

Bible Studies for Life: June 18

Eli and Samuel • I Samuel 2:22-26; 3:7-10, 15-18

By Don Hicks



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Mentoring – discipling in the Christian context – as an effective way to invest in others is a major tenet of the New Testament church. The writer of Hebrews emphasized it this way:*Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another. and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25 KJV).*

Our focal Scripture passage for this lesson has two main characters: Eli and Samuel. One was very old and one was very young. The younger of the two, Samuel, is being tutored on how to hear and listen to God.

The first words of our focal passage are, “Now Eli was very old.” Being old, even very old, does not disqualify any of us from being disciple makers.

Eli served both as a judge and the high priest from the tabernacle located in Shiloh. Unfortunately, Eli was a terrible father. He had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, serving at Shiloh with him as priests. We will look more at the accusation that the High Priest was a bad father. I expect you will agree.

Eli had not strongly tried to correct or even stop Hophni and Phinehas from their riotous and openly immoral sexual sin at the very door of God’s Tabernacle. The Bible makes it very clear that Eli knew of this while he was the Judge and High

Priest of Israel: *He said to them, "Why are you doing these things? I have heard about your evil actions from all these people" (I Samuel 2:23 CSB).*

Samuel made feeble attempts to influence his two sons to live up to their positions as priests under his direction and authority, but to no avail. In I Samuel 2:24, he reached out to Hophni and Phinehas saying, *No, my sons, the news I hear the LORD's people spreading is not good.*

Eli's sons did not listen to their father and certainly did not change their ways.

There is good news in the account about the happening around the Tabernacle when I Samuel 2:26 says, *By contrast, the boy Samuel grew in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people.*

This is God's plan for children. The Gospel of Luke tells us about when Jesus was twelve years old, Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52 CSB).

This brings us back to the LifeWay quarterly's teaching point: "Don't let past mistakes prevent you from being an effective mentor."

There is no indication in Scripture that Eli was ever effective in changing the conduct of his two wayward sons, but there is the very encouraging account of Eli the aged High Priest helping the young boy Samuel learn to hear God speak to him and Samuel responding positively to God's leadership and call on his life.

God's Word is always completely honest, as we have just seen when the corrupt and disgustingly immoral lives of Eli's sons were presented even as Eli served as the High Priest of God's chosen people.

Now we turn to the equally honest and detailed account of

God's call of Samuel to be His prophet and spokesman. *"In those days the word of LORD was rare: ...One night Eli, ...was lying down in his usual place... Samuel was lying down in the temple... Then the LORD called "Samuel" (I Samuel 3:1-4 CSB).*

Samuel answered quickly, "Here I Am," and ran to Eli thinking he was the one who called. Eli told Samuel that he didn't call. The same thing happened two more times.

After the third time, Eli realized it was God calling Samuel. So Eli told Samuel, *Go and lie down and if he calls you, say, "Speak LORD, for your servant is listening" (I Samuel 3:8-9 NIV).*

God told Samuel that He was going to punish Eli's sons for their corrupt, evil live style. Bravely, when Eli asked Samuel he told Eli exactly what God had told him and, *The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground (I Samuel 3:19 NIV).*

Hicks is missions director for Jasper Association in Bay Springs. He may be contacted at donaldwhicks@gmail.com.