

Junior 1 Year 3 Book 3 Lesson 6
Eli: Failures as a Priest and a Parent
 Passages: As listed in the lesson.

Memory Verse

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
1. Eli failed in his duties as both priest and parent by honoring his sons more than God. 2. As a result, the Lord condemned his family and the Israelites’ faith went into decline.	1. God is omniscient. 2. God is just.	1. Accept discipline with a humble heart. 2. Avoid despising God in our daily lives.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Understanding Eli
- B. Eli’s Failures as a Priest
- C. Eli’s Failures as a Parent
- D. The Consequences of Eli’s Failures

Life Application

- 1. Do Not Despise Correction
- 2. Do Not Despise God

Memory Verse

Conclusion: We should learn from Eli’s mistakes, and keep our spiritual eyesight clear by maintaining our faith and seeking God’s will each day.

Introduction

How do you deal with problems? Do you deal with them immediately, or do you procrastinate until the last minute? Do you ignore them completely, or try to make them someone else's problem instead? What do you think would be the consequences for each response? Try thinking back to a problem that you encountered. Share with the class what it was, how you dealt with it, and the consequences of the way you dealt with it.

We all deal with problems differently. Even in the Bible, there are a variety of different responses, especially to problems that people encountered in their faith. Today, we're going to be studying Eli, who is introduced to us at the beginning of 1 Samuel. Eli was a judge and a priest over the Israelites. However, he failed to address certain problems in his life, leading to terrible consequences.

A. Understanding Eli

During this period of Israel's history, "the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation" (1 Sam 3:1). Without God's word, the Israelites cast off their restraints and the society became corrupt. Amidst this darkness was the high priest Eli, who served as mediator between God and man. However, he was a poor spiritual leader whose weaknesses led to the decline of the nation's overall faith.

Eli belonged to the tribe of Levi, and for years, he acted as a judge and high priest in Israel. But despite his position, his life ended in dishonor. Instead of receiving a reward for his many years of service, Eli was cursed. His weaknesses in character and his tragic end serve as a warning for us today. Let's examine Eli's weaknesses as a high priest.

1. His spiritual eyesight was dim

1 Samuel 3:2 says that Eli's eyes had "begun to grow so dim that he could not see." The concern here isn't about Eli's physical decline, but his spiritual decline. A person with poor spiritual eyesight is someone who lacks spiritual discernment. We have evidence of this in his reaction to Hannah's earnest prayers of distress. Let's read 1 Samuel 1:12–14. Although he was a priest and a judge, he was unable to recognize that she was praying. This made Eli similar to a blind man leading the blind (Mt 15:14)!

2. His heart was far from God

Although Eli was the high priest, God did not reveal Himself to him, as his heart had drifted far from God. We can see this in the number of times it took for him to realize that it was God speaking to Samuel (1 Sam 3:8). Samuel, on the other hand, grew in the presence of God while serving Him, despite his young age. Consequently, God revealed Himself to Samuel and established him as a prophet of the Lord (vv. 19–21).

B. Eli's Failures as a Priest

Because of his lack of faith and spiritual discernment, Eli failed to serve both the Lord and the people as high priest. He may have performed his physical duties, but he failed to act as a mediator for the Israelites. In fact, as their spiritual leader, he actually led the Israelites even further astray from the Lord. Let's examine the various ways he failed his duties as a priest.

1. He allowed the priesthood to fall into disrepute

Eli was responsible for teaching the laws to the people, executing judgments, and offering sacrifices on their behalf. Unfortunately, he did not live up to his role in teaching the laws or maintaining the sanctity of the priesthood. Let's read 1 Samuel 2:12–17. Because of his sons' sins and Eli's lack of action, we can only imagine that those who came to commune with the Lord were no longer able to do so. Perhaps they were even blocked from God by the very people who were supposed to act as mediators, making worship at the temple a time of stress rather than a time of joy. Moreover, people tend to follow their leaders - seeing the priests of God sin would have given the Israelites an excuse to do the same themselves. Even so, Eli honored his sons more than God (v. 29), and allowed them to continue in their evil ways.

2. He did not correct his heart before God

Eli himself understood that what his sons were doing was wrong (1 Sam 2:24–25), yet he still didn't take any significant action to fix the priesthood. He continued allowing his sons to act sinfully in the temple and did not repent of his actions. The Lord gave Eli two separate warnings, one from "a man of God" (v. 27), and one from Samuel. Despite this, the Bible does not record any repentance on Eli's part, nor any attempt to fix the situation. When Jonah went to warn Nineveh of its destruction, the city didn't resign itself to its fate. Instead, the Ninevites deeply repented, and as a result, their city was spared. Eli, on the other hand, simply accepted his fate (3:18). This may seem like obedience, but the fact that he made no attempts to repair his relationship with God shows that he lacked both faith and the desire to repent.

3. He did not train a good successor

Eli's two sons were clearly unfit for priesthood. In order for the work of God to continue to prosper, it is important to cultivate successors and future pillars for His service. In the Bible, there are many great leaders who trained successors to continue their work. Moses trained Joshua, Elijah trained Elisha, the Lord Jesus trained His twelve disciples, and Paul trained young Timothy. Since Eli failed to train his sons, the Lord stepped in and personally appointed the young Samuel as His prophet instead.

C. Eli's Failures as a Parent

Eli had the responsibility of overseeing all worship in Israel. But his neglect of his own home shows that he was not up to the task. The Bible teaches us, "[For] if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim 3:5). Likewise, "[he] who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Lk 16:10). The state of Eli's household teaches us what kind of a person he was, and more importantly, tells us that his spirituality was severely lacking. Let's examine the results of Eli's negligence regarding Hophni and Phinehas' actions.

1. They did not know the Lord

Let's read 1 Samuel 2:12. "Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD." This is the very first description of Hophni and Phinehas in the Bible. A literal translation of the words "were corrupt" might also be read as "were sons of Belial." They did evil, and their actions were worse than those of the Gentiles, especially because they were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the nation. They were God's priests, but they did not know God.

2. They treated the Lord's offerings with contempt

According to the law, if the people made certain offerings, specific parts were given to the

priests, such as the shoulder, cheeks, and stomach of an ox or sheep. Eli's two sons, however, took the best parts of an offering before it was offered to God, including the fat of the animal, which was considered the best part of the sacrifice. In short, they didn't care about God, so they robbed God of what belonged to Him.

3. They seduced the women at the tabernacle

Aside from stealing, the two also committed sexual immorality with women who gathered at the tabernacle to serve the Lord. Let's read 1 Samuel 2:22–25. Eli's words seem rather weak in the face of their sins, and they clearly had no effect on them. They were so steeped in sin that they were no longer sensitive to sin, or to his warning.

It is clear that his sons were wicked people, but all Eli did was speak ineffective words of rebuke. Despite raising them, he was unaware enough of their spirituality that he thought this would be enough to stop them. And when it didn't stop them, he didn't care enough to take further steps to punish them or to stop them from serving God. This is why God told Eli that he honored his sons above Him (1 Sam 2:29). Eli was unwilling to stand up for the truth or be firmer towards his sons, and as a result, he became an ineffective parent as well as a priest.

The Bible teaches us that sometimes severe punishment is necessary to purge sin (Prov 13:24; 23:14). Punishment may bring temporary pain and suffering, but "nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb 12:11). By sparing his sons from punishment, Eli was condemning their souls.

D. The Consequences of Eli's Failures

Sometimes our failures only affect ourselves, and sometimes they affect other people, too. Forgetting to study for that test may affect only your grades, but if you forget to do something that you promised for someone else, then you've affected the lives of others with your actions. Eli's failures affected both his sons' lives and those of the Israelites. He wasn't solely responsible for their actions – his sons chose to act as they did, and as in Hannah's example, his failures didn't lead all of the Israelites into wickedness. But his failures certainly had an impact on his family, the Israelites, and the glory of God's nation.

1. Eli's family

Because of their sins, the Lord sent a prophet to announce judgment on Eli and his house. The prophet outlined a series of tragic events that would occur:

- a. God would cut off the arm of his father's house, so that there would not be an old man in his household, and all the descendants of his house would die early (1 Sam 2:31–33).
- b. Both his sons would die on the same day and lose their priesthood (1 Sam 2:34).
- c. The Lord would replace his family's position in the priesthood with a new, faithful priest (1 Sam 2:35; cf. 1 Kgs 2:27, 35)

Because of their disregard for God, God would completely wipe them out, and instead raise up a faithful priest to take their place. This new priest would act in accordance with God's heart and mind. This prophecy was fulfilled in King Solomon's time when Solomon expelled Abiathar – the last priest from Eli's household – from his status as high priest (1 Kgs 2:26–27).

2. The Israelites

His sons' wicked deeds and Eli's failure to punish them for it contributed to the decline in the Israelites' faith. Their conduct caused the people to despise the priesthood and lose faith and

hope in God. The devout who came to offer sacrifices were instead confronted with unscrupulous priests, while the wicked and lawless had an excuse to commit greater sins.

3. The Glory of God's Nation

Because the sins of the people increased, God did not abide with them. Consequently, when they went out to fight against the Philistines, they were defeated. Their army was destroyed, and the ark of the covenant was even captured, disgracing the kingdom of Israel (1 Sam 4:1–11, 21–22). The conduct of the priests and the Israelites as a whole affected the glory of the nation.

From Eli, we can see that although our actions may seem only to affect ourselves, what we do can in fact influence others. For example, voicing complaints can lead to negativity in others, which may lead to conflicts in the church. Consistently waking up late on Saturday mornings makes your whole family late to service, which teaches your younger siblings that it's okay to be late to church. On the other hand, godly behavior demonstrates to truth-seekers that God dwells in our church! Our actions, both positive and negative, can affect others far more than we might think, so we should constantly strive to live out Jesus Christ in our speech and conduct.

Check for Understanding

1. **What does it mean when a person has poor spiritual eyesight?** It means that they lack spiritual discernment.
2. **How did Eli fail as a priest?** He allowed the priesthood to fall into disrepute; he didn't correct his heart before God nor make attempts to repair his relationship with God; and he failed to choose a good successor to continue the work of God.
3. **Why was Eli's rebuke towards his sons ineffective?** Hophni and Phinehas were so steeped in sin that they were no longer sensitive to sin, or to Eli's warning.
4. **In what way did Eli honor his sons above God?** He was unwilling to stand up for the truth or be firmer towards his sons. As a result, he became an ineffective parent and priest.
5. **How did Eli's failures affect the Israelites? What can we learn from this?** His sons' wicked deeds and Eli's failure to punish them for it contributed to the decline in the Israelites' faith. Their conduct caused the people to despise the priesthood and lose faith and hope in God. We can learn that our actions, both positive and negative, can affect others more than we might think, so we should constantly strive to live out Jesus Christ in our speech and conduct.

Life Application

1. Do Not Despise Correction

Eli failed to discipline his sons, and his sons did not heed the words that he spoke to them – to avoid making the same mistake, we should understand the reasons we experience discipline, and why we should accept it even when we feel that it is unfair or undeserved. Our earthly parents and our father in heaven discipline us for various reasons. Although we may feel hurt or upset when we experience it, there are many reasons we experience discipline from our parents and from God.

a. To express love (Prov 13:24)

Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly." As their child, your parents love you deeply and don't want to see you go off track while living in a perverse generation (Phil 2:15). Let's read Hebrews 12:6–7. The process of their discipline can be painful, but it is evidence of their deep love – and of God's deep love – for you.

b. To teach godly submission (Heb 12:9–10)

To be “in subjection” to our Father in heaven means to learn godly submission when He disciplines us. When we submit to our parents’ discipline, we are submitting to God, and when we learn to submit to Him, He will always bless us. He knows the plan that He has for each of us, but it is only through discipline that we can learn to follow His plan. This learning process starts with the discipline that we receive from our parents.

c. To share in His holiness and yield righteousness (Heb 12:11)

When you’re disciplined, the Bible teaches us that we share in His holiness. How does this happen? Outwardly, your parents discipline you on how to make good choices, resist impulses or temptations, manage your anger, and other such things. Inwardly, when we accept their correction and repent, we are constantly refining and purifying our inward, spiritual selves, and are developing submission, holiness, and righteousness. Through constant correction, we become blameless children of God.

God doesn’t want us to remain infants. He wants us to grow in holiness and bear the fruit of righteousness. But to do so requires discipline from our parents and from God, because we are born immature and unwise. Ultimately, we always end up repeating the same mistakes, so we need to learn to accept the discomfort that comes with discipline, and humbly instill it into our hearts whenever we receive it.

2. Do Not Despise God

In the Lord’s prophecy against Eli’s house, He asked him, “‘Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me [...]?’ [...] ‘[For] those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed’” (1 Sam 2:29–30). By failing to reprimand his sons, Eli had despised the Lord. We must learn to avoid this in our own lives. But what does it actually mean to “despise” God? Let’s first look at a few examples in the Bible.

- “And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.” (Gen 25:34)
- “Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.” (2 Sam 12:10)
- “But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.” (2 Chr 36:16)

From these examples, we can see that to “despise” means to treat someone with disrespect, regard something as worthless, or to scorn something and treat it with contempt. We may not hate the Lord, but if He values something and we brush it off as worthless, we have despised God.

Let’s read Matthew 6:24. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Every time you choose to skip prayer because you want to spend more time on social media, spend Sabbath service daydreaming about the new game you bought, or deliberately disobey the Bible, you have shown that you do not value or cherish God. You are despising Him.

Below is a list of possible ways that we have despised God. For each item, check off whether you have done this before, then on a scale of one to ten, circle which number best matches how frequently or infrequently you have done this – one being not very often, and ten being very often.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not bother to listen to the sermon speaker, or even to refer to Bible verses during sermons.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I deliberately disobey my parents when they ask me to do something.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I forget God's omnipresence and lie about things that I have done.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I stay up late on Friday nights and fall asleep during sermons on Saturdays.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	During group cleaning, I do the bare minimum so that I can spend more time with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I run in last minute when I am assigned for hymn leading and pick my hymns in a hurry, without any thought or prayer beforehand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I frequently complain about things, such as the food I am given or things I do not have.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am always spending money on things that I desperately want but do not need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I cheat on tests.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I always question why there are so many rules in the Bible.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am always making excuses as to why it is okay to date.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

From your answers, do you think you have "despised" God in any way?

What should we do when we recognize our sins?

God does not want to punish us, and He doesn't want us to perish. At the same time, God is holy, and He cannot abide sin or iniquity. But being human, it is impossible for us to avoid sin entirely. So, the Bible also teaches us how to repent according to God's will: genuine repentance is always followed by good deeds. Moreover, we should not waste time when we recognize our sins, but immediately correct ourselves by changing our attitude and our actions. When we do that, God will blot out our sins (Isa 43:25), and He will help us live a new life with the power of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, if we continue to despise God and live in sin, God's wrath and anger will pour out on us. Paul wrote, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God

comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Eph 5:6). Therefore, we shouldn’t take God’s grace for granted, but do our best to keep our spiritual eyesight clear, recognize our sins, acknowledge them, and truly repent from the heart.

Memory Verse

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

Meaning

Parents must understand the responsibility that they have in teaching their children to live godly lives. But this verse isn’t just for parents. Even as children, we can spiritually train ourselves by spending time studying God’s word, and by slowly adjusting our thoughts, hearts, and actions to align with God’s will. In doing so, we are not only building up a solid foundation for our spiritual future, but we are also setting an example for those even younger than us.

Conclusion

Like Eli, we also have our strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, Eli did nothing to change his own weaknesses, and those of his sons. Because he valued his sons more than God, the Lord rebuked him severely. We should learn from Eli’s mistakes, and keep our spiritual eyesight clear by maintaining our faith and seeking God’s will each day.

Lesson 6 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. How do we spiritually train ourselves so that we do not depart from God in the future?
By spending time studying God's word, and by slowly adjusting our thoughts, hearts, and actions to align with God's will.
2. "And the _____ of the _____ was _____ in those days; there was no _____." (1 Samuel 3:1b)
word, Lord, rare, widespread revelation
3. "He who is _____ in what is _____ is _____ also in _____; and he who is _____ in what is _____ is _____ also in _____."
(Luke 16:10)
faithful, least, faithful, much, unjust, least, unjust, much
4. In what way did Eli honor his sons above God?
He failed to punish them and allowed them to continue in their evil ways.
5. What kinds of sins did Eli's sons commit?
They robbed God of the best part of the offerings, took the meat before it was even sacrificed, and committed sexual immorality with women at the tabernacle.
6. What are three reasons we experience discipline from our parents and from God?
As an expression of their love; to teach us godly submission; and so that we can share in God's holiness and yield righteousness.
7. Share a time when your actions negatively affected others. What did you learn from this experience?
Personal answers.

Life Application Activity: Do Not Despise God

Below is a list of possible ways that we have despised God. For each item, check off whether or not you have done this before, then on a scale of one to ten, circle which number best matches how frequently or infrequently you have done this – one being not very often, and ten being very often.

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