

READING PLAN: SAMUEL

Day One

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20

Keeping promises can sometimes be painful. If you make a promise without really thinking through it, you can find yourself very disappointed. It also depends on the person you're making the promise to. If it's someone you really care about, making and keeping a promise is more doable, even if keeping the promise is painful.

I can remember one time I promised a friend I would help them move. Moving day came and I just didn't want to do it! I made up some lame excuse why I couldn't help. The friend was understanding, but I regretted that moment for weeks! I finally had to come clean to my friend. It was painful, but thankfully he was a better friend than I was!

Hannah wept before God daily over her unanswered prayer to have a child. She was in deep distress that was so intense she did not eat. She begged God to look at her and remember her. She was in a situation that would have caused most people to turn away from God. Instead, Hannah pressed into the Lord's goodness and trustworthiness even harder. She had feelings of doubt, but God's goodness and personal care for her kept persisting in prayer and clinging to God's constant promises. And "in the course of time, Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a Son,"(1 Samuel 1:20). God did not answer her prayer right away, but over time he answered it in his perfect timing.

Because of her faithfulness in asking God, He gave her a son. She named him Samuel, and he was extremely special to her.

But, in Hannah's desperation to have a child, she made a deal with God - give me a child and I'll turn around and give him right back to you. A promise is a promise. When Samuel was old enough, she took the child to the temple and he lived out his days there as God's servant.

Imagine the bittersweet moments Hannah went through as she left her only child in the care of those at the temple! The only time she got to see him was on a yearly visit to the temple. But Hannah's faithfulness was HUGE! God kept his promise so Hannah did too, and all of Israel was blessed because of her faithfulness.

Questions:

1. Have you ever had to keep a promise that was painful to keep? How did you do it?
2. Why is keeping promises such a big deal with God?
3. What is one promise that you've made with God and not followed through with? How can you honor that promise today?

Day Two

Read 1 Samuel 2:27 – 3:1

Don't you hate it when you see injustice and hypocrisy? What is your typical response? Do you immediately speak up or do you take note and complain to others? The bigger question isn't what we do or don't do - it's what we learn. This is what shapes our faith journey.

Imagine what young and impressionable Samuel felt as he was being dropped off at a strange, unfamiliar place away from family, friends, and everything he knew.

At the tabernacle, Samuel had a good coach but lousy teammates. Eli's sons used their positions as a way to take what they wanted - even if it went against God. They took sacred food for themselves, used their authority to threaten men, and used their influence to seduce women who were serving God. They treated their position as more important than anyone else's. It was part of Eli's job in the tabernacle to stop any actions against God - he failed miserably.

What would it have been like for an impressionable Samuel to see his coach have one set of rules for him and another set of rules for his sons? Eli was teaching one thing and living another. Why should Samuel have to listen to his coach when he was not doing what was right?

In the midst of the sin at the tabernacle, Samuel chose to continue to be faithful before the Lord. Samuel chose to listen to the truth being taught by his coach, Eli, whether Eli and his sons would listen to it or not.

Questions:

1. What did Samuel do right when he was confronted with the choice to follow in sin or follow in obedience?
2. What was Eli's sin before God?
3. What is our responsibility before God when we see something that is wrong? What are you learning as a result of spiritual injustices you see around you?

Day Three

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-14

Listening to people you don't trust or respect is difficult. If you think about teachers, parents or bosses you've had that weren't the most admirable people, you know obeying and listening to them is a challenge. It really puts us in a strange place when God's word tells us to obey our parents when a parent isn't obeying God.

Samuel was in a tough situation. He had been taught what was right, but he had also seen Eli's sons make a mockery of God. How would Samuel follow God and still trust and show respect to his coach?

When we read about Samuel's encounter with the voice of God, it's a great reminder to us about being a good listener. It's the stuff we learn early on in our faith experience. Even with Eli's track record of listening and obeying God, he gives Samuel some great advice - when you hear the voice of God, acknowledge Him and listen.

Even though Eli was not teaching his own sons to follow the Lord, God still used him to teach Samuel how to recognize Him. Eli helped Samuel connect to God and Samuel knew the advice was the right kind of advice. (Clearly, God uses all people) This would become a foundational moment for Samuel. His story would be filled with key moments of listening and speaking on God's behalf to kings and rulers.

Questions:

1. How could Samuel stay committed to God and at the same time respectful of Eli in his position as spiritual coach in his life?
2. What do you think Samuel learned from the Lord using Eli to teach him even in his disobedience and broken trust?

Day Four

Read 1 Samuel 3:15-21

Delivering bad news is never fun. I once had to tell a friend that his girlfriend was cheating on him. Even though I knew it was the right thing to do and ultimately would be in my friend's best interest, it was still hard to do.

Samuel was in a very tight spot. The word that God gave to young Samuel was a direct judgment of Eli and his family - and it was up to Samuel to speak that word to Eli. Talk about awkward! Can you imagine knowing your direct supervisor at work was going to be fired and you're the messenger? I'd be thinking they aren't paying me enough to do that!

Think of all the excitement of talking directly with God! Think of the nervousness and doubts that accompanied the message. Imagine all that had to be going through Samuel's mind that night as he tried to sleep: What does this mean? What should I do? Should I tell Eli? What should I tell Eli? What is in store for me after I deliver this message?

Samuel got up the next morning and opened the doors of the temple. He had a lot on his mind - he wrestled with what to do. He was probably thinking - Eli is older than me. He raised me from childhood, and he taught me the ways of the Lord. He is my mentor, my coach. How can I tell him what God intends to do to his family?

It couldn't be avoided. Eli came to him and asked him what God said. With Eli's encouragement, Samuel told him God's entire message of the wrong decisions Eli had made to do nothing when his sons were sinning against the Lord. Eli had one last lesson for his student. Eli told Samuel "He is the Lord. Let him do what is good in his eyes."

Eli did not speak out against the Lord. He didn't attack his student for delivering this message - he didn't get angry or belligerent. He turned back to God and submitted himself to whatever God saw fit to do. What a powerful message for Samuel to hear and witness!

When Samuel found himself having to rebuke his coach, he chose to speak in humility and respect and saw God use him to bring Eli back to Him.

Questions:

1. How do you respond when people confront you about the mistakes you've made? What does your response tell people about God?
2. Think of a time you felt compelled to tell someone in authority over you that what they were doing was wrong. Did you go through with it? What was most challenging about the experience?

Day Five

Read 1 Samuel 12

Samuel went from a young farm boy to the spiritual leader of all Israel. Samuel proved to be a great leader by being a great listener. Even as the spiritual leader of all Israel, Samuel remained a lifelong student and servant of the Lord.

Samuel did what was right when faced with the decision to go the way of Eli's sons or go the Lord's way. He told the truth even though it was difficult. He did not go for the outer appearance, as many would have done - he waited and chose young David to be king.

Samuel was raised to serve God and help others worship him in the tabernacle. He was attentive to what God wanted for his people and was very troubled when they did not obey. When his own sons strayed from the ways of God in the same ways that Eli's sons had, Samuel not only knew what to do but he took action and appointed King Saul to rule over Israel.

The characteristic that defined Samuel was his sincere yearning for God. This heart for God helped him stay connected to his ultimate Coach, and his Coach's hand was on him throughout his life.

Great things came from this young farm boy! Samuel exhibited five qualities that shaped him into a lifelong student of God.

- Teachable
- Honest
- Humility
- Compassionate
- Passion for God

Questions:

1. How are you doing in these areas?
 - Are you Teachable?
 - Are you Honest with yourself and others?
 - Are you humbly willing to confess your need for God?
 - Does your heart stay big for others?
 - How's your desire for God?