

## The Cautionary Story of Eli: A Man Who Was NOT Bold

Message 2 of 5 in the series: "Stories to Make Us Bold!"

### A. God wants His children to be **bold**.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."

2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

"The wicked flee though no one pursues, but **the righteous are as bold as a lion.**" Proverbs 28:1 (NIV)

### B. Eli was Israel's spiritual leader, but he was **unwilling** to boldly remove two corrupt priests who served under him at the Tabernacle because they were his sons.

"Now **the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord.** And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, 'Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw.' And if the man said to him, 'They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires,' he would then answer him, 'No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force.' Therefore, **the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.**" 1 Samuel 2:12-17 (NKJV)

*Note:* The wicked behavior of Hophni and Phinehas drove people away from making sacrifices at the Tabernacle and finding reconciliation with God. "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For **you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces.** You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either." Matthew 23:13 (NLT)

"Now **Eli was very old, but he was aware of what his sons were doing** to the people of Israel. He knew, for instance, that his sons were seducing the young women who assisted at the entrance of the Tabernacle. **Eli said to them,** 'I have been hearing reports from all the people about the wicked things you are doing. Why do you keep sinning? You must stop, my sons! The reports I hear among the Lord's people are not good. If someone sins against another person, God can mediate for the guilty party. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede?' But Eli's sons wouldn't listen to their father for the Lord was already planning to put them to death... One day a man of God came to Eli and gave him this message from the Lord: 'I revealed myself to your ancestors when they were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. I chose your ancestor Aaron from among all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer sacrifices on my altar, to burn incense, and to wear the priestly vest as he served me. And I assigned the sacrificial offerings to you priests. **So why do you scorn my sacrifices and offerings? Why do you give your sons more honor than you give me**—for you and they have become fat from the best offerings of my people Israel! Therefore, the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I promised that your branch of the tribe of Levi would always be my priests. But **I will honor those who honor me, and I will despise those who think lightly of me.** The time is coming when I will put an end to your family, so it will no longer serve as my priests. All the members of your family will die before their time. None will reach old age... And to prove that what I have said will come true, I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to die on the same day!"

1 Samuel 2:22-34 (NLT)

**Life Application:** Boldly following Jesus means putting our relationship with Jesus first. "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:26 (NLT)

**Life Application:** Boldly following Jesus means more than talk. "**Talk is cheap...**" Ecclesiastes 5:7a (NLT)

### C. **Providentially, God brought Samuel to assist Eli in the Tabernacle because He was raising up a bold spiritual leader who would listen and obey His instructions when Eli and his sons were gone.**

"Meanwhile, the boy Samuel served the Lord by assisting Eli. Now **in those days messages from the Lord were very rare**, and visions were quite uncommon. One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. Suddenly the Lord called out, 'Samuel!' 'Yes?' Samuel replied. 'What is it?' He got up and ran to Eli. 'Here I am. Did you call me?' 'I didn't call you,' Eli replied. 'Go back to bed.' So he did. Then the Lord called

out again, 'Samuel!' Again Samuel got up and went to Eli. 'Here I am. Did you call me?' 'I didn't call you, my son,' Eli said. 'Go back to bed.' Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before. So the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. 'Here I am. Did you call me?' Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, 'Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, "**Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.**"' So Samuel went back to bed. And the Lord came and called as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel replied, 'Speak, your servant is listening.' Then the Lord said to Samuel, 'I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel. I am going to carry out all my threats against Eli and his family, from beginning to end. **I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn't disciplined them.** So I have vowed that the sins of Eli and his sons will never be forgiven by sacrifices or offerings.' Samuel stayed in bed until morning, then got up and opened the doors of the Tabernacle as usual. He was afraid to tell Eli what the Lord had said to him. But Eli called out to him, 'Samuel, my son.' 'Here I am,' Samuel replied. 'What did the Lord say to you? Tell me everything. And may God strike you and even kill you if you hide anything from me!' **So Samuel told Eli everything; he didn't hold anything back.** 'It is the Lord's will,' Eli replied. 'Let him do what he thinks best.' As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable. And all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord." 1 Samuel 3:1-20 (NLT)

**Life Application:** Boldly following Jesus means listening to what He says, and listening to what He says means doing what He says. "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves." James 1:22 (NLT)

#### D. Eli and his sons reaped terrible consequences for their wickedness and passivity.

"At that time Israel was at war with the Philistines... The Philistines attacked and defeated the army of Israel, killing 4,000 men. After the battle was over, the troops retreated to their camp, and the elders of Israel asked, 'Why did the Lord allow us to be defeated by the Philistines?' Then they said, 'Let's bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh. If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies.' So they sent men to Shiloh to bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Heaven's Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were also there with the Ark of the Covenant of God... the Philistines fought desperately, and Israel was defeated again. The slaughter was great; 30,000 Israelite soldiers died that day. The survivors turned and fled to their tents. The Ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed. A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battlefield and arrived at Shiloh later that same day... The messenger rushed over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and blind. He said to Eli, '...Israel has been defeated by the Philistines... The people have been slaughtered, and your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were also killed. And the Ark of God has been captured.' When the messenger mentioned what had happened to the Ark of God, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and overweight." 1 Samuel 4:1-18a (NLT)

**Life Application:** We need to boldly follow the Lord wherever he leads. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." Galatians 6:7-8 (NIV)

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#### Connect Group Questions:

Read the cautionary story of Eli (1 Samuel 2:12- 4:18). Then discuss the following questions:

1. Does it surprise you that God brought Samuel to assist Eli during the corrupt ministry days of Hophni and Phinehas? (Esther 4:14) Does it surprise you that God brought our church into existence during a time of spiritual apathy and decline in America?
2. Why was God so angry at Hophni & Phinehas? (Matthew 23:13)
3. Why do you think Eli only talked to his sons? He was the High Priest of Israel and he knew all about their wickedness. So, why didn't he remove them? (See Luke 14:26-27)
4. Joel 2:12-14 reads, "...the Lord says, 'Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.' Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish. Who knows? Perhaps he will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing

instead of this curse." In light of this verse, how might Eli have responded differently to the prophecies of judgment he received? How should we respond when God convicts us of sin?

5. Discuss the following statements:

- God wants His children to be bold. (Proverbs 28:1, 2 Timothy 1:7)
- Boldly following Jesus means more than talk. (Ecclesiastes 5:7)
- Boldly following Jesus means listening to what He says and doing what He says. (James 1:22)
- We need to boldly follow the Lord wherever he leads. (Galatians 6:7-8)

6. Spend some time praying as a group. Ask God to give the people of Centerpoint courage, conviction, and power so that we can be bold witnesses for Jesus. (Ephesians 6:19-20)

7. Discuss the following quotations:

"You are free to choose, but you are not free from the consequences of your choice." Unknown

"The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or other material things, but rather a legacy of character and faith." Billy Graham