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1 SAMUEL 2:12-3:10

1 Samuel Series

I'd like you to take your Bible. The Bible is the word of God, inspired by God inherent. It is the word of God that then makes an impact on our lives. In order for it to make an impact on our lives, we have to listen to it, we have to hear it, we have to read it. In the next few minutes, probably thirty minutes or so, I'm going to teach from God's word and I expect that God is going to speak to you from His word something that you'll be able to take away and use in your life. So our objective is to allow God to speak to us this morning.

We're going to look today at 1 Samuel 2:12-36. If you have your Bibles you can open up there. We're jumping into the middle of a passage because we are in the custom of teaching the Bible verse by verse. So we're going right through the passage in 1 Samuel. Whatever we end with this week we'll start with next week and we'll keep going through the book of 1 Samuel. Then we'll take another book of the Bible and we'll teach it verse by verse.

The goal is to allow God to speak to us through His word and to understand what the Bible says. Many of us today don't really know what the Bible says. So our objective is to get into it and let it speak to us and understand more about what it looks like.

Let me just bring you up to date if you weren't with us before. We've looked at Hannah who wanted to have a child. It's a beautiful picture of her godly parenting as we see her dedicating her son to the Lord. That is the whole picture we have up to this point, but now we come into a contrast with another family that has a lot of challenges. We'll look at that and it's going to be helpful for us who are parents with some applications there, but it's also valuable for anyone because I want to zero in on the personal relationship that we all must have with God. That's what missing in the one family's life, that's what exists in the other guy's life. So there's a contrast back and forth we're going to see and it has to do with personal relationship.

I just want to say right at the top here, if you don't have a personal relationship with God, listen to this today and you'll be able to understand a little bit more about what that means. A personal relationship with God views God not just as a distant God up in heaven, but that He's living in my heart and I'm communing and interacting. He's talking and I'm listening.

Let's look at verse 12 as we get started. Eli is the priest at the time. *Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord.* We begin by looking at Eli. Eli is a priest who is a direct descendant from Aaron. The first priest God established in the Mosaic Law was Aaron. And then as you go down his lineage you came to Eli, and then of course his sons were Hophni and Phinehas that we're going to learn about as well. They were serving as priests in Shiloh, which

was the central worship area for the community. So people would come there for worship and they would come to the priest who would help them to experience God and understand God.

The priests were speaking on behalf of God to the people. So the people would experience God through the priests. But these two guys were priests and they were corrupt. I find it interesting in the verse that we read that it says *they were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord.*

The idea of lacking character and lacking regard for the Lord are tied together. That's why when someone gets saved or they end up having a personal relationship with God, it transforms them and their character changes. They used to live this way, but now they live this way because when someone has regard for the Lord good things happen in their lives. Their lives change.

Well these guys were corrupt, it says, or they were scoundrels and they had no regard for the Lord. Now we're going to get an illustration, the first illustration of their offense and what they did.

Verse 13 – *Now it was the practice of the priests that, whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot. Whatever the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh.*

The practice that they're involved in is wrong. The practice that they're engaged in is against God's instructions that He gave to them. In fact they were taking advantage of the people and they were misrepresenting God because God had given them instructions. God had already provided for the needs of the priests.

Let me show you some verses that illustrate that. In Leviticus 7:31 it says – *The priest shall burn the fat on the altar but the breast belong to Aaron and his sons.* So the priests were provided for by the offerings that were brought. The priests had a portion of that. It was given to them. It was decided how that would take place.

Back to our passage. Verse 15 – *But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."* So what these corrupt priests were doing is they were violating God's law and they were taking this with the fat on it, which was not supposed to be taking place.

In fact here's another verse that describes that in verse 25 of Leviticus 7. *Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from which a food offering may be presented to the Lord must be cut off from their people.*

So there were specific instructions about why that was to take place. These guys disobeyed God's word. They had no regard for the Lord and they didn't have this personal relationship with God. Interesting. Even a person in a religious position, someone who had a position to represent God to the people, lacked this personal relationship with God. It's really sad. Their practice was

not to accept the breast and thigh, but instead they thrust this three-pronged fork into the kettle and took for themselves whatever was brought up. They did it before the fat was burned on the altar, so they were violating God's command as well.

Why did they do this? Maybe they didn't understand why this was so important. Maybe they didn't like it. But I would suggest as I teach young people today that responsibility isn't liking what you're supposed to do. It's doing it, even if you don't like it. That's responsibility. We all have things we don't like to do, but we're responsible and we do them because they're the right thing to do, not because we particularly like them.

These guys were doing the wrong thing and they were taking advantage of God's system for sacrifice and taking it for their own benefit and use. It's a really sad situation. In fact when one of the worshipers came and they would object, "Hey don't do this" (read on verse 16) – *If the person said to him, "Let the fat be burned first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would answer, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force."* So they were abusing the people. A sad situation.

Verse 17 – *This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.* In other words what they were doing was wrong. They were disregarding the Lord. We already saw those words. They weren't valuing what God had set up. Now all of that is describing these evil guys, I think in part because God wants to show the character of Samuel.

We see the first contrast exist in verse 18 with the word *but*. So these two guys are evil, what they're doing is wrong; we've got illustrations for that. Then it says in verse 18 – *But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.* Hannah had bore this child, but then dedicated him to the Lord. So now where this boy Samuel is being raised in the same home as these bad, evil guys. Same home, but had a different heart.

Verse 20 – *Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, "May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord." Then they would go home. And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.*

Let's talk about that word *presence*. As I mentioned earlier *the presence of the Lord*. There is in the scriptures this understanding of God and theologically that He is omnipresent. That means He exists everywhere. Wherever you are, God is there. There is nowhere you can go away from God's presence. He's always everywhere. But then there's passages like this one that seem to indicate that we can move into God's presence. We do that when we worship. We come into God's presence in a different way than He's everywhere, but it's just this sense of openness of our heart to God, this ability to connect with God in a personal way. I think it has to be intentional.

So there's two ways to look at the presence of God. One is God is everywhere. Sure. We know He is. He's working. He's doing all these things. But there's another way in which we come into

this presence of God and we experience Him. We enjoy that presence. We live in that presence of God and do what God expects us to do.

All of that is what's being described here when it says *the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord*. We would have to say this is the priest's house. He's growing up in the priest's house. Hophni and Phinehas grew up in the presence of the Lord in the one sense that God is working and they could see God working everywhere. But there's this sense where Samuel was in the presence of the Lord and experienced that.

Well we could stop there because I just think that's such a great application for us to take Jesus home into our lives and to say, "Wow, am I living in the presence of God today? Or tomorrow when I'm not at church. Am I enjoying and experiencing God's presence when things around me don't seem to be getting better, they seem to be getting worse?" Can I enjoy God's presence in the midst of that personal illustration that I think really describes the personal relationship that God wants us to have. He wants us to have this personal relationship.

So there's some that have this picture of God where He's distant or He's harsh or judgmental. When I'm working with parents and I'm trying to teach parents how to work with their children to use the scriptures in their parenting, I caution parents by saying this: "Be careful that you don't just use the Bible with your children during correction times because you may give the impression to your children that God is simply judgmental or angry."

Now it is important that you teach children about the wrath and the holiness and the justice of God. Those are very important qualities of God that we must understand, but you have to remember theologically that when Jesus Christ died on the cross He died to satisfy the wrath and the just and the holiness of God so that we can experience Him as a loving heavenly Father who cares about us, has our hairs numbered, and cares about us more than the flowers of the field, more than the birds of the air. He cares for us in such a very personal way that we call Him Father. We don't want to miss that as we're trying to understand this wrath and holiness and justice of God. However, it is important for us to understand that God has created a standard that we must live by. If we don't live by that standard then bad things are going to happen. Judgment is going to happen.

The problem here with these two boys gets worse. Verse 22 says – *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."*

First of all it strikes me. It seems like weak parenting that's going on here. Not only here, but as we continue on in the passage. His sons were doing the wrong thing. Eli had not only the responsibility but the authority to do something different about this, to remove them from their positions. He doesn't apparently take firm action that he needs to take in order to help them change. They need to take responsibility for their own actions. He has the authority to move in that direction, but he doesn't do that and it creates a problem.

Verse 24 continues what he's saying. *"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.

Listen to their father's rebuke. Why? Because God was speaking through their father and was giving them an opportunity to change, to be corrected, to respond. God is always speaking. The question is are we willing to listen to what He has to say?

We'll hear more about speaking in just a minute here, but I want to talk about the challenge that I think this guy is experiencing as a dad. He's trying to know what do you do. When my kids are doing the wrong thing, how do you respond? What do you do in that difficult situation? It appears that he should have taken more leadership than he did in this moment.

I like to call these heart moments that we have with our children. These heart moments come in a lot of different ways. Sometimes you have a heart moment when the child comes up and cuddles with you and says something and kind of gives you a hug. That's a heart moment where you're connecting emotionally. Sometimes heart moments come when a child surprises you and it draws you close. But sometimes the heart moments come during corruption. When you say, "Son, we're not going to live this way anymore. Things are going to change." The child may get angry and stomp off and then hopefully in the midst of that there's some kind of a heart moment when there's some reconnection or an opportunity to speak. That doesn't seem to be taking place in this situation. We long for those heart moments. I try to share that idea with parents.

This week I was talking to a mom and she was saying, "I'm really frustrated with my 14-year old son because he does well at school. Everything at school is great and then even the first fifteen minutes when he gets in the car on our way home he seems to be doing well. But then he make a switch when we get home and he turns into this terrible monster of a person and treats me unkindly." So I'm trying to give her solutions or dealing with that problem. But one of the things I'm saying is you've got fifteen minutes in the car before he turns into the monster. That's an opportunity to have a heart moment. Every once in a while we get those with our young people. Every once in a while we get those with kids and when we do we need to be ready for those and recognize those.

Today I gave you a book that Joanne Miller and myself wrote. It's called *Family Heart Moments*. You can read it if you're a parent. I would suggest you do because the idea of the book is to give you some tools, some ways to think about how heart moments happen in a family and to take advantage of them because usually a heart moment means open receptivity on the part of a child where a little bit of values, convictions can be resented or taught. So you want heart moments. The book is full of illustrations of heart moments that you can read on your own. You don't have to be parents to read it. I think you'll find it's full of stories of heart moments. I think you'll find it inspiring. You might want to pass it on to someone else.

The point is God wants heart moments in our lives. Not just parent-child heart moments, God wants heart moments in your and my life where we draw close to Him. Sometimes He corrects us in ways that we're thrown back and we go, "Oh yes, I did the wrong thing," and then we have

a heart moment. So I'm sure you have heart moments or have the potential to have heart moments when you can commune with God and come into His presence and enjoy that. That's what we're talking about here in this idea of connecting with God. Heart moments.

Verse 26 goes back to the contrast between these boys, Hophni and Phinehas and this other boy that's growing up in their home whose name is Samuel. Verse 26 – *And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people.*

I think if God were to speak to us and say it, He would say it this way as He does in Proverbs 4:20-23: *My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. What I want you to do is see the process of listening. Pay attention, He says. Turn your ear to my word so you can hear. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.* There's this connection that God wants to have with our hearts and it's an important message for us, not just for a parents, it's a message for all of us that we learn to listen to the Lord and what the Lord has to say to us.

Let's continue our story. I want to cover a lot of territory today in this book. So let's start again in verse 27. *Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestor's family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest (that was Aaron), to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your ancestor's family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?'"*

Isn't that interesting. I'm going to read that again. *Why do you honor your sons more than me?* See, I'm very committed to family – helping families grow strong, help families to be close together. I'm committed to pass the faith onto the next generation and many times it takes place in families. So families are strategic.

But I think we're warned here and elsewhere in the Bible that family can be an idol. There can be times when we love our family so much that it gets in the way of our relationship with God. We start making choices between what maybe God would have us do and what we might want to do with our children or family. We have to be careful not to allow family to become an idol because what the man of God is saying to Eli the priest is, *"Why do you honor your sons more than me?"* Wow. It's just a warning for us.

Verse 30 – *"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.'"*

I just pause and reflect there. He says *although good will be done to Israel*. The good to Israel will continue even though there are these bad things happening. God is continually doing good in our world and in our lives, even when bad things are happening. Just a note that struck me this week.

Verse 23 – “*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.”*”

Now I want you to see that Eli isn't judged because his kids did the wrong thing. Eli is judged because he didn't take action in the proper way when his kids were doing the wrong thing.

Sometimes parents will ask me, “Well are there any guarantees here? If I do all the things you're saying and I raise my kids in a godly way, are there guarantees?” The answer is no. There are no guarantees because everybody has a choice, everybody has a will of their own and they have to choose. Even God as He was working with Adam and Eve, they made a choice to not follow Him and do what they should have done. Even Jesus as He's working with His twelve kids, twelve disciples, one of them decided to go a different direction. There's no guarantee that your children will choose to do what's right. But we certainly can do a lot to persuade them. We can certainly do a lot to influence them, and heart moments are right at the center of that.

Paul tells children to obey their parents. But right after that it talks about *fathers don't exasperate your children; but raise them in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord*.

Let's go into chapter 3 because I want you to see this contrast with Samuel. *The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.*

I just want to pause there for a moment because it seems clear that at certain times in history words from the Lord seem to be more prevalent than other times. We always need to be ready to hear God speak, to hear a word from the Lord. That word from the Lord may come directly from God to us, like He spoke to Samuel, as we'll see. It may come to us through His word, it may come through a parent or other authority in our lives. It might come to us through our children or it might come to us through some other means. God even speaks through creation, the Bible says. So we know God speaks to us and we want to hear what He has to say.

As we think about how God speaks, let me draw your attention to a couple verses of scripture.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says – *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*

He used to speak through the prophets, but now he's saying we have Jesus Christ living inside of our hearts and He speaks to us in our hearts. Prophets. So there's a way in which we are prophets in that God speaks directly to us. In the same way we are priests (we'll talk about Hophni and Phinehas), we are priests that we can behave access directly to God and into His presence.

Here's another verse that I find striking as we're trying to use these words that God gives to us. This is in the area of ministering within the fellowship or with other people – *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.*

So the words that we speak are really important. If God shares a word to you that says I think this person needs to hear this and you go and share that, you want to share it very carefully, holding it so tenderly because it's the very words of God.

Of course as we're thinking of God speaking to us, we come to 2 Timothy 3:16 that *all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.* God speaks to us today. The question is will we listen to what He has to say?

I like the story of the music teacher. I like the idea of music because music people have to listen. So the music teacher is asking the question, "What's the difference between listening and hearing?" All is quiet for a bit and then one of the students raised his hand and say, "Listening is wanting to hear." I like that because in the same way that we talked about the presence of God existing everywhere, but we come into God's presence in a particular way, there's a way in which God is speaking all the time, but some people aren't listening. They're not listening with this intent to hear.

Let's look at Samuel's heart as he's getting to know God and hearing His voice in the next verses.

Verse 2 – *One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel.*

What an interesting experience that must have been. But Samuel did not know that it was God. Samuel did not yet recognize the voice of the Lord. It's important because I think the same thing happens in our lives. Sometimes God is speaking and we don't know it's God. It's just another person talking and talking, but really God is speaking through that person and we need to learn how to listen. So God speaks sometimes and we don't know that it's the Lord speaking. That's what Samuel is experiencing here because He's getting to know God.

But he does act on it. Notice what he does. *Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."* Now those of us who have children can relate to this experience because Eli had already lied down for bed and here comes a child in there to wake him up. "Yes, you wanted me?" Eli kind of rubs his eyes and basically says, *"I did not call; go back and lie down."* I'm sure you can identify with that story. *So he went and lay down.*

Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." I can just imagine this experience with a child coming into your room and trying to send him back. "Look, I didn't call you. Just go back to bed."

*Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. So he's getting to know God's voice. We are all in the process of getting to know God's voice and hear Him. What is He saying? The New Testament says, *My sheep hear my voice. He calls us by name.* But we have to get to know that.*

It says in verse 8 – A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Now if you're a parent this gets kind of old after a while. Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

So if you've got kids who interrupt you in the middle of the night over and over again, just do what Eli did. Say, "Hey, just go back to the bed and talk to God about it. Work it out with the Lord yourself." So Samuel does that.

It's interesting though I want you to know that God is using an imperfect man like Eli to teach Samuel how to listen to the word of the Lord. I think that's significant. There's some times when young people become Christians or they get on fire for the Lord and their parents might not be in the same fire or the parents might not even be Christians and they say, "I don't have to listen to them." No, I would suggest that would be a mistake. I would suggest that parents are often the vehicle through whom which God speaks and shares His message. So we listen to parents, as children because God may speak. That parent loves you, that person knows you and may say something that God could use significantly in your heart to help you understand something very important. God speaks in lots of different ways. Sometimes God speaks through imperfect parents or imperfect people, as He does here to communicate a valuable message.

Verse 10 – The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

In that moment the God of the universe began to speak to a boy. How old was he? Maybe twelve. Maybe ten. But God began to speak to Him and began to reveal to him very important things about his life.

I would suggest that we teach our children today to learn how to follow instructions, not just so we can get the clothes cleaned up and the dishes put away. We teach our children how to follow instructions so they can learn to listen to God someday. And not just someday. So they can learn how to listen to God now because God delights in speaking to young boys and young girls. We want to help our young people know that the faith that they have isn't just because their parents

are Christians. The faith that they have is because they can have a personal relationship with God, but they've got to learn to listen to His voice as all of us do. We want to hear God's voice because in the midst of hearing His voice, God directs us and guides us.

That's part of what it means to have a personal relationship with God. A personal relationship with God is one where you're talking and listening, you're conversing and you're having a conversation that God is speaking to you. You're seeing Him work. You're going, "Wow, I really appreciate what you're doing here, God. This is great." And the conversation continues in your life in a very personal and intimate way. That is what it means to have a personal relationship with God.

I want to invite you today if you've never experienced that, that is ask Jesus Christ to come into your life and don't have that personal relationship with God, that you make that decision today. If you ask Jesus Christ to come into your life, He will do that. It means that you end up saying, "I'm a sinner, and because of that sin I'm blocked in my relationships. I can't have a personal relationship with God because of my sin and that's why I need a Savior." That Savior is Jesus Christ who comes into our lives and acts as that mediator between God and man so that we can have that personal, intimate, close relationship with God as Father.

In a few moments we're going to have a ministry time. In that ministry time we're going to sing a song. As we sing that song maybe the Lord will speak to your heart in a particular way and you want to follow Him and listen to what He has to say. Maybe you'll stop singing during that moment and just listen to the Lord. Maybe you'll talk to Him in your seat there and you'll have an experience with Him that's very important because He wants to speak to us and maybe He wants to share something very particular with you today.

There will be counselors up here ready to pray for people, so if by chance the Lord is directing you to come up or you want prayer for a specific area of your life, then come on up. The prayer counselors will pray with you. I appreciate when they pray for me because there is something about relying on someone else's faith as a prayer counselor that just encourages me and gives me hope and helps me understand how to move forward.

Marge was telling me that two weeks ago she was praying with some prayer counselors afterward about a particular problem that she was experiencing, and that afternoon God resolved that part of the situation. Just God is working in her life.

We are confident that God works through prayer and so we pray for people regularly. We pray for people who are sick. We pray for relationships. We pray for big decisions that are going on in the course of the week. So if God is speaking to you in a particular way and you want prayer, then come on up to the prayer counselors. You don't have to. You can pray in your seat if you want the encouragement of someone else to pray with you then come on up and we will do that during this next song.

Will you stand with me? Let's pray and then allow God to work specifically in each of our own hearts as we take Jesus home today.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your graciousness. We thank you that you allow us to have that personal relationship with you. Lord, I just ask now that you would do that work in each of our hearts, that you would draw our hearts close to you and teach us more what it means to follow you with all of our hearts. Speak to us we ask now, Lord, and we will listen and we will obey. In Jesus' name, amen.