LESSON 11
November 15, 2026

Unit III: Samuel: Prophet, Priest, Judge, and King Maker

A Virtuous Leader

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 7:3–17
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Samuel 7:3–11, 15–17

Key Verses

And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. (1 Samuel 7:15, KJV)

. . . . .

Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life. (1 Samuel 7:15, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Recognize that a good leader responds to the people's cries for help.
- Understand that good leaders guide people (back) to God.
- Assist in the restoration of the relationship between God and His people.

*Key Terms

Fasted (verse 6)—Hebrew: *tsûwm* (tsoom): abstained from food; literally "[covered] the mouth," meaning refrained from eating; used in contexts of mourning, repentance, prayer, and seeking God; used for both individual and national fasting.

Pray (verse 5)—Hebrew: *pâlal* (paw-lal'): to make supplication; intervene; to mediate, "intercede" (NIV), or judge oneself; praying includes praise, confession, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession.

Return (verse 3)—Hebrew: *shûwb* (shoob): to restore, bring back, recover, refresh; to repent; to reverse, withdraw, turn away; "are returning" (NIV); to turn back, whether physically, emotionally, spiritually, or relationally.

Served (verse 4)—Hebrew: *'âbad* (aw-bad'): worked (in any sense); labored; worshipped (when the service was directed toward God). Samuel encouraged the people to turn back and serve only the Lord.

Were afraid (verse 7)—Hebrew: *yârê'* (yaw-ray'): feared; dreaded; was terrified; stood in awe or revered (when the fear is respectful rather than frightened).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Life Happens

Sofia is admired for her ability to unite people across ideological divides. She's chosen to lead a project to build a new community center, a place meant to serve young adults, families, and marginalized groups. At first, the project feels like a dream. Volunteers rally, local businesses pledge support, and excitement spreads through the community.



Overview

As she tells it, Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson knew she would be a justice. In her high school yearbook, she would write down her ambition: "I want to go into law and eventually have a judicial appointment." She didn't know then that she would go on to become the third African-American Supreme Court Justice and the only Black woman to be confirmed to sit on the highest court in the nation, but her work ethic, her intelligence and her community of support prepared her for lifetime appointment as a justice. This lesson explores the lifetime appointment of God's prophet and judge, Samuel. Both Samuel and Justice Jackson serve as examples to us on living purposefully. Leadership isn't just about ambition or to appear strong or to shout orders to tell people what to do. It's about using our gifts to bring out God's best in all of us and invite people to serve God by serving others. Leadership depends on our ability to remain faithful to God and His principles. It serves others and is invested in welcoming God's purposes into the world.

Soon, challenges emerge. A wealthy donor offered full funding, but only if the center excludes certain groups they view as "undeserving." Accepting the offer would mean the center gets built quickly, yet at the cost of fairness and inclusivity. Half of Sofia's team argues that compromise is necessary because it's "better to have something than nothing." The other half insists that bending to the donor's demands would betray the mission they all committed to.

Local media began covering the story, portraying Sofia as either a rising star or a naïve idealist depending on the commentator. Her reputation is suddenly at stake. Meanwhile, Sofia's family, struggling financially, urged her to accept the donor's terms. They see the center as her chance to secure stability, influence, and a better future.

Caught between competing pressures, Sofia felt the weight of the decision pressing in from every side. She wonders whether she should compromise her values for quick success or risk losing everything to protect the integrity of the vision. The choice forces her to confront what kind of leader she truly wants to be and what kind of community she hopes to build.

Questions

1. Is it more virtuous for a leader to deliver results quickly, or to uphold values even if progress stalls?
2. How should a leader balance loyalty to their mission with pressure from powerful stakeholders and public opinion?
3. What sacrifices are worth making to ensure leadership remains rooted in virtue rather than convenience?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Call to Return *(1 Samuel 7:3-6)*

KJV

3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.
4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.
5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.
6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

NIV

3 So Samuel said to all the Israelites, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."
4 So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.
5 Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the LORD for you."
6 When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

Samuel spoke to the whole house of Israel with a clear condition: if you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve Him only, and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. The word "if" carried everything. Samuel was not promising deliverance as a given. He was telling the people that their rescue depended on the genuineness of their repentance.

The people responded. They put away their Baals and Ashtoreths and served the Lord only. Samuel then called the entire nation to assemble at Mizpah, where he would intercede with the Lord on their behalf. When they gathered, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord, fasted, and confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord." The pouring of water was a ritual act of humility, a symbolic emptying of themselves before God. The fasting and confession made repentance concrete.

Samuel did not lead this moment with strategy but with worship. Before any battle plan or military preparation, he called the people to deal with their spiritual condition first. Samuel understood that Israel's problem ran deeper than politics or military strategy, it was relational. The nation was broken because the people had walked away from God, and no amount of military strength would fix what only repentance could restore.

What Do You Think?

"Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines." What do you hear in the voice of the Israelites?

Thunder from Heaven *(1 Samuel 7:7-11)*

KJV

7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.
8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.
9 And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.
10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.
11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

NIV

7 When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines.
8 They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines."
9 Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.
10 While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.
11 The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar.

When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, they saw an opportunity and marched against them. The Israelites were terrified. They turned to Samuel and said, "Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines." They did not ask Samuel to organize an army, but asked him to pray. The people had learned, at least in that moment, that their survival depended on God's intervention, not their own effort.

Samuel took a lamb and sacrificed it as a burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out on Israel's behalf, and the Lord answered him. While Samuel was still offering the sacrifice, the Philistines drew near for battle. But the Lord thundered loudly against the Philistines, they panicked, and were routed by the Israelites.

The timing matters. God's thunder came while the sacrifice was still being offered. The deliverance was tied directly to the act of worship. Samuel did not finish praying and then wait for results. God moved in the middle of the intercession. For a people who had spent years trying to protect themselves through military strategy and even through the manipulation of sacred objects like the ark, this was a dramatically different experience. God fought for them because Samuel stood between them and prayed.

What Do You Think? **What sticks out to you about Samuel's leadership?**

A Lifetime of Faithful Service *(1 Samuel 7:15-17)*

KJV

15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.
16 And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.
17 And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

NIV

15 Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life.
16 From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places.
17 But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

Verse 15 says simply, "Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life." From year to year, he traveled a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. Then he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel and built an altar to the Lord.

Samuel's leadership was not centralized in a palace or a throne room. It was itinerant. He went to the people rather than requiring them to come to him. His circuit covered the heart of Israelite territory, ensuring that communities across the region had access to godly leadership and fair judgment. The altar he built at Ramah made his home as much a place of worship as a place of residence. His personal life and his public service were not divided into separate categories.

After the chaos of the judges—the cycles of sin, the absence of moral direction, the leaders who were antiheroes at best—Samuel is a departure from that pattern. He combined the roles of prophet, priest, and judge into a single life of consistent faithfulness. He was not without fault, and later chapters in 1 Samuel would expose his failures as a father. But for the generation he served, Samuel was the steady presence that held the nation together. His life is a picture of what leadership looks like when it is rooted in devotion to God rather than in ambition for power.

What Do You Think?

What qualities made Samuel an effective leader? How can those same qualities be cultivated in your own leadership, whether at work, in your family, or in your church?

Your Life

Samuel took the invitation to lead seriously at an early age. Consider how God may be inviting you to use your gifts to influence and encourage others at this stage in your life. Identify both your gifts and your talents that may be used for God's glory.

Your World!

Faithful leaders seek to guide and encourage with humility and empathy. Faith informed leadership is mutual, not hierarchical. Clergy leaders should be introspective and take note of leading with a heart posture of service to others. This servant-leadership style honors God and brings glory to God's kingdom.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for putting Spirit-led leaders in positions of authority. Guide us to follow Samuel's faithful example so that we can be leaders who serve with humility. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, November 16	"Blessings of a Righteous Ruler"	(Proverbs 29:1-14)
TUESDAY, November 17	"God Deposes and Sets Up Kings"	(Daniel 2:16-22)
WEDNESDAY, November 18	"Anointed for God's Service"	(Luke 4:14-21)
THURSDAY, November 19	"God Rejects Saul"	(1 Samuel 15:10-23)
FRIDAY, November 20	"God's Righteous Servant"	(Matthew 12:14-21)
SATURDAY, November 21	"Do Not Judge by Appearances"	(John 7:14-24)
SUNDAY, November 22	"God Looks on the Heart"	(1 Samuel 16:4-13)