

MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY SEVEN

Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

Erosion is a treacherous thing because you don't know it's going on. All the while, it is eating away, disintegrating, destroying—slowly, silently, subtly. Domestic erosion is never fast or loud or alarming. It just quietly works its subtle ways. And it's not a new phenomenon. It's happened since time immemorial.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

NO building can stand forever—not even wonders like the Egyptian pyramids, the Roman Colosseum, or the Great Wall of China. While these monuments may survive today, they represent faded memories of former glory. It may take millennia, but the heavy hand of time will gradually break down these structures until they join the dust of the earth.

The great buildings of history have delayed their inevitable decay only through the meticulous planning and careful attention of their architects and builders. Without protection against erosion early on, these structures would have deteriorated centuries ago.

Strong marriages and families likewise must take special care to watch out for the danger signs of *domestic* erosion and to address them before the damage becomes severe. Families who ignore Scripture's godly counsel inevitably will face relational, spiritual, and moral erosion without realizing the subtle and gradual damage.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will turn back the clock 3,000 years to examine Israel's judge Eli and his family. The danger signs of this family's domestic erosion flashed like blinking beacons until they faced their judgment and downfall. Their story acts as a warning for those today who desire to build families that will carry a legacy of love and faithfulness that will endure forever.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

God Himself sets the foundation for a strong family. As each member grows in his or her relationship with God, their collective strength will only increase, and the family will be able to withstand the harshest storms of life. Say this prayer to your heavenly Father as you open His Word today:

Father, thank You for being a compassionate, gracious, and loving God. I thank You that I can call You “Father.” As I study the Scriptures today, help me see Your character so that I can demonstrate it within my own earthly family. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When the people of Israel first settled the promised land, they had no king. Before God established the kingdom of Israel, He raised up leaders called judges to oversee the political, judicial, and spiritual welfare of the people (see *Deuteronomy 16:18–20*).

For forty years, Eli functioned, not only as a judge, but also as Israel’s high priest (*1 Samuel 4:18*). First Samuel 1–4 documents his life. The man had much to commend, but a close study of the Scriptures reveals certain areas he neglected—and such neglect would cost him dearly.



Observation: Eli’s Wicked Sons

The first step in the journey of sound Bible study is observation. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll says, “To observe means ‘to inspect or to take note of; to look carefully, with attention to detail.’”¹ Read *1 Samuel 2:12–36*, and pay special attention to the writer’s description of each character.

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were also priests (*1 Samuel 1:3*). What word does *2:12* use to describe Eli’s sons? Why did the narrator describe them this way?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

First Samuel 2:13–16 provides an explanation for the character assessment of Hophni and Phinehas in *2:12*. As you read these verses, don't get too bogged down by the details. If you want to learn more about Jewish sacrificial customs, see *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

The narrative summarizes the sins of these brothers in *2:17*. What indictment does the text make against them? According to *2:22*, what other wicked acts did these scoundrels commit?

Eli was aware of the actions of his sons, and in *2:23–25*, he confronted them. In your own words, summarize what Eli said to his sons. According to *2:25*, how did they respond to their father?

What accusation did the mysterious man of God give against Eli in *2:29*? According to *2:30–34*, how would God judge Eli's family for the actions of his sons?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

In the following passages, Israel goes to war with the Philistines. What was the result of the battle mentioned in [4:10–11](#)? According to [4:14–18](#), how did Eli respond to the news of this battle?

The events prophesied to Eli came to pass just as God had said. God would not allow sin to fester among the spiritual leaders of Israel and so infect the rest of His flock. Even though Eli's sons acted most wickedly, God held Eli responsible. The danger signs weren't hidden in Eli's life, and neither will they be in ours.



Interpretation: Eli's Righteous, Spiritual Son

Interpretation requires asking, "What does this passage mean?" This passage contains timeless truths about domestic erosion from the example of Eli and his sons.

While Hophni and Phinehas were Eli's *biological* sons, he had another son—a *spiritual* son named Samuel. Samuel later assumed Eli's high-priestly post after his death.

Read [1 Samuel 1:28](#); [2:21, 26](#); [3:1, 8–10](#). How do these verses describe Samuel? How does Samuel's character contrast with that of Eli's biological sons?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

Even though this passage highlights the wickedness of Eli's sons, the mysterious man of God confronts *Eli* in *1 Samuel 2:29–35*. In fact, the Hebrew wording of the accusation is plural, meaning the man lumped Eli together with his sons. Why did Eli receive judgment along with his sons? In what ways was Eli culpable for the sinful actions of his sons?

Eli did not know his family was eroding. It's silent. It's slow. It's subtle. There were no blasts of trumpets. There was not a voice from heaven. He was just a daddy—just busy about his work. He hadn't become deadened to the things of God. He was just out of touch with his boys at home. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Wisdom for Avoiding Erosion

The book of Proverbs contains dozens of invaluable gems of wisdom for families seeking to avoid erosion. As you read these verses, remember that these are *proverbs*, not *promises*. They offer wise counsel, not rock-solid guarantees. Proverbs reveal how human affairs in a broken world typically unfold under God's divine order.

Read *Proverbs 3:11–12*. According to these verses, why does God discipline us? What example does this set for parents seeking to discipline their children? In other words, what should be the motivation behind discipline?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

Read [Proverbs 19:18](#). According to this verse, why should parents discipline their children? What will be the result if they do not discipline?

Read [22:6](#). Summarize in your own words the timeless truth contained in this proverb.

*Let me pause for a caveat. Sometimes a dad does what he ought to be doing, and the kids just go bad. Kids have a will of their own. Let me just set that straight lest you think I'm not aware of it. Often, however, the dad is too busy, too involved, and therefore, out of touch.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Application: Taking Action While We Can

In his application of this passage, Pastor Chuck identifies four danger signs of erosion displayed in the life of Eli. He was . . .

1. *Too busy.* Although he passionately served God, Eli grew preoccupied in his own work as the spiritual needs of his own family gradually slipped down the priority list.
2. *Too dull.* Eli lacked the awareness to acknowledge the sinfulness of his sons.
3. *Too slow.* By the time Eli listened to the warnings of those who knew of the evil deeds of his sons, it was too late to intervene.



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

4. *Too easy.* Eli's rebuke to his sons was nothing more than a slap on the hand. Ultimately, Eli rationalized the wrongs of his sons and thereby became part of the problem.

No family is perfect, and every family will go through seasons when these dangers might start to chip away at the health of the family. Consider your family and marriage. In its current state, do any of these warning signs flash before you?

Pastor Chuck offers three solutions:

1. *Wake up! This will keep you alert.* Recognize your own responsibility as a parent and spouse. Listen. Observe. Think. Pray.
2. *Talk straight! This will uphold your authority.* Are you concerned? Confront those concerns. Ask hard questions. If you don't say something, who will?
3. *Stay close! This will say you care.* Make your interactions frequent. Apologize for any distance. Laugh with them more. Pray with them more. Be deliberate.

This may be a wake-up message. Rise to your responsibilities as a parent. Your children long for boundaries. They long for your love. They long to know the security of your life. They just don't know how to put it into words. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Which of these solutions do you sense the Holy Spirit urging you to apply in your own family? How might you address the danger signs you explored in the previous question?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

You may look at your family and think, *It's too late*. It may seem like domestic erosion already has taken its toll—as if your family is on the verge of collapse. But no family is so broken that the grace and power of Jesus Christ cannot rebuild it. It's *never* too late to address erosion and to build your family upon a biblical foundation, moment by moment, one interaction at a time.

You might be asking, *When?* Right now. Start today.



A FINAL PRAYER

End your time in God's Word by writing your own prayer in the space below. Ask God to protect and to restore your family by His grace, and to use you to prevent future erosion.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 80.

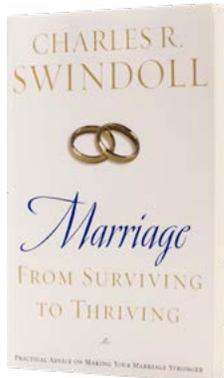


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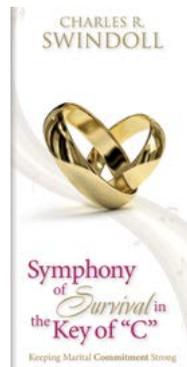
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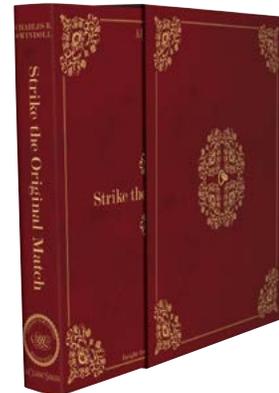
Tools for Digging Deeper



Marriage: From Surviving to Thriving
by Charles R. Swindoll
softcover book



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For the 2022 broadcasts of *Marriage: From Surviving to Thriving*, *Searching the Scriptures* studies were developed by Brad Smith, writer, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages.

