

# “Abusive Leaders and Faithful Shepherds” -- The Call of Samuel // 1 Samuel 3 // *The Life of David* #2<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

1 Samuel 3, if you have your Bibles: Hope you had a great 4th of July...I heard our Campus Pastors crushed their sermons. If you were blessed by your CP can you put your hands together and thank them?

Our CP's are as faithful as they come and I hope you know how much they love you, pray for you, and care for you at every one of our campuses.

**One of the things I love to do on the Fourth of July is watch patriotic movies, and a really good one that came out during COVID was *The Greyhound*, starring Tom Hanks** (which only happened, I believe, because Nic Cage turned down the role). The movie is based on the events now known as the “Battle for the Atlantic,” told originally in the 1955 novel, *The Good Shepherd*. The actual characters in the movie and book are fictional, but they accurately depict the actions of several brave commanders whose heroism saved the day in that battle.

In the movie, one of the commanders, Capt Krause, is charged with escorting a handful of Allied ships across the Atlantic ocean. Day and night, they're hounded by German submarines, sometimes getting so

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<sup>1</sup> Works Consulted: Tim Chester, *1 Samuel For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading (God's Word for You)*, The Good Book Company, September 15, 2014; Jeremy Yong, "When Leaders Sin Against God," a sermon preached

close to them that they run into each other. Even when they *aren't* under direct attack, the terror of anticipation hangs over all of them.

Krause's destroyers are the first wall of defense, the ones the enemy submarines first target to get at the rest of the convoy. The thing that is remarkable is how, through it all, Capt Krause and these other commanders won't leave the convoy. They have multiple chances to leave the convoy and flee for their lives, but even if it means they die in the Atlantic, they will see their commission safely through. For several days Capt. Krause literally gets no sleep. The final scene of the movie is him lying down, only after those under his command are finally safe. (Or maybe he dies tragically in a final torpedo attack somewhere in the North Atlantic. I don't want to spoil it for you; you'll have to watch it to find out.)

**There's something inspiring about leaders like that.** Someone who puts his people's interests above his own; someone faithful to the end. **And that's at play here in 1 Samuel 3...** 1 Samuel 3 is about the kind of leader we long for, and need.

The book of 1 Samuel, you remember, opens with Israel seeking a King. God was supposed to have been their primary King--their protector, their provider--but they didn't trust God and wanted an earthly king instead. And so, in the opening 16 chapters of 1 Samuel, God sets up a contrast between the King they want and the King they need.

**In the story of Hannah, God showed them that a King could never be their primary source of identity, security and happiness.** Hannah sought those things in a son; Israel sought them in a king; we seek it through things like money, status, good looks, a great body, a healthy

at First Baptist Church of Hacienda Heights in Los Angeles, California on March the 29th, 2017; John Sailhammer. *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Joby Martin, "Speak, For Your Servant Hears," sermon preached at The Church of Eleven22 on May 12, 2019.

family or many other things. But real identity, security and happiness are found in God alone.

**Today, the focus is the kind of Shepherd God wants to provide for his people.** What you're going to see is the difference between a good Shepherd and a bad one.

**3** Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. (who was the high priest at this time) Remember that Samuel was Hannah's son, given to her in answer to prayer. She had dedicated him to the Temple by means of a Nazarite vow, which meant basically that she gave him up for adoption to the Temple. He grows up there, at the Temple, under the direction of Eli, the high priest.

(Now) And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. <sup>2</sup> At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place.

**The writer is setting up that this is a dark time in Israel.** *The Word of the Lord was rare, and there were not many visions.*<sup>2</sup> He points out the thing about Eli's eyes becoming dim as a kind of metaphor: ***just like Eli the High Priest can scarcely see physically, Israel can scarcely see spiritually.***

One cause of this blindness was the **decadent state of spiritual leadership** in Israel. Look back at 2:22:

2:22 Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Eli's sons, who served underneath Eli, who were in line to take over for him when he died, were sleeping with the female volunteers at the Temple. **Not only that, if you go back to vs 13 in ch 2,** we see that Eli's sons were manipulating the offering— basically extorting money from the people, and misusing funds intended for the Temple to enrich themselves.

And so, God says to Eli in vs. **29** (of chap 2) **"Why then do YOU scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?"** For as long as there has been ministry, there have been leaders who abused those positions for monetary and sexual benefit. But **what God goes after here** is Eli's silence in the face of them.

And so, God said to Eli: vs. 31 of chapter 2: **Eli, because of your silence,** "I will cut off your house... and (then, v. 35) I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind."

In the face of all this degradation, God is going to raise up a new leader, a faithful leader, a selfless leader. Who is he talking about? Samuel? (How many?) David? Jesus? (Congratulations, class, all answers were correct.)

**Which brings us back to chapter 3. It was a spiritually dark time in Israel,** but **3:3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out** (which means God's presence had not totally left, there was still a glimmer of hope), and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. (The ark of God means 'The Ark of the Covenant,' which was a gold box with a couple of carved angels on the top--you know, you've seen (pic) *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* --this golden box was the resting place of the presence of God, and on top

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<sup>2</sup> A statement that will open and close this story (3:1; 4:1)

of the lid the high priest would offer a sacrifice once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, for the sins of the people.

Samuel slept next to the room where the Ark was kept, and he laid down to the candle that burned eternally with God's presence--**TALK about an amazing night light!** I used to think it would be scary for a little boy to sleep in a big old Temple all by himself, but sleeping next to a lamp that burned eternally with God's presence would make it better, I think. (How many of you sleep with a light on? How many of you are cave sleepers? I used to like a small light on but as I've gotten older and more irritable I need total darkness. But if you're going to have a night light, this is a good one.)

4 Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." (Parents, you know what it's like when you wake up in the middle of the night and there are two eyes staring at you and it totally freaks you out. Usually my kids want some water or to tell me they are scared or something, and I say what any good dad would say: "Your mom is right on the other side of the bed." Just kidding. Samuel said, "Hey, Papa Eli, you called me!" And Eli said, 'No I didn't, son. Go back to bed.'" **So he went and lay down.**

6 And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "(Boy, what is wrong with you?) I did not call, my son; lie down again." (Translation: "You better get back to bed and let me sleep. Don't you be coming in here again.")

**Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.** (That doesn't mean that he was still an unbeliever--like, he didn't know God and was lost--just that he hadn't yet become a prophet. There's a kind of 'knowing the Lord' that makes you a Christian; and a kind of 'knowing the Lord' where you

hear from him and walk with his Spirit as he directs you in ministry. Some of you know the former but not the latter.)

8 And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." **Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.** 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 And the Lord came and stood (a fourth time), calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

11 Then the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. 14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

15 Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 17 But Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me..." 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. (Specifically, Samuel prophesied to Eli that both his sons would die on the same day and that the Ark of the Covenant would be lost.)

**Talk about a tough first sermon to give.** My first sermon was given at my home church on a Sunday night when I was 16 years old; it really was a terrible sermon and there's no way I'm ever going to let you listen to it. But everybody came up at the end and told me what an amazing job I did, and my mom and dad took me out afterwards for ice cream. **Samuel's first sermon was telling his mentor** that both his

sons would die on the same day and the presence of God would be stripped from his ministry.

But Samuel faithfully delivered the message, **setting an important precedent for the future**: he would be faithful to relay what God said no matter how difficult.

- **I hope you'll pray for whoever stands in this spot right here**, whether it's me or anybody else. Every week I face the temptation to tell you things you want to hear rather than what you need to hear;
- to affirm the culture when I need to contradict it; to tell you things are ok when they are really not ok.
- It's not that my message is all negative, of course: my calling is to be a dispenser of good news; but part of sharing the good news is telling the truth about the bad news, and a lot of times people don't want to hear that.
- **And here's the thing**: I like to be popular and I like to be liked. So pray for me, because I know what you most need here is not a popular preacher, but a faithful one.

18 And he (Eli) said, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him." (One positive thing you have to say about Eli: for all his failures as a leader, which are substantial, he knows you don't do yourself any favors by putting your head in the sand and ignoring God's word. So he says, "Samuel, tell me exactly what God has said.")

Which leads me to the first of **5 Takeaways**

### 1. Put yourself in a place where you can hear hard truth.

- If you read the Bible (or listen to it being taught), with any humility or degree of openness, at some point the Word of God is going to make you mad. If it's not, you're not reading it right-- there's nobody for whom the Bible just affirms them the way they

naturally are. If what you get from the Bible is a continuous affirmation-fest, you're reading it wrong.

- **Now, let me be clear: sometimes I make people mad** because I'm a bonehead and I say things that are immature or insensitive, and I've had to learn how to say 'I'm sorry' a lot over the years. I'm not talking about when I make you mad because I do something foolish like that.
- **I'm talking about those times where I am actually being faithful to the Scriptures and it upsets you.** Sometimes when people start lighting me up about something I've said, I'll ask, "Are you mad because you think I'm misinterpreting the Bible, or do you just not like what it says?"
- **Sometimes people are like**, "Well, I don't think the Bible is really clear on this." And I say, **There is a difference in the Bible being unclear and it being unpopular.**
- I mean, **unsurprisingly, the places people today find the Bible most "unclear"** are the places it is least popular in our culture-- *God's design for sex and family; his complementary design for gender; the dangers of Christian nationalism on the one hand, or dependent socialism on the other; our radical duties toward the poor; our responsibility to protect life from the womb to the tomb; our duty to surrender our cultural preferences when we come to the house of God to pursue diversity in the church; our responsibility to put God first in our finances; our responsibility to make his kingdom the top priority in our family schedules*--the Bible is not unclear on these things. **There is a difference in the Bible being unclear and it being unpopular.** Don't confuse the two. *Sometimes the ambiguity is not in the Bible; it's in your life.*
- Put yourself in a place where the Word of God is preached without partiality or respect to your feelings. If those who are preaching the Word of God do not step on your toes every once in a while, either you're not listening or they're not really preaching.
- Pray for us, your teachers, to have both clarity and courage, pray that we are able to separate our opinions from God's word, and

that we'll be bold to tell you what God says regardless of how unfashionable. I need that so much, and you need me to be that.

## 2. **God seeks surrendered vessels, not gifted ones**

- Every Jewish reader reading this would have recognized that Samuel was second string when it came to ministry.
- First, he was from the wrong tribe. Priests were supposed to be from the tribe of Levi. **Remember, there were two ways to become a priest** in those days:
  - One was to be born to the tribe of Levi; that was the preferred way.
  - The other was to take a Nazarite vow, where you renounced membership in your tribe and got adopted into the tribe of Levi. But that was the second string way, and that was how Samuel entered the ministry. He wasn't first string. He wasn't a "pure blood;" he was mud-blood.
- **Vv. 18–19 tell us Samuel's mom came up once a year to bring him clothes, which means he wasn't even supported by Temple dollars like other young boys** entering the priesthood. IOW, he's not on scholarship; he's basically an unpaid intern.
- AND YET, HE's the one God chooses to make the premier prophet and priest in Israel. Why? **Because God seeks surrendered vessels, not gifted ones.**
- Samuel's response when God calls him is "*Speak, Lord, your servant hears,*" a response totally different from Eli's sons or Eli himself.
- "***Speak, Lord, your servant hears.***" Let me translate that for you: "Lord, my answer is yes before you even ask the question. **That's THE SPIRIT God seeks in his servants.**"
  - There's a phrase we sometimes use around TSC--we say, "**Put your yes on the altar.**" --Maybe you've heard that phrase and wondered what it really means. It comes from a story that the interim pastor before me--Dr. Keith Eitel--used to tell about a young girl who was in a church service as a missionary explained what God was doing overseas and

challenged people in the church to be willing to say yes to God if he called them to join them over there. Well, at the invitation time at the end of the service--that part of a Baptist service when some people come down to the front and pray--the little girl went forward and knelt down at the altar. On the way home, the dad asked the little girl if she believed God was calling her overseas, and she said, "No, I don't know that yet. But I wanted to put my 'yes' on the altar so that whenever God does call me to something, he'll already know what my answer is."

- **That's what Samuel does.** "Speak, Lord, your servant hears. My answer is 'yes' before you even ask the question."
- **Y'all, it astounds me how many people--church people, people who have been in church their whole lives--expect to follow God with conditions.** They want God to give them suggestions about what to do or say or believe, but they reserve the right to veto or ignore or tweak it when they don't like it.
  - I sometimes compare it to the brake pedal my Driver's Ed instructor had in his car on his side. I don't know if they still do this, but **when I took Driver's Ed**, the car I was in had a brake pedal (**PIC**) on the instructor's side, so that if I did something he didn't like--rolled through a stop sign, got too close up behind somebody in traffic--he could slam on the break. He was always SO DRAMATIC about it--he'd stomp his foot and glare over at me; but he let me know: you don't get final say in this car. I had control most of the time, but he could VETO my choice any time he wanted. **That was probably wise on his part**, but for a lot of people, this is what they do with Jesus.
  - **They say, "Jesus, you can drive my life..." and go along with Jesus until he says:**
    - I'm calling you to serve overseas--then out comes the foot and they slam down on the brake..
    - Or he says, I'm calling one of your kids overseas--slam (I can't tell you...)

- God says, “I want you to end this dating relationship”--slam
- I’m calling you to tithe--slam
- I’m calling you to have this really difficult conversation--slam
- I want you to forgive--slam
- Here’s what my word teaches about sex and family--slam
- I’m calling you to sacrifice this--slam
- **To follow Jesus means you take out the brake pedal.** You relinquish your veto power.
- **And so I ask: Is this your posture toward God? God,** I’ll say what you want me to say (like Samuel). I’ll go where you want me to go; I’ll do what you want me to do. No limits, terms or conditions.
  - **It’s amazing to me how many people feel free to edit or tweak the doctrines of the Bible that they don’t like.** This is God’s word. I don’t get to vote on or tweak what God says to make it more palatable. **People often feel like I grew up with the convictions** I have now, but that’s not true. Y’all, candidly speaking: there are lots of things in the Bible that over the years I have found to be challenging, even offensive. There are a lot of things I didn’t want to believe, that at first I resented, even hated. **I used to say “Give me 10 mins and an eraser…”** But I made a decision a long time ago that if Jesus is Lord, I wouldn’t have conditions. What he says is my rule. He is Lord. He is my King of Kings, not King of Suggestions. If God says it, and I know he says it, by his grace ***I’m going to be committed to it regardless of how offensive or unpopular.*** I don’t have the freedom to edit God’s word. You’ve probably heard the quip: God made man in his image and ever since then he’s been trying to return the favor. I don’t have that freedom and neither do you.
  - **I ask again: What is your posture toward God’s Word and the leadership of God’s Spirit?** Christian, God wants to use you powerfully, like he did Samuel, and David, but as he did with

them, it starts with surrender. The Spirit only fills a completely surrendered vessel:

- **I love how C.S. Lewis says it in, *Mere Christianity*:** “Christ says, ‘Give me all of you! I don’t want a certain amount of your time, a certain amount of your talents and money, or a certain amount of your work. I want *you*. All of *you*. I didn’t come to reform or correct the natural self, but to kill it. No half measures will do. I don’t want to only prune a branch here and a branch there; rather I want the whole tree out. Hand it over to me, the whole outfit, all of your desires, all of your wants and wishes and dreams. Turn them ALL over to me, give yourself to me and I will make of you a new self--in my image. Give me yourself and in exchange I will give you myself. My will, shall become your will. My heart, shall become your heart.’”
- God wants to do more than reform you morally; he wants to fill you with himself; he wants to fill you with resurrection power, but that only comes through *surrender*.

### **3. God has a call on *your* life**

- **Samuel’s experience is, in one sense, unique--**this whole “getting woken up by a voice in the middle of the night” routine is not the normal way God calls people--Samuel was being called to a very special role that needed a lot of validation. In fact, as far as I know, Samuel is the only person in the Bible God ever called this way.
- But, having said that, I do believe Samuel demonstrates the calling every believer has on their lives and how they should respond to it. You see, your calling may not come as dramatically as Samuel’s did, but God has a calling specifically for you: **an assignment to be his mouth and hands and feet to someone.**
- **One of the most destructive myths that Christians believe is that only a few of us are called,** and calling only happens through some weird mystical moment like Samuel’s, and if that hasn’t happened, you’re not really called.

- **There's only a few people in the Bible God calls in a dramatic way:** Samuel, Moses, Mary, the Apostle Paul. *For the vast majority of us, it doesn't happen that way.* It didn't happen that way for me. But Scripture says that God has a special assignment for every believer, and your job is to figure out what that is and get after it. We have to be as surrendered to our calling as Samuel was to his. The question is no longer if...
- Some of you "know the Lord" in the salvation sense but you don't "know the Lord" in this sense. And it's your job to discern this and get after it.
- **You say, "Well, how can I know what my calling is?"** Great question. I'll give you the usual answer--you'll want to write these down::
  - **Saturation in his word** (as God's priorities become clearer in your heart, your role becomes more apparent)
  - **Communion with God in prayer** (more mystical)
  - **Practicing your gifts:** Just start pedaling the bike. Father Christmas...
  - **Involvement--deep, real involvement--in the church.** As we saw in our study through 1 Corinthians, God speaks to us, and guides us, through this church. So when I say "involvement in the church," I don't mean casual attendance on Sunday--I mean being in a small group and on a volunteer team and being here basically whenever the doors are open and getting involved in mission--so that others are close enough to you that they can see the gifts at work in you and call them out.
  - I'll do these last two together: **Special experiences** and **Circumstantial direction** ('special experiences' means particular ways God has written your story; particular things he's allowed you to experience that enable you to be a testimony to others; struggles you've had--with infertility, divorce, an addiction, a chronic illness, getting fired from your job, a past mistake like abortion--experiences that allow you to minister to others who are

now in the same conditions that you were.

**"Circumstantial direction"** means providential doors God opens for you)

- **These are the primary ways God speaks to people today.** And your posture toward God's guidance has to be the same as Samuel's: "Speak, Lord, your servant hears. The answer's "yes" before I know the question." **\*\*Maybe that's happening today.** You are feeling a stirring, an awareness that God is moving on you for something...

If you are a Christian, you are called, and you should know what that is and see your primary identity as 'God's servant'.

- **And let me say something to our high school and middle school students--not sure why this is on my heart, but I'll just share it:** It's never too early for you to pursue this! To make this your focus and your identity. One of the quests of teenagers is to develop an identity in front of your friends. To be known for something. "I'm good at *this*." "I've done *these* things." "I'm cool like this." Sometimes you even want to dabble in sin so that you can be cool in front of your friends that way: "Oh yeah, I've got experience in this or that..." Make pursuit of your calling part of your identity: "I belong to God; I'm committed to his mission; I'm his servant." Like Samuel obviously adopted from a young age. *This is who I am.* It's possible for you, middle school student, to be as clear about your identity as God's servant as Samuel was!

#### **4. Jesus is the greater Samuel**

- This is **the primary takeaway of the Samuel story:** Samuel points us to David, but even more importantly, to Jesus.
- Like Samuel, Jesus was born in a dark time, "when the word of God was rare and there were no visions." In fact, when Jesus was born, God had been silent for about 400 years.
- Like Samuel, Jesus was born in a time when Israel's spiritual leaders were power-hungry, abusive and apathetic.

- Like Samuel, Jesus would not have the right pedigree for ministry. He was born in the wrong location to the wrong parents; he wasn't rich or highly educated or raised in privilege.
- But, like Samuel, Jesus would be surrendered to the Father. Like Samuel, his power came not from his talent, but from his surrender to the Spirit.
- Like Samuel, Jesus would be a faithful prophet, delivering the Word of God even when incredibly unpopular.
- **And like Samuel, Jesus stayed faithful even when the people failed to listen.** This is getting a little ahead of ourselves, but there's a scene in 1 Samuel 15 where Israel rejects Samuel's word, and when they realize that, they come back to Samuel and say, "Will you still intercede on our behalf to God and represent us before him?" And Samuel says, "I could never sin against God by failing to pray for you." In other words, "I'll remain faithful to you even when you are unfaithful to God."
- That's a picture of Jesus, who not only faithfully delivered God's truth to us, but refused to forsake us even after we rejected his words. In fact, Jesus willingly bore our punishment for ignoring those truths, something Samuel never did. It was like the thief on the cross, who railed at Jesus and mocked Jesus, and instead of cursing him, Jesus prayed, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,' and then the moment that thief showed the slightest regret, Jesus responded with tenderness and mercy. That's what he does with us.

Samuel was an amazing prophet and priest who prepared the way for the King, but Jesus was the ultimate prophet, priest and King of all Kings. He was the faithful Shepherd, leader, captain, protector, provider and defender that we've always yearned for. Every other great leader--like Capt Krause, the Good Shepherd in the movie *Greyhound*--becomes good only as they model their leadership after his. A leader who puts the people's interests above his own, who

refuses to give up or walk away; who is faithful to his or her calling to the end.

*And while we have plenty of historical examples of those who abused their positions of leadership, but it's also true that Christ's example has inspired some of the greatest, most sacrificial leaders in history.*

***Like Lottie Moon, a small, 4' 3" American missionary whose name is now associated with an offering our church participates in every Christmas.***

*Lottie graduated from the girls' college in Charlottesville in the 1850's--the female counterpart to UVA--one of the first women in the South to earn a master of arts degree... She was incredibly bright. She was engaged to be married, but her husband didn't want to go to China, and that's where she was called, so she went single. It wasn't easy. In fact, one of the most touching lines I read in her biography: **"I pray that no missionary will ever be as lonely as I have been."***

*She gave undying devotion to the Chinese that she loved. When many were fleeing China during the China-Japan war she stayed where she was. The work was really slow, but this little 4'3" woman was ferocious and would not give up--there are stories about her putting her own body literally between the persecutors and Chinese Christians saying, "You'll have to kill me to get to them."<sup>3</sup>*

*In 1911, a great famine swept her portion of China. Again, she refused to leave. She wrote to American pastors pleading with them, can't you give to help your brothers and sisters in China? So, after she died, churches began to take up an offering every year at Christmas time in her name.*

So yes, it is true that many Christian leaders fail at their post, like Eli and his sons, but many others learn from Jesus, and, like him, lay

<sup>3</sup> *The New Lottie Moon Story*, Catherine B. Allen, 184.



down their lives for the people they serve; willing to be unpopular if they must, faithful to the end.

**That was true of Samuel, it was true of David, and most of all, it is true of Jesus.**

Which leads me to the last thing I want to point out from this story:

#### **5. Spiritual abuse is a deadly serious matter, and so is silence**

- Eli wasn't like his sons. He wasn't immoral or abusive in his behavior. **In fact, 1 Samuel 2 said that their actions grieved him and he rebuked them.** But, and this is the key, Eli wasn't courageous enough to do anything about it. He seems to be a good guy; a good high priest. But he prioritized family unity over institutional integrity.
- When it comes to spiritual abuse, silence is as sinful as the acts themselves.
- You see, there's probably nothing as damaging, spiritually, as when someone who has been appointed to represent God to people uses that position to exploit and take advantage of those people that he is called to serve. And it is equally grievous when other leaders, like Eli, who would never dream of doing these things themselves, won't take action to expose these wolves-in-sheep's-clothing and get them out of the church.
- **Abuse is a deadly serious matter, and so is silence and apathy in the face of abuse.**

Some of you have seen that the Southern Baptist Convention, of which our church is a part, recently took some rather decisive action on this--to say that we will not tolerate any version of Eli who seeks to protect other leaders at the sake of God's people.

- Not only would our silence allow people to be hurt, it also leads, as we see here in 1 Samuel 3, to a complete loss of the presence of God. God literally took the Ark of the Covenant away.

The NT says that elders should be men of proven character--1 Tim 3 says that elders must not be greedy for money, addicted to wine, they must be men of proven character who are faithful to their wives and who have lives characterized by integrity and selfless leadership.

**This is really important for us here at TSC. We have tried—as much as God gives us grace in this—we have tried never to highlight talent over character. Because talent can 'wow' you from the stage for a while, but character is what carries you through to the end. We want godly leadership that is accountable, and we have put multiple safeguards to make sure that I, or no one else, can run the system.** We have a board of lay elders to whom I report. I don't get final say on things. I've lost votes. I don't control our money. My salary and my giving are transparent both to our team of Directional Elders as well as other people to whom I have made myself accountable. I don't have a single password that someone else (or, usually several someones) doesn't know and can check if they want. I regularly seek out feedback on my leadership or my messages from our elders, other staff, my main counselor, named Veronica, and members in our congregation (this message, and every message I preach, gets multiple points of feedback before I preach it to you.).

- **If we discover that one of our pastors has used their position to extort or exploit that is an immediately fire-able offense.** We want you to be confident that your leaders are here to serve you, not to serve themselves. If there's anything about one of our leaders that says, "I'm here for the church to serve me," that's not the kind of leader we want, no matter how talented they are.

## VAMP

BTW, I know that I'm talking to some who have been the victims of that kind of abuse. We want to be here to be a resource for you if you can. I know we're not perfect--far from it--but we're committed to you. We're trying, by God's grace, to be like Samuel. And I realize that

it may be difficult for you to learn to trust any church leader again, but if you give us a chance, we'd love to be able to walk this path of healing with you. Start the conversation with us.

We want you to know how much that leader's actions—who hurt you—how much that grieved Jesus and they grieve us, too. Jesus said it would be better for someone to have a millstone tied around their neck and cast into the sea than to cause one of his little ones, the vulnerable ones, who believed in him, to stumble. I can't think of anything that would make someone stumble more than being abused or exploited by their spiritual leader. That's how Jesus feels, and we want to represent that.

So, start the conversation with us.

**Five takeaways.** I hope you can see how they all come out of this passage. *Put yourself in a place to hear hard truth; rely on surrender, not talent; God has a calling for you; spiritual abuse is a very serious matter and Jesus is our ultimate hope.*

## Prayer

Here's how I want to leave you: God has a call on your life, and it starts with surrender. Have you put your yes on the altar? Open your hands...