

WEIGHING ANCHOR

INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF SAMUEL



GENE GETZ



Weighing Anchor: Insights into the Life of Samuel

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WEIGHING ANCHOR

INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF SAMUEL

Without a doubt our world needs men like Samuel from whom we can learn how to remain steady as our circumstances close in around us. Early on in life Samuel knew that he had been called to a special place in the nation of Israel. Serving in a role that put him squarely between the King of Israel and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Samuel made the very conscious decision to weigh anchor and set his course as an unshakable voice for God. Even when confronted with an entire nation's wishes and mounting pressure to pursue a path different from God's direction, Samuel maintained an unwavering stand in the name of the Lord. Because we are always one generation away from complete ignorance of the Lord, it becomes paramount that men like Samuel assume the role for which they have been called as fathers, models for others, and men of purpose.

The Men of Purpose series focuses on the lives of men in the Bible who provide poignant examples of godly masculinity. Each of these leaders faced trials, frustration, and failure, yet was inspired by God to achieve great goals. In a world where Christian male role models seem increasingly rare, this series reminds us that some of the most worthy examples of godly character can be found in the biblical figures who brought power, wisdom, and inspiration to God's people throughout the ages.

As you and your group approach each study, do so with the same spiritual passion and personal integrity that have characterized Dr. Getz throughout his lifetime. Let the goals of every group meeting be to understand biblical truths, to grapple with Dr. Getz' principles to live by, and to commit to helping each other apply what you learn in your daily lives. This is the supreme act of a disciple—being doers of God's Word (James 1:22-25).

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

While this Bible study may be used individually, it is designed to be used within the context of small groups. Each group meeting should include all elements of the following "three-part agenda."

Icebreaker: Fun, history-giving questions are designed to warm up the group and build understanding between group members. You may choose

to use all of the Icebreaker questions, especially if there is a new group member that will need help in feeling comfortable with the group.

One of the purposes of this book is to begin and to then solidify a group. Therefore, getting to know one another and bonding together are essential to the success of this effort. The Icebreaker segment in each group session is designed to help you become better acquainted, greatly enhancing your group experience.

Bible Study: The heart of each meeting is your examination together of the Bible and the key “Principles to Live By” that are drawn from the Bible. This section emphasizes understanding what the Bible says and applying its truth to real life. The questions are open discovery questions that lead to further inquiry. Reference notes are provided to give everyone a “level playing field” and provide deeper insights into the biblical story. The questions for each session build on one another. There are always “going deeper” questions provided. You should always leave time for the last of the “questions for interaction.” You may elect to use the optional “going deeper” questions to lead you in applying what the group has learned. This segment also satisfies the desire for more challenging questions in groups that have been together for a while.

To help your men connect as a group, it is important for everyone to participate in the Bible study. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Participants should strive to make all of the other group members feel comfortable during the Bible study time. Because we all have differing levels of biblical knowledge, it is essential that we understand and appreciate the personal context from which each one of us responds. We don’t have to know much about theology and history to bring our own perspectives to bear on the truths contained in the Scriptures. It is vital that you keep encouraging all group members to share what they are observing as you work through these important Bible passages.

Caring Time: All study should lead us to action. Each session ends with prayer and direction in caring for the needs of individual group members. You can choose between the various questions provided, or use them all.

Small groups help the larger body of Christ in many ways: caring for individuals, holding one another up in prayer, providing emotional support, and bringing new men into the church family. Each week it is important to remember to pray for those whom God would bring to your group.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Begin by reviewing the following ground rules and talk about the importance of “sharing your story” (see below).

GROUND RULES

- **Priority:** While you are in the group, give the group meeting priority.
- **Participation:** Everyone participates and no one dominates.
- **Respect:** Everyone is given the right to his own opinion and all questions are encouraged ... and respected.
- **Confidentiality:** Anything that is said in the meeting is never repeated outside the meeting.
- **Empty Chair:** The group stays open to inviting new men to every meeting. Keeping an empty chair in your circle symbolizes those men you need to invite.
- **Support:** Permission is given to call upon each other in time of need—even in the middle of the night.
- **Advice Giving:** Unsolicited advice is not allowed.
- **Mission:** We agree to do everything in our power to work toward starting a new group—a vital part of our mission.

SHARING YOUR STORY

These sessions are designed to assist group members to share a little of their personal lives each time the group meets. Through a number of special techniques, each member is encouraged to move from low risk, less personal sharing to higher risk responses. This helps develop authentic community and facilitates care-giving within your group.

It is only when group members begin to share their own stories that the group bonds at levels deep enough for life-change to take place.

PERSONAL NOTES

WEIGHING ANCHOR

DARK DAYS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

WELCOME

Every generation needs men of purpose, like Samuel, who are born into Christian homes, who establish a relationship with God early in their lives, and who serve the Lord all the days of their lives. Many of us, however, didn't even know about Jesus until we were well up in years. Some of us have walked out of His will for a period of time before we, like the prodigal son, returned to our Father.

No matter what your background, you can become a man of purpose. The Apostle Paul is a wonderful example of this. All his adult life he regretted that, as a young man, he had opposed Christ and persecuted the church (1 Tim. 1:12-17). He didn't let that regret stunt his spiritual growth. Instead, he said, "Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

Whatever your past, let the tremendous example of Samuel's life encourage you to pursue the prize of purpose and godly character.



ICEBREAKER

We live in a time of constant, rapid change. Some of it is exciting, such as medical breakthroughs and space exploration. Some of it is troubling, such as the Internet that brings everything grand and gross right into our homes through our computers. Some of it is downright frightening, such as the accelerating moral and spiritual decay of our culture.

1. Which of these is your favorite techno-toy? What did you do with your time before this gadget came into your life?
 - a. My computer
 - b. My iPod
 - c. The Internet
 - d. My cell phone
 - e. My Xbox/Playstation
 - f. Other _____

2. What was your father's attitude toward change?
 - a. Things were better in the good old days.
 - b. It's all the fault of the (insert hated political party here).
 - c. Look at things change! Is this a great country, or what?
 - d. I'm going to change things and make them better.
 - e. Other _____.

3. Which development in modern society troubles you the most? Why?



BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Samuel's story unfolds against the backdrop of the Book of Judges. Samuel was the transitional figure between the judges and the kings of Israel. The Book of Judges tells of Israel's failure to heed the instruction and example of Moses and Joshua, the two great leaders God used to forge a nation from a motley mass of freed slaves. Before turning our attention to Samuel's birth and childhood, let's consider how the conditions of his culture came about.

The Instruction of Moses

⁴ "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. ⁷ Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

¹⁰ When the LORD your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give you—a [land with] large and beautiful cities that you did not build, ¹¹ houses full of every good thing that you did not fill [them with], wells dug that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant and when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful not to forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery."

Deuteronomy 6:4-12

The Challenge of Joshua

¹ Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem and summoned Israel's elders, leaders, judges, and officers, and they presented themselves before God. ² Joshua said to all the people . . . ¹⁴ Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River

and in Egypt, and worship the LORD. ¹⁵ But if it doesn't please you to worship the LORD, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship the LORD.”

Joshua 24:1-2, 14-15

The Failure of Israel

⁷ The people worshiped the LORD throughout Joshua's lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who outlived Joshua. They had seen all the LORD's great works He had done for Israel.

⁸ Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110. . . . ¹⁰ That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works He had done for Israel.

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals ¹² and abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD, ¹³ for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Judges 2:7-8, 10-13

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted.

Judges 21:25

PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY

The early history of Israel provides us with plenty of lessons. Some of them are encouraging as we consider the leaders God gave His people and the training He provided to prepare them to serve Him. Other lessons are sobering as we face the fact that God's people quickly forgot His blessings and abandoned His ways. It is tempting to lose heart as we look at conditions at the end of the era of the judges, but we have to remember that just as things looked darkest, God had a man waiting in the wings. Samuel would be a man prepared to lead in dark days.

PRINCIPLE 1

GOD EXPECTS SPIRITUAL LEADERS TO MODEL CONSISTENT, GOD-FEARING LIVES FOR HIS PEOPLE.

There is no more powerful and important chapter in the Old Testament than Deuteronomy 6. This chapter contains the secret to living a long and fruitful life as individuals, as families, and as a larger corporate community. Moses reminded Israel that their obedience was to be the overflow of their love for God and not mere conformity to a set of rules. He insisted that each generation needed to pass on to the next a vibrant familiarity with God's involvement in their history and a heartfelt allegiance to His law.

Joshua took this challenge very seriously. He continually pointed Israel to the Lord as their Redeemer and the Captain of their army. Near the end of his life, Joshua assembled first the leaders (Josh. 23) and then the entire nation (Josh. 24) to challenge them to remain true to the Lord. In Moses and Joshua, Israel had two leaders who modeled consistent, God-fearing lives. More than three hundred years later, after a long era of national disgrace and distress, Samuel would prove to be another exemplary model for God's people.

Without godly leaders, God's people go astray. They have no models of righteousness. They have no one to teach them how to live consistent Christian lives. One of the reasons we should heed the example of Samuel is so we will know how to live exemplary lives in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and churches.

PRINCIPLE 2

HAVING GOD-FEARING LEADERS WHO MODEL AND TEACH THE TRUTH DOES NOT GUARANTEE THAT GOD'S PEOPLE WILL ALWAYS LIVE IN HIS WILL.

After Joshua and the whole generation that he disciplined died, "another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works He had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10). One generation stood firm, but it failed to pass the torch to the next. Or the next generation refused to receive the handoff. In either case, in just one generation, the people of God lost their first love and grew cold toward the things of God.

Each of us has a free will. We must understand and accept this reality. No matter how faithful we are, some people—including our own children—may not respond positively to the love of God. However, we

should never use this possibility as an excuse for slacking as examples. When we have done the best we can, we must confidently leave the results to God. As a loving heavenly Father, He will eventually discipline His wayward children. When He does, He will get their attention.

PRINCIPLE 3

GOD'S CHOSEN LEADERS DO NOT ALWAYS REMAIN FAITHFUL AND FREE FROM SIN AND FAILURE.

Moses made a serious mistake in the homestretch of his life (Num. 20:1-13). Samuel was mentored by Eli the high priest, who failed miserably as a father to his sons (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-36). Samson, David, and David's son, Solomon, all failed God miserably at points in their lives.

In the Old Testament, no one illustrated this kind of failure more tragically than Saul, whom Samuel (as an old man) would anoint as king of Israel. Moses had warned Israel that if their hearts grew proud, they would take credit for all that God had given them in Canaan (Deut. 8:14-17). Saul started out as a self-effacing king (1 Sam. 9:21; 10:20-24), but in time pride and arrogance turned his world upside down (1 Sam. 15:17-29). Eventually, he committed suicide rather than surrendering on the battlefield to the Philistines after a crushing defeat (1 Sam. 31:1-6).

These examples are warnings to us. Paul wrote, "Therefore, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12). We do not have to fall, however. Paul also said, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, so that you are able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

We *can* be overcomers. God has provided us with the resources we need to defeat Satan. We can put on God's armor and withstand the Devil's evil arrows (Eph. 6:10-18).

PRINCIPLE 4

HISTORY TEACHES THAT GOD'S PEOPLE CAN DEGENERATE SPIRITUALLY IN THE SPAN OF ONE GENERATION.

After Joshua's death, his own generation served God as they said they would. Their children did not, however. Instead, this generation allowed the pagan influences of Canaan to penetrate their thinking and lifestyles. Perhaps posing an even greater problem, they failed to review for their

children what God had done for Israel. They failed to instruct them in God's holy law. That generation gave up all pretence of serving God and keeping His law. They worshiped idols and lived sinful, licentious lives.

Ironically and tragically, this is what we see happening around us in Western civilization. Nations shaped by Christian values and concepts have jettisoned the Christian God and the truth of His Word. Drug abuse runs rampant. Adultery and premarital sex pass for the norm. Families fracture. Abortion is a guarded civil right. Homosexuality presses for acceptance as an alternative lifestyle. Pornography has become ubiquitous and aggressive thanks to the Internet. Rape, child abuse, spousal abuse, and murder are on the increase.

How long did it take to overthrow the restraint of Christian values and unleash modern, sophisticated barbarism? Only one generation.

PRINCIPLE 5

GOD RESPONDS TO HIS PEOPLE WITH MERCY AND GRACE WHEN THEY CONFESS EVEN HORRIBLE SINS AND CRY OUT FOR HELP.

Throughout the period of the judges, God's anger flared against His rebellious people, but He never turns a deaf ear to any genuine prayers of repentance and pleas for help. The Book of Judges records a repeated cycle of sin, servitude, supplication, and salvation. Each spin of the cycle took Israel deeper into spiritual decay until Judges concludes with the sad declaration: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted" (Judg. 21:25).

When Israel reached its lowest point, God showed His compassion and grace by bringing Samuel on the scene. "Just when it seemed the nation would cave in on its own rottenness, God intervened and in response to godly Hannah's prayer gave young Samuel to her and the nation, Samuel's strong leadership as judge, prophet and priest provided respite to the people from both internal and external threat" (Eugene Merrill, "1 Samuel," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 431).

Today God will respond to us in the midst of spiritual and moral decay if we pray. We are part of the body of Jesus Christ, His church. Within our family structures as well as within the church, we have an environment where we can grow and model and teach God's truth to our children. If we follow His principles, we can be victorious over sin and Satan.

QUESTIONS FOR INTERACTION

1. What do you think are the most critical values we need to pass on to the next generation so they will remain true to God?
2. How were the Israelites to pass on the law of God to their children (Deut. 6:4-9)?
3. What forces would lure Israel away from allegiance to God (Deut. 6:10-12; Josh. 24:14-15)?
4. How do these same forces lure us away from loyalty to God today?
5. How did Joshua motivate Israel to obey God (Josh. 24:1-2,14-15)?
6. How did Israel lose its allegiance to God (Judg. 2:7-8,10-13)?
7. How can we keep that sort of thing from happening to our children and grandchildren?
8. In what ways was the period of the judges like our day (Judg. 2:10-13; 21:25)?

GOING DEEPER

9. In your opinion, what are the most important qualities leaders need in order to inspire people to remain true to Christ?
10. What are the most important qualities we can model for young people to help them choose to serve Christ as they enter adulthood?
11. How can we encourage our leaders and hold them accountable so they don't fall away from allegiance to Christ?
12. What cultural trends do we most need to resist in order to stay true to Christ?



CARING TIME

Why begin a Bible study with a session focused on failure? That isn't very motivational or uplifting. Fortunately, the Book of Judges reports the spiritual darkness before a dawn of new activity by God through the man Samuel. We should not conclude that when things are bad that they have to get worse. Bad times are times to cry out to God and seek His face. Bad times are times to hope for a new outbreak of righteousness that will be spearheaded by a man of purpose.

1. How do you tend to react when life goes badly?
 - a. I lose heart and expect things to go from bad to worse.
 - b. I'm a fighter. I try to gather people around me and resist evil.
 - c. I can see the Devil behind the headlines almost every day.
 - d. I pray. I go to God and plead with Him to turn things around.
 - e. Other _____.
2. How do you think a group of men like us can help one another become more consistent in standing up for the Lord in difficult days?
3. What concerns do you have that we can pray about concerning the future of your family? Your church? Your community?

NEXT WEEK

Next week we will look at Samuel's family background and birth. He entered life as part of a polygamous household. His mother was a woman of great faith. His father proved to be a man of remarkable sensitivity and tenderness toward his barren wife, even as his other wife easily bore him sons. Samuel was an answer to his mother's prayer, a miracle child who would grow to be the answer to a lot of people's prayers.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-12

6:4-9 This is one of the best-known portions of the Old Testament and is called the "Shema," which means "hear." It is at the heart of the Jewish faith. Jews today repeat these verses often.

6:4 *the Lord is One.* This knowledge brought a sense of comfort to the Hebrews. Their polytheistic (worshiping many gods) neighbors always had to fear the

displeasure of the many gods they worshiped. But this was not so with the Hebrews. They worshiped the one true God and had only to concern themselves with His expectations in their lives. The unity of God is foundational to the Christian understanding of the Trinity.

6:6–in your heart. The easiest way to put something in your heart is to memorize it. Meditation also is a way to know God's truth in your mind. In meditation we contemplate the truth of God unhurriedly and peacefully.

6:12–be careful not to forget. This was a warning to Israel. Throughout history people have tended to trust God through bad times and forget Him in easy times.

JOSHUA 24:1-2,14-15

24:1 all the tribes of Israel at Shechem . . . before God. Near the end of his life, Joshua gathered all of Israel to Shechem, a town in the valley between the two mountains where they had renewed the covenant before conquering Canaan (Josh. 8:30-35; see Deut. 27–28).

24:15 As for me . . . we will worship. One man registered his vote for the supremacy of God. He knew he could not speak for all of Israel. The choice to serve God ultimately is an individual responsibility. To remind the people of their vow to serve God faithfully forever, Joshua set up a monument next to the tabernacle that was at Shechem at that time (vv. 25-27).

JUDGES 2:7-8,10-13; 21:25

2:10 another generation rose up. The story of Israel in the Book of Judges reads like a case study of good intentions gone badly. Picking up where the book of Joshua left off, it is the story of Israel abandoning commitment to God and entering repeated cycles of disobedience, defeat, and deliverance. The generation after the generation Joshua disciplined was never taught the faith story of their ancestors. They did not know about the Red Sea, the Jordan River, or Jericho. They tried to battle the Canaanites, but it was for political rather than spiritual reasons. Sadly, they didn't realize that, because of their disobedience, God was no longer fighting with them.

2:11 Baals Appropriately named for the god of storms and wars, these foreign idols were controversy incarnate. There were many Baals, because each worship site tended to have its own. God opposed the Baals and kept the Israelites from winning wars whenever they worshiped the Baals.

2:13 *Ashtoreths*. Baal was a fertility god, and the Ashtoreths were his counterparts in sexual activity. Baal was often depicted by an idol shaped as a bull; his goddess consort was represented by a carved wooden pole. The immorality of Baal worship could not have been more destructive of the holiness God wanted of His worshipers.