's sons**, including pronouns, with a **P**.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about Eli from this passage?
- What had Eli heard about his sons' behavior and from whom had he heard it?

INSIGHT

According to Deuteronomy 21:18–21, the Law of Moses instructed that if a son refused to obey when his father chastised him, or refused to even listen, the father was to bring his stubborn and rebellious son to the elders at the gate of the city, where they would stone him to death and thus remove evil from their midst.

1 SAMUEL 2:22–25

22 Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

23 He said to them, “Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people?”

24 “No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD’s people circulating.

25 “If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?” But they would

not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death.

1 SAMUEL 2:27–35

27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Did I not indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh’s house?’



- How did Eli respond to the reports of his sons’ behavior? Was his response effective? Explain your answer.
- What should have been Eli’s next step as Israel’s spiritual leader and as the leader of his family?
- Describe the Lord’s response to the sons’ behavior. What does this reveal about the seriousness of the situation?
- Discuss what you learned about Eli’s leadership as both a father and the high priest.

OBSERVE

As a result of Eli’s failure to deal with his sons’ behavior, God sent a harsh message to him through an unknown messenger.

Leader: *Read aloud 1 Samuel 2:27–35. Have the group say aloud and mark the following:*

- every reference to **Eli**, including pronouns, with an **E**.

- every reference to **God**, including pronouns and synonyms, with a triangle: 
- the word **heart** like this: 

DISCUSS

- What was Eli accused of doing in verse 29? Why was Eli held accountable for the actions of his sons?
- What leadership principle(s) can be learned from God's message to Eli?

28 'Did I not choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I not give to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel?

29 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?'

30 "Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk

before Me forever'; but now the LORD declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.

31 'Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house.

32 'You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever.

33 'Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar so that your eyes will fail from weeping and your soul

- The man of God gave a detailed picture of what would happen to the priesthood in Israel. Discuss the outcome prophesied in this passage for Eli's family.

- Verse 35 begins with the word *but*, which signals a contrast. What was being contrasted in verse 34 and verse 35? Explain why this is significant.

- What did you learn from marking *heart* in this passage, and what does this reveal about God's expectations of a leader?

OBSERVE

Even as Eli's sons were rebelling against God's ways, the high priest was given the responsibility of raising Samuel, a young child who had been given to God by his mother. God eventually called Samuel to

grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life.

34 "This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die.

35 "But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always."

WRAP IT UP

In examining these scenes from the lives of Eli and Samuel, we see that an effective leader must not only be willing to do what's right but also challenge others to do the same. This requires courage.

Eli exhibited a shameful lack of courage and strength when it came to his sons. He knew they had placed their own selfish desires ahead of their ministry to the people of God, yet he failed to discipline them effectively. He allowed their sinful actions to threaten the spiritual health of the people.

Samuel, by contrast, exhibited great courage as he delivered a hard message to Eli. He chose to obey the Word of God even at the risk of offending his mentor, with whom he clearly had a close relationship. Samuel not only had the courage to confront his mentor, he had the courage to confront the entire nation!

So we see that courage is an essential quality of effective leadership. Courage is not the lack of fear; it is the willingness to do what is right even in the face of fear. Such courage gives us the strength to confront those closest to us with the truth of God's Word. And where do we gain this courage? Through an intimate walk with God, as we'll see in the following weeks.

For now, the question to ask yourself is this: are you willing to step up wherever God has placed you and lead with strength and courage?



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