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### Torn between family and the Lord

Eli and his sons Hophni and Phinehas are the priests of the Lord and make their way to Shiloh every year to bring kettles and make sacrifices to their Lord. Elkanah and his two wives, Peninnah and Hannah, also come to Shiloh yearly with Peninnah's children. Hannah has been struggling to become pregnant for a while and every year she is incredibly sad and prays to God to give her a son. Eli watches her emotional prayers and promises her that her prayers to God will be heard and fulfilled which is a very compassionate action by Eli.

Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, happened to not accept and value God and act incorrectly during the sacrifice processes. They threatened the Israelites who were trying to give their sacrifices and they put time pressure on them. Therefore, the people of Israel feared the yearly offering of the Lord. Eli's sons sinned several times and also were with many different women at the tabernacle. When Eli hears about all his sons' wrongdoings, he kindly asks them why they would do such evil things and that he does not think what he has heard about them is good. He says that they would make the people sin and that it is unrightful for man to sin against the Lord. Hophni and Phinehas did not listen and kept doing what they were doing. In this situation, Eli can be viewed as both good and bad because on the one hand he cares about his sons' lives and does not want to punish but instead help them and correct them to be better. On the other hand, Eli should be more concerned about his responsibility to the Lord and the people

of Israel. Hence, he must have punished his sons for they have sinned to the Lord. However, Eli did not manage to handle the situation responsibly and let his son's go with nothing but some advising words which puts him in a bad light.

Time passed and Samuel, the firstborn of Hannah who ministers before Eli, grew into a man, and always acted in accordance with the Lord and men. When God calls him, Samuel runs to Eli thinking it was him calling. Eli tells him that he did not call for him and he should go back to sleep. When Samuel gets called two more times, Eli realizes it is the Lord calling the boy. Then Eli explains to Samuel how he should act and what he will say when he gets called the next time and so he does. After God spoke to Samuel, he told Eli about God's plans for him and although those are not in Eli's favor, he says: "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him." (1Sam 3:18, NKJV). This final passage of chapter three shows pure goodness in Eli. First, he unreluctantly helps Samuel to connect to the Lord without any hidden intentions or feelings of envy. Then, after hearing what is awaiting him, he does not try to fight back or defend himself but rather shows faithfulness and trust in God's plan for him.

Having collected and explained these examples of Eli's actions, I would estimate his overall character as good for he did not intend to do evil, his only fault was being too lenient with his unfaithful sons and therefore did not intervene their sins to God nor punish them for doing so. Nevertheless, he has done good by helping Hannah with conception and when Samuel's time had come, Eli accepted the Lord's decision and helped Samuel to follow in his footsteps without hesitation.

There is one central lesson that I learned by studying the life of Eli, which is to do the right thing for the higher good although it means I might have to let go of loved ones. The way Eli approached his sons after hearing about their sins was very relatable to me because many

people, including me, tend to hold on to their family members and loved ones despite their wrongdoings. We often times overlook their bad actions and the consequences because we are blinded by love and compassion for our own flesh and blood. Considering all the harm they did to the people of Israel and the Lord, they should have been punished. I would apply this lesson in my life when, for instance, a family member of mine broke the law and hurt people, I would have to report it to the police so they will not harm anyone again. Although it will be a very tough decision, it would be the right one.

