

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH
DAVID-THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART
ELI'S SONS
1 SAMUEL 2:12-29
07/23/2017

MAIN POINT

Our relationship with food reflects our relationship with God.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is your favorite restaurant? Favorite food?

Share about a time when you went to great lengths to satisfy a craving only to be disappointed in the end.

Why don't the things we seek satisfaction in completely satisfy us? What does this tell us about the things we seek satisfaction from? What does this tell us about ourselves?

The fact that the things we desire in life never manage to fully satisfy us tells us that we were not made for these things. We were made for something more. We were made for God. We exist to worship and delight in Him (Isa. 43:7; Ph. 4:4).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 2:12-17 AND 22-26.

With what roles and responsibilities were Eli's sons entrusted (see also Lev. 7:22-36)?

How were the sons abusing their positions?

Verses 12-17 of chapter 2 tell us that Hophni and Phinehas were "worthless men." They "did not know the Lord." This disregard for the Lord can be seen in the way Hophni and Phinehas took advantage of their liturgical office to fill their bellies. They abused their priestly office and "treated the offering of the Lord with contempt." Leviticus 10:1-11 records the seriousness with which the Lord takes priestly misconduct. A holy God would not allow this to go on without punishment.

What are some ways people in our culture dishonor God in the way they think about food? How about in the way they eat food?

How did Hophni and Phinehas' cravings for food affect their relationships with those who came to offer sacrifices (v. 16)?

Hophni and Phinehas were controlled by their cravings for food to such an extent that they antagonized others and hindered their worship of God. The Bible calls us to honor God with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and to glorify God in the way that we eat (1 Cor. 10:31). Food, like everything else we crave, reflects back on our relationship with God. If we want to be wholly devoted to Him, we must consider how to use food to glorify Him and fight the temptation to become controlled by our cravings.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 2:27-29 AND 4:18

What was God's response to the gluttony of Hophni and Phinehas (v. 29)?

Why does God extend to Eli the responsibility for the sins of his sons?

One of the sins of Eli and his sons was that they took more meat from the sacrificed animals than they were entitled to (1 Sam. 2:13-16). They also demanded their meat portion before the fat was burned, and they instructed their servant to take it by force if necessary. The prophet called them out for "fattening" themselves; their spiritual laziness was making them physically lazy, and as a result, they became obese.

What does the way Eli died tell us about the example he must have left for his sons (1 Sam. 4:18)?

When Eli learned that the Israelites had fled from the Philistines and that the ark of God had been captured, he "fell over backward" and died because "he was old and heavy." It seems that Eli had set a poor example for his sons in terms of taking care of his body and controlling his cravings. Thus, Eli's sons followed in the sins of their father and gave into their cravings for food, which opened the doors for them to both dishonor God in worship and express disdain for others.

What kind of example are you setting for your family in your relationship with food? In your stewardship of your body (1 Cor. 6:19-20)?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

. What might the balance between taking responsibility for cravings and avoiding legalism look like in your life and family?

How might eating with others provide opportunities for ministry? How might eating with others hold us accountable to honor God in our relationship to food?

How might your diet need to change in order for you to begin honoring God with your body and controlling your cravings?

How has God satisfied your heart recently? What can you do this week to put yourself in a position to taste and see that He is good?

PRAY

Thank God for promising to satisfy our deepest cravings through the gift of His Son. Ask God to help the members of your group honor God in all areas of their lives, including what and how they eat. Pray that we would see food as a gift from God given to us to use for His glory.

COMMENTARY

1 SAMUEL 2:12-29

2:12. This verse consists of two complementary evaluative comments: Eli's sons were "worthless" (lit., "sons of Belial"); they "did not know" the Lord. The words cast an ominous pall over the passage and prepare the reader for the sequence of disasters that unfold in chap. 4. The verbless clause in v. 12—literally, "the sons of Eli, the sons of Belial"—serves as a sort of double entendre: besides indicating the perverse character of Eli's sons, the construction has the effect of equating Eli with Belial. Indeed, Eli was a Belial because he failed to give due respect to God and therefore threatened the sanctity of the Lord's name in the community of faith.

Hophni, Phinehas, and Samuel were skillfully portrayed by the writer as being similar in the sense that at the beginning of the story none of them knew the Lord (cf. 2:12; 3:7). Yet at the same time, differences and contrasts were also being established. While Hophni and Phinehas were despising the Lord, Samuel was serving Him.

2:13-14. The priestly practices customary at Shiloh in matters of sacrifice are unlike those mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament and clearly differ from those prescribed in the Torah (cf. Lev 10:14-15; Num 18:18). The writer described the strange traditions of the Shiloh priests in detail to clarify the need to destroy the Elide line and remove the central Israelite worship site from Shiloh.

2:15-17. These verses focus on the climactic flaw in the priestly practices at Shiloh: Hophni and Phinehas were taking the priestly share of the fellowship offerings "before the fat was burned"—that is, before the Lord had been given His portion (cf. Lev 3:3-5; 7:30). Furthermore, the priests were consuming fat from the sacrificial animals, an act explicitly prohibited in the Torah (cf. Lev 7:22-26). In addition, they used the threat of violence to get their way. This blasphemous expression of self-interest and disregard for the law was a sin that "was very great in the sight of the LORD" (v. 17; cf. Lev 7:25). Even the laypersons, who acceded to the wrongful demands placed on them, were more pious than the priests and their servants in that they tried to get the priests to give the Lord His portion first.

Samuel's precocious childhood, one marked inwardly by his unique relationship with the Lord and outwardly by his priestly attire and his presence at Shiloh, contrasted sharply with that of Hophni and Phinehas. The final portrait of Elkanah's family, which is also presented in this section, contrasted just as vividly with the destiny of Eli's family. Elkanah's family was depicted in acts of exemplary piety; Eli's family will be depicted in acts of disgusting sacrilege. Elkanah's family received a blessing and fruitful multiplication; Eli's would receive a curse and desolation. The family portraits are studies in Torah blessings and curses (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28).

2:22-25. Eli's first recorded rebuke of his sons' misconduct came when he was "very old." The writer may be implying that Eli neglected his parental responsibilities earlier in life (cf. Deut 6:7; 21:18-21). Eli reprimanded them because he "kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel." To the previously reported offenses (cf. vv. 12-17) a new charge was added—they were having sexual relations with "the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting." Perhaps these women were Nazarites involved in volunteer service at the worship site (cf. Num 6:2; Exod 38:8); alternatively they may have been cultic prostitutes. However, they were being treated as though they were pagan shrine prostitutes (cf. Hos 4:14).

Eli the judge used the imagery of a legal dispute in warning his sons. In a case pitting two people against each other, God could work either through His revealed law or through circumstances to exonerate the person charged with wrongdoing. However, if a person were pitted against the Lord in court, the human could expect only condemnation. Hophni and Phinehas, having committed capital offenses (cf. Lev 7:25; 22:9), could expect the Lord to bring the death penalty upon them.

The phrase "it was the will of the LORD" (v. 25) also can be translated "the LORD was pleased." Although it would be misleading to say that the Lord takes pleasure in killing people (cf. Ezek 18:32; 33:11; 2 Pet 3:9), it is certainly true that He delights in bringing justice to the world order. Justice is a central trait in God's character (cf. Exod 34:7; 2 Chr 12:6), and the implementation of divine justice always brings satisfaction.

2:27-29. The unnamed individual who spoke in the Lord's name to Eli is termed a "man of God" (v. 27), the second most common designation for a prophet in the Old Testament (used 71 times). The man of God's statement opened with the classic introduction to the body of a prophetic speech, "Thus says the LORD" (lit., "Thus said Yahweh"). "The house of your father" and "your father" were references to Eli's forebear Aaron (cf. 14:3; 1 Chr 24:3), whom Yahweh chose "out of all the tribes of Israel" to perform the priestly functions (cf. Exod 28:1). These functions included going up to the altar in the tabernacle courtyard (cf. Exod 20:24) and burning incense in the holy place (cf. Exod 30:7-9; 40:5), as well as all other official priestly activities performed while wearing "an ephod" (cf. Exod 28:1-6).

As noted in v. 28, the Lord ordained that the sacrificial meat portions given to Him by offerers were to be eaten by the priests (cf. Lev 7:34; 10:14). However, the priests were "fattening" themselves by eating the "choicest parts of every offering," that is, the fatty portion that was to be burned in the fire (cf. Lev 7:25). The use of plural pronouns in the Hebrew of "you scorn" and "fattening yourselves" in v. 29 indicates that Eli was implicated in some sense in the sin, even if it was only in the sense that as the eldest priest at the sanctuary he bore ultimate responsibility for what occurred there. However, while condemning their sin, he may have been participating in it. This interpretation is reinforced by the narrator's comment in 4:18, where it is noted that Eli was "heavy"—a condition that could have resulted from eating the forbidden food.

Though Eli's sons committed grave sins, Eli did not bear responsibility for their misconduct. He was condemned for his own sin—honoring his sons more than the Lord. This sin amounted to a violation of the First Commandment (Exod 20:2-3).