

# FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES

## STUDY SIX

### Samuel: The Boy Who Heard God's Voice

*1 Samuel 3:1–18*

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*What did God say? Why did He wake Samuel three times? What was it all about? It is one of the severest warnings God ever gave to a man of God. And one of the only times—maybe the only time—He ever gave the warning through a child.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll



To deepen your study, scan to listen.

**A**s a child growing up, did you ever want a new set of parents? After all, your friends' parents seemed to better understand their children by offering later curfews, fewer restrictions, and fair decision-making. Perhaps you saw all the privileges that you lacked, and maybe you even resented your parents' boundaries.

Then, as you grew up, matured, and brushed off that blissful vision of your friends' parents, you began to understand why your parents "imposed" the protective boundaries that they did. These parent-imposed limitations were for your long-term good!

Most parents readily concede that biblical parenting is not designed for the fainthearted. Hard conversations, stinging rebukes, unpopular decisions, faithful discipline, and sleepless nights mark the bumpy road called "parenting God's way."

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study reflects on an Old Testament character named Eli, whose indulgent ways with his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, brought ruin upon his household and disgrace to the name of God. In this stormy scene of a family in crisis, young Samuel shined like a lighthouse. God was shaping him to guide the nation in righteous living. Let's learn how God can work within even the most troubled homes to bring hope for the next generation.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

“Humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls” (James 1:21). Open your heart in prayer to receive the soul-enriching truth God has for you through your study today.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Samuel's birth and childhood occurred during a calm in Israel's turbulent history. The smoke of war had drifted away, the period of the judges had passed, and the nation had settled into spiritual malaise, even apathy. In these yawning years, “messages from the LORD were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon” (1 Samuel 3:1).

Eli, the high priest, was an elderly, nearly blind man who had taken Samuel under his tutelage and care. Hannah, Samuel's mother, had promised the Lord that if He gave her a son, she would dedicate him to God for lifelong service. So when Samuel was born and weaned, she presented him to Eli to raise at the tabernacle at Shiloh (1:1–28).

*Samuel was serving the Lord as a young lad under the watchful eye of Eli, a sort of preoccupied, doting grandfather type who took this young lad under his wing to teach him the things of the tabernacle. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Hophni and Phinehas, however, were the worst sort of role models for young Samuel. How would you describe the attitude and lifestyle of Eli's sons, according to [1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22–23](#)?

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## Observation: God's Prophetic Call Through Samuel

Observation considers the type of literature in the passage.<sup>1</sup> Narratives focus on the lives of people, their qualities, their interactions, and the lessons they embody. Look closely at Samuel's character in contrast to those around him. Note the ways Samuel models faithfulness, integrity, and humility.

### God's Voice . . . Samuel's Response—1 Samuel 3:1–10

Read *1 Samuel 3:1–10*. How many times did the Lord call Samuel's name before Samuel understood that it was God speaking? Why was Samuel unable to discern it was the Lord who had spoken to him?

Three times, Samuel tells Eli, "Here I am. Did you call me?" (1 Samuel 3:5, 6, 8), thinking it was Eli calling. What does that indicate about the nature and sound of God's voice? When Eli realized the Lord was calling, what did Eli say to Samuel? Put yourself into the scene. What feelings do you think Eli and Samuel were experiencing?

*I assure you Samuel did not go to sleep. Can you imagine working as a young person under someone who has years in the things of God, and that person you so greatly respect says, "That's God's voice"? It's the first time in Samuel's young life that he has connected with the living God, the two of them all alone.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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## God's Message . . . Samuel's Reluctance—1 Samuel 3:11–18

In that hushed moment of silence in his bedchamber, Samuel heard God speak to him—but God's message was not pleasant. What words of warning did God pronounce in *1 Samuel 3:11–14*? What emotions might Samuel have experienced upon receiving such a severe message about his mentor Eli?

The Lord referenced a previous warning He made directly to Eli through an unnamed prophet in *2:27–32*. What did God say to Eli then? What was Eli's chief sin, according to 1:29?

Whom did the Lord hold accountable for the blasphemous behavior of Eli's sons? Why?

According to *3:15–18*, Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the Lord's message but, when pressed, Samuel told Eli everything. What was Eli's reaction?

*There are times when this kind of intervention or confrontation is necessary. There are times when God uses an individual to confront another individual with the wrong of his or her life. It's one of the hardest experiences.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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## Interpretation: Turning a Blind Eye to Sin

Samuel didn't realize it was God's voice because he "did not yet know the LORD" (1 Samuel 3:7). Even as a child, Samuel was a devoted follower of God, but his relationship with God was still developing—"he had never had a message from the LORD before" (3:7). What does Samuel's relationship with God imply about faith development and how spiritual maturity grows over time?

God held Eli and his two sons accountable for their sins, vowing "that the sins of Eli and his sons will never be forgiven by sacrifices or offerings" (3:14). Had Eli rebuked and disciplined his sons, he could have avoided the tragic consequences that the rest of his family had to endure (2:30–33).

How did Eli's neglect in disciplining his sons affect his entire family? How did it change the course of his future priestly line, according to *1 Kings 2:27, 35*?

Under the new covenant, we don't follow the Mosaic law. But we can draw lessons from Eli's negligence. What family-life principle do you conclude?

If only Eli had chosen early and courageously to discipline his sons, perhaps the outcome might have been different for him, for his priestly lineage, and for Hophni and Phinehas. Let's see what other passages in Scripture have to say to parents today.

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## Correlation: The Remedy of Discipline

How does the truth of *Proverbs 19:18* reflect the tragic path of Eli's family?

According to *13:24*, what is the relationship between love and discipline?

Summarize the analogy used in *Hebrews 12:7–10*. What point is the writer making? Apply that truth to Eli and his sons, and reflect on how it relates to your family situation.

*If you have children who are young, you have children who are impressionable.  
That's the time to discipline them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Application: Addressing Domestic Disintegration

The contrast between innocent Samuel and those in the family who refused to deal with their sin highlights four signs of a disintegrating family.

1. *Preoccupation with a job to the exclusion of family needs.* Eli was a busy man—a high priest, a respected judge, a public official. His sons paid the price for his busyness.
2. *Refusal to face the severity of children's actions.* Eli was aware of his sons' blasphemy and misdeeds but failed to address them.

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3. *Failure to respond quickly and thoroughly to the warnings of others.* Parents will receive reports from neighbors, teachers, pastors, and from police. If parents are wise, they will listen and consider their reproofs. Eli failed to listen to the man of God who earlier came to him, and he paid dearly for it.
4. *Rationalization of wrong, thereby becoming part of the problem.* Eli knew what his sons were doing, but he rationalized it through his own inaction.

Do you see any of these signs in your family? Remember, no family is immune to problems. But simply hearing the truth isn't enough; action is essential.

Like Eli, are you allowing some unaddressed issues to fester in your family? What are those circumstances? What steps can you take to deal with the problem with God's help and by His grace?

Are you in relationship with another who is parenting like an Eli? Can you come alongside him or her, to encourage, counsel, and admonish, if necessary? Share this person's story and how the Lord is leading you to pray for and assist him or her.

Samuel was teachable and obedient, two qualities that we all need to develop in our walk with the Lord. Have you heard Him speak to you through His Word? If so, be like Samuel, whose example shows us how to respond when God is trying to get our attention. "Speak, your servant is listening."

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## A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I pause in this serious moment to thank You for the things You have taught me. My problem is not intelligence; my problem is obedience. Give me the faithfulness to act upon what I hear. May I learn through young Samuel, whose sleep was interrupted. May I learn a lesson for today—the importance of time spent with those living legacies who will outlive me. May Your name be exalted and glorified because I have obeyed. I pray in the lovely name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen

## ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1990, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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