

The Lifestyle Of Men Who Finished Well

by Sdemola Ishola

This sermon focuses on the characteristics and principles of Samuel, a man who finished well in ministry. It emphasizes the importance of growing in the presence of the Lord, saying no to moral degradation, having a high sense of call to minister, growing in favor with God and man, listening to God, teaching what is good and right, forthright preaching of God's word, and consistency in prayer as key elements for a successful ministry.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:18, 1 Timothy 4:15, 2 Peter 1:5, Hebrews 12:12, Colossians 3:22, 1 Samuel 3:4, 1 Samuel 12:23, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Samuel 7:5

Topics: "Faithfulness in Ministry", "Listening to God's Voice"

Description

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Transcript

for me to stand before the clergy at the apex level to be able to share the word of the Lord. Most of the time it is with fear and trembling. I don't take this for granted.

As I was preparing to join us, I started wondering, Lord, just like Obadiah, I don't know what the spirit would do to Billy, whether you would just say, where you would take him to, I don't know. So I asked the Lord to help me, especially in relation to the theme. So the Lord gave me three passages to work on.

One, by God's grace, was shared with you yesterday from 1 Corinthians chapter 9, 24-27. The second was Hebrews chapter 12, 1-13. And then I realized that reference or referrer was made to Hebrews chapter 12 several times, including today from the preacher this morning.

The third passage has to do with a role model, someone who started so well, so privileged, started so well, so clean, and ended so well in the ministry. And there are several of them, but this particular man of God caught my attention. And these several role models who finished well in their ministry, quite many.

Some listed for us in Hebrews chapter 11 from the Old Testament, and of course the New Testament. Joseph, Daniel, among those giants whom the Lord enabled to complete the assignment successfully. Samuel is however my choice, or the choice of the Lord for me to share with us as I was preparing for this

retreat.

What are some characteristics, issues, themes, role models such as Samuel possessed? So if I will title this message tonight, it is characteristics or lifestyle or principles of a man who finished well in ministry. Lifestyle of a man who finished well in ministry. Characteristics or principles of Samuel.

What are the biblical ideas that characterized his life to enable him to finish well in ministry? As I was doing a study of this man of God, from chapter 2 and 3, of course there are other chapters from 1 Samuel. I want to read from 1 Samuel chapter 2 where I will base this message. 1 Samuel chapter 2, we will begin reading from verse 18 through 21 to save us some time.

But Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a leaning ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli will bless Elkanah and his wife saying, may the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and give to the Lord.

Then they will go home. And the Lord was gracious to Anna. She conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters.

Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord. Knowing that we still have a few issues to deal with, I will go to list some of the characteristics that made Samuel to begin well and to end well. That does not mean that Samuel did not falter along the way.

But here is a man of God, a role model. Someone whom the Lord God committed a task of leading those people, serving as the judge, serving as the prophet, the seer. Someone who sees on behalf of God for the people of God.

Someone who stood in the gap. The first thing that I see that I ask the Lord to help me as well and pray that for my colleagues we will do similarly is, there is this lifestyle of growing in the presence of the Lord. It sounds so simple.

Growing in the presence of the Lord. Verse 21b. And the Lord was gracious to Anna.

She conceived and all of that. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord. The importance of growing in Christian life apart from the ministry is essential, extremely crucial.

A while ago, two couples shared with us the need for both husbands and wives to grow strong in the Lord, in the knowledge, wisdom of the Lord God of glory. Samuel, of course, was fortunate. His home was literally at the temple where the man of God was, Eli.

And so growing in the presence of the Lord will be natural, quite easy. Almost he had no other place to go. So maybe no wonder.

But what about me? What about you? When I don't sleep inside the church. But where will I find myself that God is not? As Psalm 139 says, where will I run from your spirit? Where can I go? And then I will consider myself hiding from you. I came here and I decided to be part of this in order to keep growing in the presence of the Lord.

I once preached a message as we were dedicating a convention venue. And I titled it, The Bush is Still Burning. The bush is still burning.

And the place looked so rough at the time we took off. That wasn't a bad thing. And the place is beginning to take a better look now.

But then it was like Moses meeting God in wilderness. But wherever you are able to meet with your God, wherever is able to feed you, carnivate you, empower you, that is the presence of the Lord. And you are required to keep growing in him.

When the Psalmist, in the book of Psalm 84, that it is so good, always wonderful to be in the chapel, in the temple, where you are able to join others that will sharpen you, sharpen you, empower you, strengthen your faith, your walk in the Lord. It is essential that every now and then you will come apart like this. Or that you will be in a church setting to make sure that you will be fed.

Those of you who are at the apex leadership, sometimes you may find it difficult to submit to someone else preaching where you are. And I have found so many top level individuals who will not even go to church anymore because what will these small boys tell me? I am afraid for people like that. While I was in Ibadan, I joined a church and then submitted myself to pastoral leadership.

And because I am a, what would I call myself? Whether I would call myself a bench warming member of that church because I don't usually go Sunday after Sunday. But that's where my membership is, that I'm committed to. And fortunately this, my pastor also is part of my accountability group.

People pray with me every now and then. How much time do you spend in the presence of the Lord? And when we are talking in the presence of the Lord, a while ago we had a challenge. What is your prayer life like? What is your devotional life like? How much time do you devote to spend before the Lord? Hebrews 10 25 says, never in your life should you neglect the assembling of yourself with fellow believers from where you will receive spiritual nourishment.

Samuel was growing in the presence of the Lord and for life until the man died, he never departed from him. No wonder he was able to finish well because virtually every now and then God keeps guiding him, leading him, directing him. When you are growing in the presence of the Lord, definitely you will need to consider some few things.

First Timothy chapter 4, and yesterday it was good that Bishop Okafo emphasized on this. I think it's important for us to remind ourselves of it. First Timothy and chapter 4, 15 and 16.

The word of the Lord says, be diligent in these matters, give yourselves wholly to them so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely, persevere in them. Because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearings.

And when Peter was writing to the believers, he said virtually the same thing. Second Peter chapter 1, he says for this very reason, as if you are living in the presence of the Lord, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverance godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, growing in the presence of the Lord, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But if you fail in this area, the Bible says you are nearsighted and blind, and you are forgotten that you have been cleansed from your past sins. The second thing that I see in the life of this man of God,

Samuel, is that there was this resolve to say no to moral degradation, moral insensitivity around him at the time. Here is a young individual who can easily be influenced to do wrong, and he was growing in the presence of ophny and phineas, the debased senior priests, those who care less about even respecting God.

In first Samuel chapter 2, verse 17, we are told that the sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with content. While the boy was ministering before the Lord, he was close to Eli the old man, and definitely would be seeing what these senior colleagues were doing, but somehow he resolved not to mess his life with such things. I urge you in the name of our Lord, yes, some may get away, or may be getting away with these subtle sins, besetting sins, and maybe nobody appears to be doing anything about them.

Sometime ago, some people attacked me and said, oh, sometimes your judgment is selective, and I wondered what they meant. Oh, when someone I don't like commits sin and falls, we will discipline them, we will do this to them. What about others here and there? And I will tell them, I am in Ibadan.

That is where our headquarters is. Those of you who live where you are, and you are not willing to tell me or to inform us, and to be willing to say, yes, I saw him do this, for you to hold someone here, rather than here, I will not do anything about that until you can bring concrete evidence. Yes, others may be getting away, but please, just like Samuel was able to stand tall, like Daniel resolved not to mess with the things around, the same was what Samuel did.

No wonder he finished so strong. First Timothy chapter four, I think it's important for us to read that, because this is the time in which we live. The Spirit clearly says that in the latter times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Such teachings come through hypocritical lives, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. And there are several other things that is happening in our own time.

It is important that you will resolve to say no to all kinds of irresponsible lifestyle, moral degradation that you see around. Never shall you copy them just because you think you will not be called, but be sure your sin will find you out. If you want to finish strong and finish well in ministry, please learn from Samuel who resolved to say no to moral insensitivity around him.

Number three that I see in his life is that there is a high sense of call to ministering before the Lord. A high sense of call to ministering before the Lord. Verse 18 of our passage tells us about the attitude of Samuel.

But Samuel was ministering before the Lord, always serving. And I realize that the word ministering has to do with slaving. Of course for the old man, a young man, maybe it would be natural for him to actually serve the Lord and serve the master.

The old prophet revered ministering before the Lord. Service, maybe you will be the first to wake up, to go and clean up, to go and take care of the old man, possibly to even cater for the old man because the boys were already messed up. When someone was passing the microphone here and there, and I saw the individual, huge fellow, not a small boy, very likely a married man, ministering before the Lord, I started thanking God.

And as I see so many of them behind the scenes serving me, making sure that my stay here is so comfortable, my coming here is a delight. Someone will cook for me, bring me water to wash my hands and all of that. But I wonder how many of us, maybe you are still a young senior minister in the denomination, and you are not willing to minister to your senior colleague because possibly you are thinking you know too much.

You know far more than this old man. And now I wish this old man would simply just move out so I can step in. Until you are willing to serve, until you are willing to be the servant, you will not be qualified to be a leader.

And because Samuel served wholeheartedly as a servant, he was able to finish so strong, so well. Colossians chapter 3, 22 to 23 talks about you slaves, serve your master as even to the Lord. And I suppose that speaks to me, speaks to you too.

Even at the apex level, are you willing to stoop low sometimes to even serve your younger priest pastors? To find a way to make ministry a delight for them? No wonder Samuel finished well. Number four, there is the pursuit of growing in favor with God and man. Verse 26 of our passage, and the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with man.

Growing in favor with God and man. There's so much to say about this, but we do not have the luxury of time. In other words, Samuel decided to please the Lord at all times, to the extent that God will listen to him, hear him speak, and when he preaches, the word of the Lord will not fall to the ground.

And everybody revered him. And he was able to find favor before the Lord. Now, growing in stature has to do with physical growth, definitely.

But it will appear to me that this man was growing gracefully in a way that he would not become so sloppy. Let me ask you, senior pastor, senior clergy, how much are you keeping your body in good shape? Actually, when I read Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 13, I started wondering whether the writer was not looking for only spiritual stamina, but that every pastor, every Christian will be physically strong to be able to serve the Lord. Listen to it.

Hebrews 12, verse 12 and 13, therefore strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. Do you engage yourself in exercise? Walking, jogging, keeping shape every now and then? Or do you just simply eat and eat and eat? Just like our sister, Kiata, said a while ago that as soon as she begins to watch her husband eat, she puts a check there.

If someone thinks, I just will have to make sure that this is the way I will be walking, and this is the sign of prosperity. If it is not hereditary, I think you need to be careful. Spiritual stamina, physical stamina is part of the maturing of someone, keeping in good shape, and I do hope all of us will try our very best to do that, in making sure that we will grow in favor with God and with man.

Colossians chapter 4, verses 5 and 6 says, be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Oh, there are some of us that can be so bullish, oppressive in the way we address issues, in the way we even talk to others, in the way we address women, and so many other things. When you begin to engage

in suggestive jokes, how can you grow in favor with man? Number five, there is also the resolve to listening and paying attention to God. It started so young.

First Samuel chapter 3, verse 4, verse 6, verse 8, verse 10. When the man started, I mean the young Samuel started hearing Samuel, Samuel, Samuel, and he would run to the old man. He lied.

You call me, Baba. I didn't call you. Maybe you are daydreaming or something.

Go back and sleep. Second time around, you call me, Baba. No, go and sleep.

And third time, the experienced old man perceived that God was calling the young kid, and he guided him. Now, those of you who are young in the ministry, those of you who are upcoming, or possibly you find yourself elevated so suddenly to the apex level, I want to beg you in the name of our Lord, will you pay attention to go through older folks? Will you be willing to subject yourself to let them guide you? The Yoruba people will say no matter how many new clothes a young man may have, he cannot have as many rags as the older people. In other words, you cannot buy experience just right there.

But if you can walk closely with those who have been hearing from God, listening to Him, paying attention to Him, they will be able to guide you well. No wonder Samuel ended well. Let me go to number six, the resolve to teach the way that is good and right.

First Samuel chapter 12 and verse 23. To teach the way that is good and right. That was his resolve.

And I think it is important for us to consider that. Verse 23, he says that as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you, and I will teach you the way that is good and right. Now whoever will teach the way that is good and right, definitely will also watch his own walk, his own life, his own way of life.

He will definitely make sure that he will walk his talk. And I wonder whether we are engaging ourselves seriously in the area of teaching the command of God, teaching what is good and what is right. And if we do that, definitely God too will be ordering our footsteps in a way for us to really finish well.

Number seven that I see, the resolve to forthright preaching of God's word. He was forthright in preaching the word of the Lord. We are told in chapter three verse one that the word of the Lord never fell to the ground in the mouth of Samuel.

Forthright preaching of the word of the Lord. And when Paul taught Timothy, second Timothy chapter four, one to four, talking about be prepared to make sure that you will preach and preach the word forthrightly by using preaching the pulpit to rebuke, to correct, to encourage, to make sure that the crookedness of the people's lives will be straightened using the pulpit so well. That means you will have to study hard, work hard when it comes to preaching, handling the word of the Lord.

The last thing that I see is the consistency in prayer. Consistency in prayer. First Samuel chapter seven and you see in verse five that Paul, I mean Samuel said, assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the Lord for you.

When you go to verse eight, the same thing. And several places, there was even a place where he said I will never stop interceding, praying for you people. No wonder Saul could even look for the old man even in the grave because he thought there would be a magic there.

If he could only reach that old man again because the prayer works wonders. I want to beg you, if you want to finish well, make sure that your prayer life will be extremely serious and you may not do it alone. I want to encourage you to make sure that you have prayer partners, what you will call accountability group.

Those who will be asking you serious questions, the motives for doing this or doing that. Those who will serve as your ears, your legs, your hands out there, picking one thing or another, helping you. Of course the best prayer partner is your spouse, your wife.

As you consider the life of Samuel and as I keep looking back, reflecting on the life of Samuel and several others like him, I realize that they engage in a lifestyle that enabled them to finish well in ministry. My prayer for you and for myself as I am beginning again another assignment is that I will make sure that I pay attention to these individuals whose life, their lifestyles, their characteristics enable them to stand strong until the very end because I realize you don't retire in ministerial career until they put you inside the dust to dust as far as I'm concerned unless at a point where you can no longer move out here and there and therefore it's like I'm beginning again and I pray that as I start all over again I will not falter as I'm praying for you that you will finish strong in the race set before you. Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we bless you and thank you for granting us grace, the opportunity to pay attention to you again using the life of Samuel to remind us as to what will help us to engage in the ministry and to finish well. Holy Spirit, we ask you to continue to help us, keep renewing us, keep energizing us to the extent that as we pattern our lives after these men and women of God, we too will serve you faithfully even until the very end. In Jesus Christ.

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