

WHEN LEADERS FALL

1 SAMUEL 2:11-36

CHURCH GROUP SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE – APRIL 26, 2026

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Samuel 2:11-36 (ESV)

REACH ONE

REACH ONE - *Getting to know people and helping people get to know Jesus.*

As we continue growing in the habit of intentionally going out of our way to see people, carve out some discussion time to let group members share how they took a step towards others during the past week. It doesn't matter if it's small (learning their barista's name) or big (getting to share Jesus with someone), celebrating little wins like these can go a long way into making this part of our daily rhythms and lifestyle.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION

Who is a leader who has had a significant impact (positive or negative) on your life? What made that impact lasting?

SERMON RECAP

In 1 Samuel 2:11–36, we see a stark contrast between the faithful, young Samuel and the corrupt sons of Eli. While Samuel grows “in the presence of the Lord,” Eli’s sons abuse their power, indulge in sin, and lead others away from God. Eli himself fails to confront them faithfully, ultimately honoring his sons above God.

This passage highlights the dangers of spiritual leadership without intimacy with God and the far-reaching consequences of sin. It also reminds us that God will bring justice, raising up a faithful priest—ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the perfect Leader who never fails and who makes a way for us to know God.

Pastor David drew out 11 key takeaways from the passage:

1. The most important trait in a spiritual leader is ever-increasing personal intimacy with God.
2. Beware the subtle temptation to create customs in worship that we like but God loathes.
3. Don't underestimate the effect of your sin on others' lives.
4. Don't let the fall of a leader take your focus off the Lord.
5. Let's give our lives to helping the next generation grow with God.
6. Spiritual leaders (in any capacity), flee all temptation to greed, gluttony, spiritual apathy, sexual immorality, abuse of power, pride, and fattening yourselves with the glory God alone deserves.
7. Don't harden your heart to the God who alone can give you life.
8. Beware the idolatrous temptation to exalt God's gifts above God Himself.
9. God will have the final Word, and His justice will be enforced in the world.
10. Jesus is the perfect Leader who never falls or fails, and He has paid the penalty for all the falls and failures of those who trust in Him.
11. As followers of Jesus, fulfill your priestly calling to lead others to life in Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Observation: What does this passage say?

1. This is a long passage. Start by having one or two people briefly summarize what happens in this passage in their own words.
2. What are the big contrasts in this passage (Samuel vs. Eli's sons, faithful vs. unfaithful leadership)?
3. What patterns of sin and failure do you see in Eli's sons—and how do those actions affect others?
4. How do Eli's response and God's response differ—and what is the outcome for each?

Interpretation: What does the passage mean?

1. Why is the most important trait in a spiritual leader ever-increasing personal intimacy with God? What happens when that is missing? (Takeaway #1)
2. Why is it so easy to underestimate the impact of our sin on others? How does sin spread beyond just ourselves? (Takeaway #3)
3. Why do people often struggle when a spiritual leader falls? What does it look like to keep your focus on the Lord instead? (Takeaway #4)
4. What does it mean to harden your heart against God? Why is it so dangerous? How do we protect against it? (Takeaway #7)
5. How does this passage point us to Jesus as the perfect Leader and High Priest? Why is that such good news? (Takeaway #10)

Application: How can we apply this passage to our lives?

1. Even if you're not a church leader, who are some people in your life over whom you have influence and leadership today? How could growing in your intimacy with God positively impact your influence in the lives of those people?
2. 1 Peter 2:9 says that as followers of Jesus we are a "royal priesthood". How should that shape, in a practical way, how we live this week?
3. How can you grow in your focus on and trust in Jesus as your Leader? (As opposed to focusing on other people or yourself as your leader)

LEADER NOTES

This passage may surface real, potentially hurtful, experiences with failed leadership. As needed, consider gently pointing people towards God's ultimate justice (Takeaway #9) and God's ultimate grace in Christ (Takeaway #10).