

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
OCTOBER 21 2023

Eli's bad, bad boys

Scripture Story: 1 Samuel 2:12-36.
Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 56.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Eli tried to serve Israel faithfully, yet his own children began to sorely affect his leadership. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were not only poor examples of behavior but they belligerently mocked God's law and His presence. Their rebellion was a display of blatant hypocrisy and disregard for true humility. Ellen White observed that the source of the problem was in Eli's parenting practices. In *Patriarchs and Prophets* she summarizes Eli's failure directly:

"Loving peace and ease, he did not exercise his authority to correct the evil habits and passions of his children. Rather than contend with them or punish them, he would submit to their will and give them their own way. Instead of regarding the education of his sons as one of the most important of his responsibilities, he treated the matter as of little consequence" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 575).

Paul would take the issue a step further and challenge parents to a more proactive style of parenting, saying, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, NIV).

This lesson can be approached from the point of view of students who will one day become parents and adopt parenting styles that need to be guided by God's will and His Word. Furthermore, the story of Hophni and Phinehas could also foster discussion about the impact spiritual leaders have on communities of faith. It might be a good idea to allow the students to read the story and share what they think the central meaning of the passage conveys.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discover the reality of cause and effect in parenting and leadership. *(Know)*
- Sense a deep conviction for the need of a genuine relationship with God. *(Feel)*
- Decide to become the kind of person today who will one day become a godly parent or leader. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Christian Behavior, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 22: "We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are

harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness. (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Why did you rank the items in the order you chose? If you were to pick what you think is the most important season of development for your relationship with God, what stage would that be, and why?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

A boy sailed his toy boat out on a pond in the park. He imagined the waters rolling up the side of his fearless ship, and the stories of danger and rescue played graphically in his mind. He became so engaged in his play that his boat floated well out of his reach, gradually making a journey away from shore to the middle of the pond. A man sitting on a park bench noted the little boy's predicament and volunteered, "Would you like some help?" The young boy, nodding, replied, "Yes, thanks."

To the boy's surprise, the man walked to the other side of the pond and began throwing rocks at the boat. The rocks fell just short of smashing the boat and sending his toy to a watery grave. The boy yelled, "Hey mister, stop throwing rocks at my boat!" He ran to the other side of the pond while the man continued throwing rocks at his boat. When he got to the other side he began to implore the man to stop when he noticed that his boat was almost back to the other side of the shore. The man was not throwing rocks at his boat but on one side of his boat, causing the ripples to slowly but surely move the boat back in the right direction.

Often discipline and accountability can upset our lives and rock us like a boat on the water. The experience is rarely comfortable, but it is necessary to move us in the right direction. Perhaps this is relevant to more than the obvious connection to parenting. To which other areas of life can this story apply? Our relationship with friends? Teachers? God?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Eli, as Israel's leader, chose to avoid disturbing the peace with his children. Instead of causing waves of discipline and correction to move his boys back to the right way of living, he left them to float along according to their own whims. Eli's hands-off approach proved disastrous, but it marks a lesson for young and older about the value of discipline. Read the following story and discover insights into God's way of dealing with people and how parents should relate to their children.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- As you read this story, what key facts or insights did you notice that are important to this story? (*Underline* them.)
- What part of this story challenges your view of God? Your view of spiritual leaders?
- Who are the main characters mentioned in this passage and what are some of the weaknesses this story exposes? (*Circle* them.)
- What other biblical stories does this passage remind you of? Why?
- Read 1 Samuel 2:13-17. They give more insight into the sons of Eli.
- Why do you think this story is in the Bible? What basic truth does it convey about God? What does it say about people?
- What do you think it means when the Bible says about Eli's sons, "they had no regard for the LORD"? What would this story look like today?
- What lesson emerges from this story that is particularly relevant to young people today?
- To what degree do you think Eli is responsible for his sons' behavior? At what point do individuals need to own their own choices?
- What are the most effective ways you have

been corrected?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story:

1 Peter 5:6; Genesis 4:7; Acts 9:1-10; Philippians 1:9-11; Luke 21:31, 32.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

It is important to remember when you read the stories in 1 Samuel that Israel is moving from a theocracy (being directed by God through prophets and judges) to a kingdom (guided primarily by a king). Even with ample stories of both God's gracious provision and His unflinching judgment, people such as Hophni and Phinehas still wander away from God but stay close enough to wreak havoc on God's people.

In 1 Samuel 2:12 the word the Bible uses to describe the two boys is *belial*, which means "worthless," "good for nothing," or "wicked." In the New Testament the word morphs some and gets used as a proper name for Satan. The sons of Eli grew to be corrupt, and so the Scriptures claim that they did not *know* the Lord. The Hebrew word for "know" is *yada,* and it conveys knowing intimately someone or something as opposed to simply being aware. This word means "to perceive," "to understand," "to have a personal experience with another person." This might be a good opportunity to discuss the difference between the tendency for people to know about God rather than knowing Him intimately.

The rest of the story of Hophni and Phinehas is tragic but proves to amplify the way God works with His people. In verse 27 a prophet came to Eli and reminded the aged priest (possibly in his mid-90s) about the sacred work of the priesthood. He prophesied: "And what happens to your two sons, Hophni

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Reflective Questions

Some teachers gauge their effectiveness by the volume of discussion that takes place in their class, and while discussion is good, sometimes carefully crafted questions are better left undisturbed by talk. But top-notch teachers will occasionally ask questions that lead to real change if the students are allowed a little time to quietly reflect.

For example, a question that may not lead to discussion but could lead to life change might be: "Hophni and Phinehas heard God's voice warn them about the danger they were boldly headed into. Do you ever hear God's voice calling you to stop or to turn around?" Or another more open-ended reflective question might be: "If God were to get your attention today, what do you think He would say to you?"

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Patriarchs and Prophets. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day" (1 Samuel 2:34, NIV). What a sad lesson for Eli and all of Israel to learn. But why is Samuel's story mixed into the narrative of Hophni and Phinehas? In verse 25 Eli tries to rebuke the wayward young men, but the Bible says: "His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke." Hophni and Phinehas were given a chance to repent and turn around, but they closed their ears to God's call, whereas Samuel was a servant who heard God's voice clearly and responded.

Perhaps this is an opportunity to ask the students, "Are you listening for God's voice, or do you resist and block it out?" This is a question more for reflection than for answering; however, it is still one that needs to be asked.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Ask the students individually, but anonymously, to make a list of three qualities this story encourages them to hold in high regard. After everyone has had a chance to make their list, post the lists on a wall or a table where everyone can read them and ask, "Did you notice a trend or pattern of qualities repeated? Which ones? Why do you think this is so? Which qualities were unique but caused you to think differently about the story?"

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Eli was getting old when his boys, Hophni and Phinehas, were getting set in their evil ways. But Eli missed opportunities to discipline his children, and they simply lived their lives by their own passions and desires. I suppose no parent enjoys correcting their kids; however, faithful parents try to instruct their children in the best ways to live. Hophni and Phinehas were given the chance to stop their self-absorbed behavior themselves, but they did not listen to God's voice.

God has spoken in His Word, through His Son Jesus, and through the lives of faithful believers over the centuries. But even with many voices calling, it is still possible to close our ears to God's call. If you are curious about that voice or only a little bit interested, I challenge you to, like Samuel, respond, saying, "I hear You." God does not impose Himself on us but pleads and woos us toward Him. Maybe, as in the illustration used earlier in this lesson, God is throwing rocks to cause ripples that draw you closer to Him. I hope you will not resist His promptings.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 56.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: 1 Samuel 2:12-36.
Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 56.

Eli's bad, bad boys



Photo by Colleen Cahill

keytexts

"Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD."

(1 Samuel 2:12, NIV)

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

(Proverbs 22:6, NIV)

flashlight

"There is no greater curse upon households than to allow the youth to have their own way. When parents regard every wish of their children and indulge them in what they know is not for their good, the children soon lose all respect for their parents, all regard for the authority of God or man, and are led captive at the will of Satan" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 579).

what do you think?

Rank the following authority-figure roles in order of importance for the different stages in life:

Formative years (birth to age 8)

____ Teacher
____ Role model
____ Disciplinarian
____ Caregiver
____ Friend
____ Parent/Guardian

Primary school years (ages 9 to 15)

____ Teacher
____ Role model
____ Disciplinarian
____ Caregiver
____ Friend
____ Parent/ Guardian

Youth through young adult (ages 16 to 25)

____ Teacher
____ Role model
____ Disciplinarian
____ Caregiver
____ Friend
____ Parent/ Guardian

Why did you rank the above roles differently at different stages?

What do you think is the most critical stage for character building?

did you know?

The best test of the Christianity of a home is the type of character begotten by its influence. Actions speak louder than the most positive profession of godliness. If professors of religion, instead of putting forth earnest, persistent, and painstaking effort to bring up a well-ordered household as a witness to the benefits of faith in God, are lax in their government and indulgent to the evil desires of their children, they are doing as did Eli, and are bringing disgrace on the cause of Christ and ruin upon themselves and their households."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 579.

INTO THE STORY

"Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD. . . .

"Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. So he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; the report I hear spreading among the LORD's people is not good. If one person sins against another, God may mediate for the offender; but if anyone sins against the LORD, who will intercede for them?' His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death. . . .

"Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, . . .

" 'Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: "I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever." But now the LORD declares: "Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age, and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

" ' " 'And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day. I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always. Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread and plead, 'Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat.' " ' "

(1 Samuel 2:12, 22-25, 27, 30-36, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

As you read this story, what key facts or insights did you notice that are especially important?

_____
_____

What part of this story challenges your view of God? your view of spiritual leaders?

_____
_____

Who are the main characters mentioned in this passage, and what are some of their weaknesses this story exposes?

_____
_____

What other biblical stories does this passage remind you of? Why?

_____
_____

Read 1 Samuel 2:13-17. These verses give more insight into the sons of Eli.

Why do you think this story is in the Bible? What basic truth does it convey about God? What does it say about people?

_____
_____

What do you think it means when the Bible says that Eli's sons "had no regard for the LORD"? What would this story look like today?

_____
_____

What lesson emerges from this story that is particularly relevant to your life now?

_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" **(Hebrews 12:11, NRSV).**

"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" **(Genesis 18:19, NIV).**

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it" **(Proverbs 22:6, NIV).**

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" **(Ephesians 6:4, NIV).**

"Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death" **(Proverbs 19:18, NIV).**

"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" **(Colossians 3:21, NIV).**

further insight

"Those who desire to control others must first control themselves."—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 247.

"Let the child and the youth be taught that every mistake, every fault, every difficulty, conquered, becomes a steppingstone to better and higher things. It is through such experiences that all who have ever made life worth the living have achieved success."—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 255.

Sabbath

Read Proverbs 22:6.

The ranking activity in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson challenges you to think about how parents impact children throughout the different stages of growth. What are some examples of ideal training?

What are some ways that your parents fulfilled some of these roles in your upbringing? How did that training impact your life?

Sunday

Read Matthew 6:1.

Read the passage in *Into the Story* and answer the questions listed in the *Out of the Story* of this week's lesson. What do you think should be highlighted: Eli's breakdown in parenting or his sons' (Hophni and Phinehas) hypocrisy and the impact it had on Israel? What other story in Scripture does this story bring to mind? What do you think is the message God has for you in this story?

Monday

Read 1 Samuel 2:12 and Proverbs 22:6.

First Samuel 2:12 is one of this week's *Key Texts*, introducing a brief summary of the whole story: "Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD." It is clear from *Patriarchs and Prophets* that the problem with Eli's sons was a gradual and continual rebellion that went unchecked and eventually spun out of control. Hophni and Phinehas served as religious leaders but were openly belligerent and careless about their calling. Perhaps you have friends or relatives who have steadily built a wall between their heart and God's Spirit. Pray for an awakening in their heart to see the destructive patterns in their life and respond to God's urging to experience a genuine walk with Christ.

Tuesday

Read Matthew 7:17.

Read the *Flashlight* quote for this week and reflect on the truth contained in such a pointed warning to parents. Think of a moment when your parent(s) held you accountable or refused something you wanted that upon later reflection you realized was probably a good thing for them to do. Do you know someone—not your parent—who models a fair and thoughtful approach to disciplining their children? What specific behaviors do you want to adopt when you have children?

Wednesday

Read the *Punch Lines* listed in this week's lesson and choose the verse that seems to speak to you most today. Why did you choose that verse? Which verse seems to capture the message of this week's story of Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas? Maybe this week you will encounter someone who, like Hophni and Phinehas, has no regard for the Lord. What will be your response to such a person? You might encounter a parent who feels regret about their parenting choices. How could you be a source of encouragement to them?

Thursday

Read Ephesians 6:4.

Make a list of five qualities you want to have as a parent.

Of the five qualities you have listed above, which do you think will be the most difficult challenge and why?

Invite someone you respect to help you develop this quality in your character.

Friday

Read Titus 2:7.

Reflect on the impact that spiritual leaders had on Israel's morale and effectiveness as God's chosen people. Who are some spiritual leaders in your life that have made a positive difference in your relationship with God? What specific stories or events have shaped your perception of them as godly leaders?

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 56.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.