

Before we examine these chapters, we need some general understanding of the books of Samuel.

I. Hannah's Life of Prayer – 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:10

A. Introduction to 1 Samuel

- i. Title: 1 and 2 Samuel were written as one book and continued to appear that way in all Hebrew traditions until as recently as the fifteenth century A.D. The Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible were the first to divide them (around 200 B.C.). Since there are more letters in the Greek alphabet than in the Hebrew, dividing the book made the lengthy manuscript more manageable.ⁱ These Greek translators titled the books 1 and 2 Kings. The books Protestants know as 1 and 2 Kings today, they called 3 and 4 Kings. These titles are still used in some Eastern Orthodox and Catholic traditions.ⁱⁱ
- ii. Author and Date: While Jewish tradition claims that Samuel wrote the book (and much of it does appear to have been recorded by an eyewitness), the author's name is nowhere indicated. Since Samuel's death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1, someone else who lived during David's lifetime probably wrote it. The period of history covered by the books of Samuel is roughly 150 years, from Samuels's birth (at the end of the 12th century B.C.) to the end of David's reign (about 970 B.C.). 1 Samuel ends with Saul's death and David's accession to the throne (about 1010 B.C).
- iii. Main Characters
 1. *Three Main Characters*: 1 and 2 Samuel have three main, human characters: Samuel, Saul, and David. This lesson and the next center around the life of Samuel (1 Samuel 1-7). Those that follow are about Samuel and Saul (1 Samuel 8-15). The last half of 1 Samuel is covered in the *Promised Land 2* study and is about Saul and David (1 Samuel 16-31).
 2. *Samuel's Roles*
 - a. First, Samuel was a prophet. Individuals like Abraham and Moses had also been prophets, but Samuel is the first Biblical character to have held the *office* of a prophet (as will later be defined).
 - b. Second, although the text never states that Samuel was a priest, on at least a couple of occasions, he performed the priestly function of offering sacrifices (1 Samuel 7:9, 10:8). Although his father's family lived in Ephraim, 1 Chronicles 6:27 indicates that Elkanah and Samuel were actually Levites (the Levites lived in towns scattered throughout Israel). He did not descend, however, from the Levitical line of Aaron,

as did Eli, and 1 Samuel 14:3 suggests that Eli's descendants continued to serve as high priest in Samuel's lifetime.

- c. Third, Samuel was Israel's last Judge (7:15-17). It is important to remember that the events that are recorded in the early chapters of 1 Samuel *belong in the context of the period of the Judges*.
 - d. Finally, Samuel was a transitional character in Israel's history. All of our *Promised Land 1* lessons thus far, beginning with the conquest of Canaan under Joshua's leadership and through the time of the Judges, are sometimes known as Israel's "settlement period." Samuel was the key figure in the transition from Israel's settlement in Canaan to the era known as the Hebrew monarchy. He anointed both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings. Israel's monarchy is largely covered in *Promised Land 2* series.
- iv. Historical Links to Books that Precede 1 Samuel: As already stated, the first chapters of Samuel are set in the days of the judges. The books in our canon that immediately precede 1 Samuel have this and other historical links.
- 1. *Historical Links to the Book of Judges*
 - a. According to Judges 10:6-8, the Lord sold the Israelites into the hands of the Philistines. Judges 13 introduces to Samson as a Judge who fought against them, yet he only did so with moderate success. Samuel inherited the problem. His success was much greater than Samson's, but the trouble with the Philistines did not completely end until the time of David.
 - b. The end of the book of Judges serves to introduce 1 Samuel. In its final chapters, a Levite's concubine was raped and murdered by the men of Gibeah in Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was nearly eliminated in a civil war that followed. We, therefore, come to the book of 1 Samuel with a less than favorable picture of the Benjamites, yet 1 Samuel tells us that Saul, Israel's first king, was not only a Benjamite but also from Gibeah (1 Samuel 10:26).
 - c. The moral decay that characterized Israel in Samuel's day brought political instability and disunity along with it. The tribes often acted independently, sometimes even fighting one another. In 1 Samuel, we learn just how hungry the

people had become for stability and security. The question of leadership weighed upon them. Seeing that regional Judges had failed to unite them against their enemies, they became restless for a national leader, a king.

2. *Historical Link to the Book of Ruth*: The larger portion of the books of Samuel is about David's life and reign. The book of Ruth tells us of David's family history. Very much like the book of Ruth, 1 Samuel opens with a story of a single, seemingly common family. Like Ruth, Hannah was a barren woman who eventually gave birth to an important son in a most unlikely way. Both of their stories reveal God's covenant faithfulness to Israel.

B. Hannah's Answered Prayer – 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11

i. Hannah's Grief and Vow – 1:1-20

1. *Israel's Worship Center*: In accordance with the Mosaic Law, the men of Israel were required to appear for feasts three times a year at their designated worship center (Exodus 23:14, 34:23). The Tabernacle was set up in Shiloh under Joshua's leadership. Unlike the average Israelite who did as they saw fit, Elkanah took his family to Shiloh annually. Corporate worship is a spiritual discipline.
2. *Polygamy in the Bible*: Although Elkanah showed sensitivity to God's Law, he nevertheless adopted a cultural practice by taking two wives. God designed marriage to be monogamous (Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 7:1-4, Titus 1:6), yet the first polygamous relationship is recorded early in Biblical history (Genesis 4:23). Far from condoning it, the Bible repeatedly shows that households with multiple wives suffered as a result.
3. *Hannah's Barrenness*
 - a. The fact that Hannah is listed ahead of Peninnah may indicate that she was Elkanah's first wife. Barrenness, in that culture, was thought to be a natural reason for a man to take a second wife, in order to ensure an heir. According to God's ideal, Elkanah should have trusted God and waited for Hannah to bear him children in God's time. Hannah was in good company, since the wives of Israel's patriarchs (Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel) had all been barren.
 - b. 1:5 tells us that the Lord had closed Hannah's womb. God does not author tragedy. The end of Hannah's story shows that the barrenness of her early years had a redemptive

purpose. If Hannah had not experienced barrenness, she would not have had a reason to devote her first son in service to the Lord at Shiloh. At Shiloh, Samuel was in the position of becoming known to the public and recognized as a godly leader.

4. *Hannah's Vow*

- a. The annual celebrations Elkanah and his wives attended were reminders that Hannah had no children and opportunities for Peninnah to ridicule her (1:4-7). Hannah means “gracious woman.” The text gives no evidence that she retaliated against Peninnah’s attacks, even though she was overwhelmed with ridicule and sorrow. On one trip to Shiloh, she approached the Tabernacle and, “in deep anguish,” prayed a prayer of desperation, asking God to give her a son and vowing to dedicate him to the Lord for a lifetime of service as a Nazirite, 1:11.
 - b. Eli, the priest (who had been sitting at the entrance to the Tabernacle), watched Hannah weep and mumble and, assuming she was drunk, chastened her. Once Hannah explained, Eli blessed her and Hannah left with a changed countenance. The blessing may have been what renewed her faith, but it seems more likely that Eli’s words only affirmed the confidence and triumph she had already gained in prayer.
- ii. Hannah’s Dedication of Samuel – 1:21-28
1. The Lord opened Hannah’s womb and she bore her first son, Samuel (probably meaning “God Heard”). After Samuel was weaned, Hannah kept her vow and brought him to the Tabernacle, where Eli received him as a young priest apprentice (another confirmation that he was a Levite, as 1 Chronicles 6 indicates ⁱⁱⁱ). Customarily, young children were weaned at three or four years of age. At such an age, the average child can feed, dress, and toilet themselves, and is easily molded. Most children this age can even grasp some fairly advanced concepts.
 2. In these chapters, we discover that Eli was a poor father. He knew about his sons’ wickedness (2:22-23) and, even though he confronted them (2:22-25), he was still responsible for failing to restrain them (3:13). His sons’ reputation was common knowledge in Israel (2:22-24). Nevertheless, Hannah and Elkanah were willing to leave their precious Samuel in Eli’s hands. Elkanah had the legal

right to overrule Hannah's vow (Numbers 30:10-15), but we are told that he and Hannah brought Samuel to the Tabernacle together (1:24; 2:11). They obviously believed that the God who miraculously gave Samuel to them was also capable of delivering, sustaining, and prospering him.

- iii. Hannah's Prayer of Thanksgiving – 2:1-10: Hannah's humility stands in contrast to Peninnah's constant boasting (2:3), as her prayer of thanksgiving affirms.
 1. *Hannah's Children*: 2:5 says, "She who was barren has borne seven children." The number seven indicates perfection in Biblical usage. Although 2:21 indicates that Hannah later birthed five children, at the time she prayed this prayer of thanksgiving she had only given birth to Samuel. Her reference to seven children was an indication that this one child had satisfied all her desires.
 2. *Hannah's Messiah*: At the end of her prayer, Hannah referenced a king, referring to Him as God's anointed (2:10). Since Samuel was born before the Israelite monarchy, to whom was Hannah referring? It is interesting to note the similarity of the prayer (song) of Mary, centuries later, while she anticipated the birth of God's Son Jesus (Luke 1:46-55). Perhaps Mary borrowed from Hannah's prayer, believing it to prophesy concerning the child she bore, the promised Messiah. ^{iv}

Summary Statement: Hannah's prayer of desperation and her prayer of thanksgiving reveal her to have been a woman who knew how to pray.

Prayer is an all-important spiritual discipline. None of us naturally longs for God, yet yearning for more of Him is exactly what propels individuals into the spiritual disciplines and positions us for spiritual growth. Perhaps, then, prayer should rank as first among the disciplines since, in prayer, we can ask God to create this deep hunger within us.

How does true prayer work? Prayer is far more than talking to God; it is *listening* to Him. Like Hannah, *those who see their prayers regularly answered are those who have learned to ask God what He wants, listened to His voice, and prayed accordingly.* Hannah's changed countenance indicated that she no longer wondered whether God would answer her prayer. She was confident that she had prayed according to His will. When we pray, we must come to God willing to have our desires transformed. Instead of rattling off our many wants to Him, we should begin by asking *Him* how *He wants us* to pray.

Principle: *True prayer is transformational.*

Application: An old saying is that “prayer changes things,” and that is true. However, it is most often true when prayer first changes *us*. Prayer is a means of humbling ourselves before God, acknowledging that we do not know or always want what is best; only He knows. When we daily ask Him how we should pray, our prayer lives becomes a means of spiritual growth.

- One of the best avenues to prepare our hearts to hear from the Lord and to follow His leading is to cultivate the prayer habits of praise and thanksgiving. When we remember who He is, we are best prepared to bend our will and pray according to His, knowing that He is good and His ways are always best.
- Another way we can be sure we are praying in line with God’s will is by praying God’s own words back to Him. There is power in praying the scriptures.
- With regard to interceding for others, Richard Foster writes, “The inner sense of compassion is one of the clearest indications from the Lord that *this* is a prayer project for you. In times of meditation there may come a rise in the heart, a compulsion to intercede, as assurance of rightness, a flow of the Spirit. This inner ‘yes’ is the divine authorization for you to pray. If the idea is accompanied with a sense of dread, then probably you should set it aside. God will lead someone else to pray for the matter.”^v
- With regard to interceding for guidance on our own behalf, we should begin by asking God to create a true willingness within us to go in whatever direction He leads. It is only when we come to this place of neutrality that we will be able to distinguish His leading from our own personal preferences. Of course, God’s Spirit will *never* direct us in a way that contradicts His written word.

(Again, quoting Foster): “Prayer is like any other work: we may not feel like working, but once we have been at it for a bit, we begin to feel like working.”^{vi} Sometimes this work requires freedom from all distractions, but other times we maintain an undercurrent of prayer all the time we are meeting the demands of our day. Developing both of these habits is important.

Transition: Surely one of the reasons Hannah was able to live righteously in the midst of cultural immorality and personal hardship was that she knew how to pray. Knowing what we do about her, we can assume that she never stopped praying for Samuel.

While Hannah lived righteously under the circumstance of her barrenness, Samuel lived righteously among a corrupt priesthood.

II. Samuel’s Growth Amidst Priestly Corruption – 1 Samuel 2:11-36

A. Eli’s Sons Contrasted with Samuel

- i. Five Contrasting Statements: Between 1 Samuel 2:11 and 3:21, five references to Samuel’s growth and faithfulness are contrasted with accounts of the wickedness of Eli’s sons:

1. While Samuel “ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest” (2:11), Eli’s wicked sons “had no regard for the Lord” (2:12).
 2. While Eli’s sons made a mockery of the Lord’s sacrifices (2:17), Samuel “grew up in the presence of the Lord” (2:18-21).
 3. While Eli’s sons slept with the women who served at the Tabernacle and ignored their father’s rebuke (2:22-25), Samuel “continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people” (2:26).
 4. While Eli’s family was prophesied against for “despising the Lord” (2:30), “Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli” (3:1) and was called by the Lord (3:4).
 5. While the guilt of Eli’s house was condemned by the Lord (3:14), “the Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and He let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground” (3:19).
- ii. Eli’s Sons’ Sin – 2:12-26
1. *With Regard to the Sacrifices:* The Mosaic Law of God entitled the priests to be fed from the sacrifices brought by the Israelites. According to 1 Samuel 2:13-14, the general custom was for the priest to plunge a fork into a boiling pot of meat and keep for themselves whatever came out (although this particular method is not specified anywhere in the Law). Leviticus 3:16 and 7:29-31 indicate that fat from the animal sacrifices was to be burned on the altar as an offering to the Lord (the flavor and aroma of the fat made it the premiere portion). Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, wanted the entire offering (including the fat), even if they had to take it by force (2:16). In so doing, they not only disrespected the worshippers but also made a mockery of the system of sacrifices (a system that was intended to represent the work of the coming Messiah). Their sin was very great in the Lord’s sight (2:17).
 2. *With Regard to Women Who Served at the Tabernacle:* In addition to abusing their privileges in the system of sacrifices, Eli’s sons also slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tabernacle (“tent of meeting;” 2:22). Eli confronted them but they ignored his warnings. Eventually (after ample opportunity to repent), the Lord decreed His judgment, hardening their hearts against Him and sentencing them to death.
- iii. Prophecy Against Eli’s Household – 2:27-36
1. *Eli’s Punishment:* A man of God (a prophet) came to Eli. The Lord’s message is summarized in the statement, “Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained” (2:30). Eli had honored his sons above the Lord, and for this he would be punished. None of Eli’s descendants would live to see old

age. Furthermore, descent of the high priesthood through his family would come to an end. The Lord would rise up a faithful priest in their place. This judgment fell over several generations, with the first sign being the death of Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas on the same day.

2. *The Faithful Priest*: At first thought, we might assume that the faithful priest mentioned in this prophecy was Samuel. He was indeed faithful, but Samuel was not an Aaronic descendant. Aaron, brother of Moses, was the Levite whom God appointed as the first high priest. High priestly privilege was to pass through Aaron's descendants. Furthermore, we later learn that his sons were not much better than the sons of Eli (8:3). Who was this "faithful priest" then?
 - a. Aaron had four sons. After the two eldest misused their priestly privilege, the Lord put them to death (Leviticus 10). Aaron's two remaining sons were Eleazar and Ithamar. Eleazar's son Phinehas (a different man than the son of Eli by that name) served as his father's high priestly heir. The Lord made a covenant of lasting priesthood with Phinehas (Numbers 25:11-13). But somehow, by Samuel's day, Eli, the descendant of Ithamar, was serving as high priest.
 - b. In fulfillment of the prophecy in 1 Samuel 2, Ithamar's descendants suffered blows at Shiloh (1 Samuel 4:13-17) and again in David's time at Nob (1 Samuel 22:18-19). On the second occasion, only one priest, Abiathar, escaped. However, David later transferred the high priesthood from Abiathar to Zadok (1 Kings 2:35), a descendant of Eleazar and Phinehas. Zadok was faithful to the royal family of David, the Messianic line. For this reason, most scholars believe the "faithful priest" prophesied about was Zadok.
 - c. Several hundred years later, the priest Ezra was among the Israelites who returned to Jerusalem from exile. Ezra was a descendant of Zadok (Ezra 7:1-6). Zadok and his descendants were types of the ultimate "faithful priest," the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 5:6; Revelation 19:16).
- iv. The Priestly Responsibility: Sadly, by Samuel's day the priesthood had become so corrupt that the Lord began sending prophets to speak for Him, such as the man of God who came to Eli the priest. The Lord's priests had great privilege (2:28), and with great privilege come great responsibility.

The priests were expected to teach God’s word to His people and lead them by example. Zadok’s descendant Ezra was a premier example of this: He was “well-versed in the Law of Moses” because he “devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord.” Furthermore, he was devoted “to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:6, 10).

Summary Statement: By contrast to the evil priesthood of Eli’s sons, Samuel grew in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people.

Although 3:1 tells us that new revelation (such as in visions) were rare in those days, Eli and his sons had the books of Moses (the first five books of our Old Testament). These constituted their Bible. The priests were directly responsible for studying this Law and teaching it to the Israelites. Presumably, Eli’s sons were familiar enough with it to have known they should not have been stealing the Lord’s portion of the sacrifices. In Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were intimately acquainted with the Law and yet Jesus condemned them. From these examples, we see that knowing the Bible is not enough. The goal of true Bible study is personal transformation. Paul tells us that transformation occurs by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). How does study renew our minds?

Foster explains: “The mind will always take on an order conforming to the order upon which it concentrates.” As we concentrate upon an object or a thought with perception and repetition, “ingrained habits of thought are formed.” The purpose of instruction about spiritual matters is to “direct the mind repeatedly and regularly toward certain modes of thought about God and about human relationships... What we study determines the kind of habits that are formed, which is why Paul urges us to focus on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious”^{vii} (Philippians 4:8). Think about this for a moment! It is little wonder that today, a time in which so many habits of thought are determined by repeated exposure to advertising and social media, people are increasingly self-absorbed and anti-God!

Principle: *When combined, study and meditation ingrain new habits of thinking and behavior.*

Study enables us to analyze and meditation upon what we study is devotional and leads to personal life application. Although these are technically two separate disciplines, when combined, the impact to our lives is powerful. As Foster explains, study involves repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. First and foremost, we should study the word of God. We benefit the most from our study of the Scriptures if we supplement it with experiential, classical, Christian literature. To these, adding live discussion and meditation upon the world around us maximizes the benefit.

Application: Now, let us consider the truth that our minds conform to the order of the things upon which we concentrate.

- What kinds of things are you repeatedly studying? Television and movies? Websites that enable you to shop? Online social networks? If we want to see real spiritual growth in our lives, we are wise to consider the amount of exposure we have to these and similar influences. Living righteously involves swimming against the tide of our culture!
- Secondly, when you answer the questions in your lesson that ask you to apply what you have learned to your life, do you tend to answer with some general, spiritual platitude, or do you consider the week that is before you and the *specific ways* in which applying God’s word would personally transform you? It is not difficult to list general ideas about what everyone ought to do. Spending time pondering what the passage illuminates about each of our *own personal* lives and recording the immediate impact to our thinking and behavior takes more serious reflection. That is the nature of the spiritual disciplines of study and meditation. They may take time and require that we quiet ourselves, but they lead to real, life transformation, not simply more knowledge.

Transition: The failure of Eli’s sons in their role as priests stands in contrast to Samuel’s willingness to listen to God’s voice, as 1 Samuel 3 indicates.

III. Samuel’s Call – 1 Samuel 3:1-21

A. The Lord’s Voice

- i. Rarely Heard: 3:1 tells us that, “in those days” (the period of the Judges), the word of the Lord was rare. This verse prepares us for the introduction and calling of Samuel into a new office, the office of a prophet. The priesthood was inherited through one’s family, but a seat in the office of prophecy required a special calling from the Lord.
- ii. A Voice in the Stillness– 3:2-3: Samuel was lying in his bed at the Tabernacle. “The lamp of God had not yet gone out” (3:3). The lamps on the lampstand in the Tabernacle were lit at twilight (Exodus 30:8) and kept burning until morning (Exodus 27:20-21; Leviticus 24:2-4; 2 Chronicles 13:11). Since the lamps were still burning when the Lord spoke to Samuel, we know that Samuel heard His voice in the stillness of the night.
- iii. A Prophecy Against Eli – 3:4-18
 1. When Samuel heard his name called, he first assumed that Eli needed him. Three times, he ran to see what Eli wanted until finally, Eli realized that the voice Samuel heard must have been the Lord’s. He instructed Samuel to lie on his bed and, when he heard the voice again, reply, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (3:9). Samuel must have uttered the phrase repeatedly in his lifetime.

2. “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him” (3:7). We need not make more of this statement than what is indicated by the context. This was the first occasion on which the Lord spoke directly to Samuel, in some kind of vision or audible voice. It was an important occasion in Samuel’s life for it marked his call into the role of a prophet.
3. The Lord spoke to Samuel, affirming His plan to judge Eli’s family. The following day, Eli demanded to know what the Lord had said and Samuel told him.

B. Samuel, the Prophet

- i. The Prophetic Office: This short account defines the role of the prophet: a prophet first heard from God and then gave the message to the intended recipient. The term “prophet” literally means, *to call* or *to speak*. A prophet spoke on God’s behalf and with God’s authority. 3:20 tells us that as Samuel grew, all Israel recognized him as a prophet of the Lord. The prophetic office developed concurrently with Israel’s monarchy. The prophets primarily served as God’s mouthpiece to Israel’s kings. In turn, the kings were to communicate God’s word to the people. As the remainder of the Old Testament reveals, the kings rarely did so, which often put the kings and prophets at odds with one another and made the prophets reluctant to do the job. They were often rejected, misunderstood, and abused. As a result, many of them led solitary lives. The last individual to fill the prophetic office was John the Baptist.
- ii. The Words of the Prophets: At times, the prophets foretold the future. When 3:19 says that the Lord did not let any of Samuel’s words fall to the ground, it is primarily referring to this predictive role. A true prophet of the Lord was distinguished by the fact that he never prophesied anything that did not come true (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). Some prophecies were not fulfilled during the prophet’s lifetime, giving self-promoting individuals known as false prophets, an opportunity to claim they had a word from the Lord. Foretelling the future was not the only role of the prophets, or even the most important. The other significant ministry of a prophet was to *proclaim truth*. They called God’s people to repentance, pointing them back to God. In this sense, they were the preachers of their time.
- iii. Samuel as a Transitional Figure: Samuel’s roles as prophet, Judge, and at times, priest uniquely qualified him to anoint Israel’s first king. We will learn more about this in the following lesson. For now, we learn that Samuel was called into the prophetic office (3:1-18), all Israel recognized it (3:19-20), and the Lord continued to appear and reveal Himself to Samuel at Shiloh (3:21).

Summary Statement: Samuel first heard the voice of the Lord in the predawn stillness.

When the Lord called Moses, Moses was alone in the desert, tending sheep (Exodus 3:1-4). The Lord Jesus Himself often escaped from the crowds in order to be alone with His Father (Matthew 4:1-11, 14:23, 17:1-9, 26:36-46; Luke 6:12, 5:16; Mark 6:31). By making time for silence and solitude, we give room for God to speak into our lives.

Principle: *Inward solitude and silence enable us to see and hear.*

The inseparable disciplines of silence and solitude are not an attempt to avoid people but to develop an inner stillness that we carry with us, even in a crowd. People can live in isolation for long periods without developing this sense, or they can live their entire lives in the bustle of an inner city and develop it quite acutely.

The secret is control of our speech, so that we learn when to speak and when not to speak. As Foster explains, “Control rather than no noise is the key to silence.”^{viii} The person who is inwardly still does not refuse to speak but moderates his speech in order to listen to God and see life and others more clearly. In one sense, the key is self-control. In another sense, the key is in trusting God’s control, for (as Foster explains) we so often use our words to manipulate others. When we practice inner stillness, we experience true freedom from this.

While we benefit from inner silence and solitude during the normal, everyday interactions we have with others, those who have developed this inward attentiveness manifest it outwardly *in willingness to be alone* in order to hear God’s quiet voice more clearly. When inward stillness prevails, there is no fear of being alone, for we know that we are never *truly* alone. “Loneliness is inner emptiness,” Foster explains, while “solitude is inner fulfillment.”^{ix}

Application: It is not enough to talk about having a quiet heart. The spiritual disciplines are habits we must *practice*. How can we cultivate inner silence and solitude?

- First, we can take advantage of the short moments in which we are in transition during the day: holding for someone to answer the phone, walking or driving to work, lying in our beds when we first awaken or are drifting off to sleep. Redeem these small opportunities and resist the temptation to turn to electronics in every spare moment.
- Second, develop regular times and places devoted to quiet in order to study, pray, plan, and think. Daily quiet times may need to take place in a closet if you share your home with many others. If a closet is not available, designate a chair and let your family know that when you are sitting in it, you do not want to be disturbed. In addition to these daily times, plan longer stretches a few times a year for planning and reflection. Almost everyone feels that they are too busy for this. If we are honest, we realize that we find a way to make time for the things that really matter to us. It can happen in the

hours between the end of your workday and your bedtime, or in the morning hours if you work at night. For some, a Sunday afternoon might be ideal. Use this time to set goals. Ask God what He wants you to accomplish in the next five years. It may involve developing a skill, building into a relationship in some particular way, or a goal for study and reading.

Conclusion

Elkanah, Hannah, and Samuel lived righteously in the midst of corruption. How did they do it? God's grace! Righteousness is a gift of God's grace. But that does not mean we live as we please. Godly Bible characters, like those in this family, placed themselves in the stream of God's grace so that they were transformed and free from cultural influence. The more culturally-trained our thinking the more we prize independence and the less we value any kind of discipline, let alone spiritual disciplines.

There are many spiritual disciplines we have not addressed: habits of gratitude, fasting, service, confession, celebration, and others. Spiritual disciplines are not rules, and when we make rules of them, we alternately become smug and prideful or disappointed in ourselves and judgmental of others. If we view them as gifts of God and means by which we can position ourselves in the stream of His grace, spiritual disciplines lead to joy, personal transformation, and a rich life in Christ.

ⁱ Howard, David Jr. (1993), *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (p 142). Chicago: Moody Press.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.cresourcei.org/canonot.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 239). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

^{iv} Bergen, R. D. (1996). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 7, p. 77). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^v Foster, Richard (1998). *Celebration of Discipline* (p. 40). New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

^{vi} Foster, Richard (1998). *Celebration of Discipline* (p. 45). New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

^{vii} Foster, Richard (1998). *Celebration of Discipline* (pp. 63-64). New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

^{viii} Foster, Richard (1998). *Celebration of Discipline* (p. 98). New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

^{ix} Foster, Richard (1998). *Celebration of Discipline* (p. 96). New York: Harper Collins Publishers.