



**Lesson Title:** The Balance of the Spirit – Spiritual Abuse



**Key Concept:** As disciples of Christ we must learn to live a life balanced by the Spirit. Mature Christians will recognize spiritual abuse and how it is in opposition to servanthship.



**Scriptures:**

<sup>22</sup>Now Eli was very old, but he was aware of what his sons were doing to the people of Israel. He knew, for instance, that his sons were seducing the young women who assisted at the entrance of the Tabernacle. <sup>23</sup>Eli said to them, “I have been hearing reports from all the people about the wicked things you are doing. Why do you keep sinning?”

(1 Samuel 2:22–23 *New Living Translation*)

<sup>25</sup>But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. <sup>26</sup>But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. <sup>28</sup>For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

(Matthew 20:25–28 *New Living Translation*)

**Context Scriptures:** 1 Samuel 2; Matthew 20:20–28; 1 Kings 21; 1 Kings 3:7–9; Matthew 19:28–30; Matthew 23:11–12



**Lesson Thoughts:**

The Old Testament is filled with stories of how **not** to live. The story of Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, is one such example that illustrates spiritual abuse. They used their positions as priests to satisfy their own desires. Their sins were very serious in the Lord’s sight because they did not respect the Lord’s offerings or the office of the priesthood. In addition, Eli knew what his sons were doing. He had more respect for his sons than he had for the Lord. This resulted in the death

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of Hophni and Phinehas. Also, no one in Eli's family lived a long life, and they no longer served as priests. Spiritual abuse led to serious consequences for Eli's entire family.

Similarly, Ahab and Jezebel abused their position of authority by having Naboth killed in order to take possession of his vineyard. Through Elijah's message, God's wrath was evident. "So now the Lord says, I will bring disaster on you and consume you. I will destroy every one of your male descendants, slave and free alike, anywhere in Israel!" (1 Kings 21:21)

Contrast these situations with Jesus' statement that rulers in this world flaunt their authority, but among you it will be different (Matthew 20:26). Jesus did not come to be served, but rather to serve and told his disciples that they also must become servants. Likewise, we are leading others and must put their well-being above our own.

Exercising holy authority in an unholy manner is abuse.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, let us have an attitude like Solomon's when he became king (1 Kings 3:7). He considered himself to be like a little child who didn't know his way around. Solomon asked God for an understanding heart so he could govern well and know right from wrong. We, too, must seek God's help to serve in a holy manner.

<sup>1</sup> Steven Beardsley sermon, *Transformation*, 11/17/2019

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Consider a situation when someone flaunted authority over you. How did it make you feel?
- 2) What are some characteristics of a spiritually abusive situation? Identify other spiritually abusive situations from the Bible.
- 3) How does knowledge of the Word help us prevent spiritual abuse?
- 4) What behaviors and attitudes go along with having a servant's heart?

**Next Lesson:** The Balance of the Spirit – Forgiveness

**Notes and Reflections**

- 1) Read 1 Samuel 2. Consider the differences between Eli's sons and Samuel.
- 2) Read Matthew 20:20–28. Why do you think Jesus spoke to the disciples about being different from the world after their request to be seated beside him in his kingdom?
- 3) In Psalm 72, what is the psalmist's attitude toward the people he is about to rule? Do you think he had a balanced view of ruling God's people at this point? Why or why not?