



Esther Core Group Study

Esther is a nine-week study with an optional Purim celebration at the end. There are articles with each study, opening questions, textual questions and application questions. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the book of Esther and how it relates to us (especially women) today.

This study was adapted from a study written by the Chi Alpha Staff at Virginia Tech, who used the Beth Moore study on Esther as a major source.

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Things to note about this study

- **ARTICLE:** There is an article to read in each study along with portions of the Book of Esther. At the end of this document there are all of the articles together so if you choose to print them out for your group to read together, you can. This would also allow them to reread them throughout the week.
- **PURIM CHART (OPTIONAL):** There is a PURIM Chart at the end of this study. This is an optional activity you and your Core Group can do together. One idea is to get into partners each week after the study and fill them out together, rereading and talking about that week's passage. If you choose to do this activity you will want to print out a chart for each person.



- PARTNER ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Much of it revolves around the PURIM study. However, there are also questions to assign. This could be a great way for your Core Group to bond and if you change the partner each time they will get to know everyone in the group even better!
- PRAYER: You will notice a prayer section in each study. This is an optional prayer you can pray over your group or give them to take with them for the week as a reminder.





Introduction

Fairy Tale or For Real?

The classic tale of Cinderella has delighted the hearts of young girls and women of all ages for centuries. This enchanting story has been told all around the world and has thousands of variants. Surely, all the elements of a great narrative are present, yet we feel in our hearts that it is more than a tale. Has there ever been a historical woman who went from obscurity to fame, from injustice to redress, from fear to faith, from hopeless to heroine? Has there ever been a fairy godmother or, better yet, a faithful God who works in the shadows, unseen, yet all the while present?

As we journey back to 460 B.C., we find our answer, our Cinderella. She lives on in the pages of one the greatest books of the Bible, Esther. This incomparable biblical work was written by an unknown Jewish author from a Persian city. The author's primary intention was to "record the institution of the annual festival of Purim and to keep alive for later generations the memory of the great deliverance of the Jewish people during the reign of Xerxes." (TNIV Study Bible)

As we look at the historical arc of Scripture, we find that this deliverance was crucial. The events that unfolded in the Persian city of Susa, the winter capital of the Persian court where King Xerxes was residing "threatened the continuity of God's purposes in redemptive history... the future existence of God's chosen people, and ultimately the appearance of the Redeemer- Messiah..." (TNIV Study Bible)

God is undoubtedly at work in this fascinating book even though He is not explicitly mentioned. The omission of God's name is a unique feature, one that leads many critics to question the book's religious value altogether. It is clear, though, that our brilliant author was deliberate and intentional in his choice of words. His style served the greater purpose of highlighting God's sovereignty and control of every circumstance and situation we find in the book. It goes without question, God is moving even when he cannot be seen or heard. As Dr. Charles Swindoll writes,

"This is the wonder of God's sovereignty. Working behind the scenes, he is moving and pushing and rearranging events and changing minds until He brings out of even the most carnal and secular of settings a decision that will set His perfect plan in place."

Ladies, get ready to meet one of the Bible's most courageous women. May her story be yours, and may her once upon a time awaken your heart to believe you also have been called "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).





Week One: Esther 1

A Royal Disaster!

Opening Questions:

1. As a woman in the 21st century, being courageous and standing up for what we believe in can be difficult. Is there a female figure currently in your life, or who you have known in the past, that has inspired you with her courage and boldness?
2. There are many women in the Bible, which one inspires you the most and why?
3. In your opinion, what makes a story great?
4. What would be some of the pressures and stresses of inheriting an empire in Ancient Persia?
5. In what ways does having a culturally beautiful appearance often work against woman of the 21st century?

Article:

As college students, we can appreciate a good party. When times look bleak, days are long, and our brains are fried, attending a well thought out fiesta is so refreshing. The desire to take a period of time and set it aside to relax, regroup, or just celebrate is not a 21st century phenomenon; throughout history, and especially in the Bible, we see people from all times and places enjoying similar “social gatherings.” In fact, our Biblical text today opens up with what may be one of the longest, most expensive, lavish, and influential banquets of all times.

King Xerxes, also called Ahasuerus, (a title meaning “high father or “venerable king”), was hungry for more power. Although he had brought the Medo-Persian Empire to its zenith, reigning over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia, and was one of the wealthiest men in the world, he was discontent. According to Herodotus’ Histories, he was hot-tempered and foolish; desiring to surpass the greatness of all the rulers before him. To this end, he was determined to conquer Greece, a quest that would ultimately lead to his demise and the downfall of the Empire.

The Medo-Persians were not unfamiliar with God or His people, the Jews. In fact, many of Xerxes’ predecessors had encountered God in and through the life of Daniel the Prophet. These men were not perfect, but their respect for the God of the Jews was demonstrated in their laws and decrees that helped His chosen people return to the Promised Land. Xerxes, however, did not follow in the footsteps of his fathers. As G. Ricciotti says, he inherited none of his predecessor’s good qualities, “but only a love of opulent display which progressively sapped his moral fiber.” Xerxes was not interested in winning God’s favor; he wanted to win a war and he had a clever plan to gain his nobles’ support.

He decided to hold a banquet that lasted 180 days to display his power and resources, producing confidence in all the royal officials and military leaders from each province that Xerxes was the ruler to bring Persia to world dominance. At the end of the festivities, he held one last banquet in his astonishing garden as a “grand finale” that lasted seven days. In one last strategic move, the king saved the best show of all for last: Vashti.

In the midst of this drunken revelry, we meet Xerxes’ first queen. Biblical scholar and teacher Beth Moore writes:



Enter Vashti, the crowned Queen of Persia. Think of the most beautiful woman you've ever seen...Some scholars suggest her beauty even surpassed our yet-to-be introduced protagonist, Esther...One reason some scholars surmise that Vashti's beauty may have even exceeded Esther's is that, in a genre where words mean the world, Vashti was twice attributed with beauty and Esther, once.

As you may know, beauty is not always a blessing. In Vashti's case, her beauty drew undesired attention. Her extremely, intoxicated husband interrupted the banquet she was hosting for the royal women and summoned her to come to court wearing her royal diadem. "This would create a dramatic and majestic entrance for her before the men being asked to go to war for the empire. Perhaps the sight of the queen in her royal glory was intended to inspire patriotism and loyalty..."

The request would create a drama indeed, one that Xerxes' never foresaw, Vashti refused to go. There are many suggestions as to why she refused, but one of the key reasons could have been the insult to her personal dignity and honor. Entering a room filled with drunken men only to be ogled and hooted at, was not on the top of her royal priority list.

As the story continues, the drunk lead the drunk, so to speak. The king's seven eunuchs and seven advisors conspire and suggest that Xerxes get rid of Vashti and give her position to someone "better than she." Their reasons are farfetched and seemingly fear-based, but they are unimportant. God is working behind the scenes to place every man and woman exactly where He wants them. The royal disaster will become a fairy tale-come-true under His sovereign hand.

Text Questions:

1. The passage does not give a definite reason as to why Vashti refused to make an appearance. What is your take on her refusal?
2. The King's royal officials and advisors seem very hasty and extreme in their advice. In your opinion, should these men be trusted? Why or why not?
3. On what grounds did the King dismiss Vashti? What does this reveal about his ego, nature, and character?

Application Questions:

1. Read Jeremiah 24:1-7, what does this passage say about God's sovereignty – that is, His control of both personal affairs and international situations? How does this impact you?
2. Read Psalm 75:6-7, Daniel 2:21, and Proverbs 21:1; what do these verses have in common? How do you see this playing out in Esther, chapter one?
3. Read Proverbs 31:10, and 30, how do these verses challenge us as women in a culture consumed by physical appearance and less with heart and integrity?
4. Have you ever struggled with the idea of physical beauty and perfection? What has encouraged you the most in this struggle?

Prayer:

Dear Father God, it is hard being a woman in a culture so consumed with outer beauty. Please help us to be women who strive for moral character and integrity. Please help us to be women who are courageous and bold, willing to take a stand for what we believe in. Forgive us for our vanity. Forgive us for thinking of ourselves all the time. Forgive us for the time we spend preparing our outer man and the lack of time we



give to tending our spirit. Help us to be women who are devoted to the things of Jesus Christ. Help us to be women of purity, noble character, and help us to have a godly fear of You. Have mercy on us, Father. We want to please You above all else. We give You our insecurities, our fears, our hopelessness and we say, "set us free." Take us to where You are and help us to focus our mind on eternal things. Be the treasure of our hearts. We love you; please change us this New Year. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignment:

1. Memory Verse: Proverbs 31:30
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter One
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Two: Esther 2

Hadassah, The Star

Opening Questions:

1. What do you think about beauty contests or shows like The Bachelor? Do they intrigue you/disgust you? Why?
2. How do you think Esther felt when she was taken to the palace? How would you have felt?
3. What would have been some of the challenges of living in the harem as a young Jewish girl?

Article:

“A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it.” Proverbs 16:14

We begin Chapter Two with a despondent, lonely Xerxes who is “remembering” Vashti. The Hebrew word for remember infers a note of compassion. Now that Xerxes has had time to reflect on his failed marriage (and a failed campaign in Greece since the edict), he may have wished he hadn’t been so hasty to take the counsel of his advisors. His personal attendants took his distress to heart and scrambled to alleviate it, knowing that he needed a queen to ensure some level of stability for the rest of the Persian court. As we find out, God had just the woman for the job.

The first time we hear about Esther, she is described as an orphan, “Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had no father or mother.” (Esther 2:7). She seems to have had every excuse to play the victim: Hadassah, soon to be known as Esther, was an orphan, presumably being raised by an older, single male relative. She did not have an older woman in her life to guide and mentor her in what it means to be a woman of God (at least, if she did, this woman is never mentioned or referred to). So perhaps we could understand if she didn’t know how to present herself or maybe we would excuse depression and bad habits with a statement like this: “You can’t blame the poor girl, with a childhood like that...” Without a doubt, many women in our culture are in similar situations, some coming from broken homes, some having emotionally absent fathers or mothers; however, our protagonist, Esther, dealt with much more than a broken home.

Not only was Esther an orphan, but it is also fair to assume that she was forced to participate in the “contest” suggested by Xerxes’ attendants. Beth Moore paints a vivid picture of the search process:

The large numbers [of girls] were herded like coddled cattle to the stalls of Susa, no questions asked. They were taken captive as surely as the exiles of Judah years earlier, even if some were foolish enough to be happy about it.

Some of you may be wondering, “What’s the big deal? A giant beauty contest, where you get pampered 24-7, and live in the lap of luxury, with the chance of being chosen queen? It couldn’t have been that bad...” Not that bad, until you read verse 14: “In the evening [each girl] would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.” Not only did many of the girls feel used and rejected, but Marvin Breneman



explains that they faced a life of “perpetual widowhood” as a concubine, unable to ever enjoy the kindness of a faithful husband or the chance to raise a normal family.

Even so, in the midst of these dark circumstances, we are introduced to Esther, which literally means “star” in Persian. She truly shone brightly in the dark, worldly competition of Xerxes’ harem. Our author makes it very clear that Esther distinguished herself. While it was customary for the king to choose a bride from the seven leading families of Persia, this unconventional contest shows God’s providence in placing Esther right where she needed to be to have an enormous sphere of influence.

The amazing and overwhelming response to Esther upon her arrival at the harem was favor. Again and again, the author drives home that she won everyone’s favor. In fact, he describes her as pleasing, notes that she won favor, or someone was attracted to her at least six times in eight verses. (Esther 2:9-17) Esther sought favor through her actions, her countenance, and her gracious manner. It is obvious that Hegai, a eunuch with nothing to gain personally from Esther’s advancement, saw something special in her that particularly qualified her to be the king’s consort. Moreover, he was so certain of her potential, he did everything in his power to give her an advantage, even to the point of giving her advice on what she ought to take with her for her night with Xerxes.

One thing Hegai might have identified in Esther was her humility. While it is not directly addressed in Chapter Two, we see in Esther’s interactions with Mordecai her humble and obedient spirit. While Esther could have made a case excusing a lack of grace, poor manners, a downcast countenance, or even deep depression, she chose instead to actively pursue favor, to seek wisdom, and to remain humble; all of these choices God honored by lifting her up.

Text Questions:

1. List the four steps from verses 3-5 that the attendants proposed for selecting a new queen (in almost all translations the steps are introduced with the word “Let...”)
2. The passage’s first description of Esther defines her as an orphan, adopted by her cousin. How would you describe their relationship, based on the information given?
3. The author says that Esther pleased Hegai and won his favor; that she won the favor of everyone who saw her, and, most importantly, that she won the approval of the king. What qualities might have led to this widespread approval? Can you find evidence of these qualities in the passage?
4. List the reasons given in the text that our society would consider “valid” for labeling Esther as a victim. Do you think she took on that label? Why or why not?

Application Questions:

1. “True holiness and virtue command permanent respect and affection, far more than charm and beauty of face and form.” - John MacArthur. Think about this quote as you read Proverbs 31:30 again. What do you value most highly in your life, your character and your virtue, or your outward appearance and the way people perceive you?
2. Winning favor is an active process. While this phrase is used passively (favor is given or bestowed) elsewhere in the Bible, in chapter two of Esther, the Hebrew used describes an active seeking. How does winning the favor of your professors, peers, and future coworkers bring God glory?
3. Has there ever been a time in your life when you have been bogged down by your circumstances and found yourself blaming others rather than seeking favor?



4. Take a moment to reflect on the circumstances you are currently facing. Has God placed you in these situations for a specific purpose? Are you choosing to be gracious and to seeking to grow in wisdom and humility in the midst of them?

Prayer:

Dear Father God, thank You for this incredible picture of Your ability to turn even the darkest of situations into good things for Your children and glory for Yourself. Forgive me when I have chosen to wallow in my own misery and discontent rather than trusting you. Please help me to remember that all Your ways are good, You know the end from the beginning, and You are faithful to work all things together for good for those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. Lord, we want to offer You our lives. We ask You to mold our character and our personalities in such a way that we might reflect Christ and grow in favor. Place us in those positions where You may use us for your kingdom purposes. Forgive us when we have sought our own glory and gain and help us to truly seek Your kingdom and Your righteousness. We love You and thank you for the opportunity to see the miracles that spring from Your sovereign plan. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignment:

1. Memory Verse: Proverbs 11:2
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Two
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Three: Esther 3

Super Sinister

Opening Questions:

1. A growing number of people (including many believers in Christ) are convinced of the truthfulness of all sorts of conspiracy theories involving the government, the military, the press, Hollywood, big banking, and even organized religion. Why do you think such theories are increasingly popular?
2. In a crisis situation, how do you typically respond? Do you a) become hysterical; b) become immobilized by fear; c) pray; d) swing into action; e) try to escape; f) react in some other way? Why do you think you respond this way?

Article:

Most of us have seen and heard the horrific stories that are told of how our Lord's precious people, the Jews, endured World War II under the tyranny of the Nazi regime. It is not as commonly known, however, that there was another "Hitler" in history, found right here in the pages of Esther. His name was Haman, and like Adolph, his agenda included the complete annihilation of the Jews. In Chapter Three we read of a horrific plan that would have cut short God's glorious plan, but for the provision he made through one young Jewish girl becoming Queen of Persia.

The ghastly degree came from Xerxes' highest noble, Haman the Agagite. It is important to note Haman's ancestry. He is a descendent from King Agag of Amalek (1Sa 15:20). "The Amalekites had attacked Israel after she fled from Egypt; for this reason the Lord would "be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation." (Ex 17:16). Israel was not to forget the Amalekite treachery, but was commanded to "blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven" (Dt 25:19)." At one point, God had King Saul pursue the Amalekites in order to kill them all and end their future permanently (perhaps in His foreknowledge of what was going to come from this group of people if left alive). King Saul disobeyed and only killed some of them, not all. If Saul from centuries past would have done as the Lord had commanded him and obeyed by destroying all the Amalekites, he may have kept his crown, but more importantly our sinister villain, Haman, would not even exist.

During Esther's reign, her cousin, and adopted father, Mordecai was promoted to work alongside other royal officials at the king's gate where he uncovered a vicious plot to kill Xerxes. He proceeded to tell Esther, who in turn, "reported to the king, giving credit to Mordecai." (Esther 2:22). Thanks to Mordecai, Xerxes was safe, yet still restless. He wanted to win a war, but lacked the resources, human and financial, to bring his dream of worldwide conquest to fruition. His impulsiveness and ego, along with his double-minded advisors, were his larger problems. So it is no surprise when we find him, blinded by deceitful counsel and bribery, sanctioning a royal decree that is utterly diabolical.

Four years after Mordecai saved the king's life, Haman devised a plan to kill Mordecai and all the Jews throughout the kingdom of Xerxes. Haman was enraged that Mordecai would not bow to him as the other royal officials did at the King's gate (and we thought Xerxes had an ego problem...). There are several reasons scholars believe might have prompted Mordecai not to bow. Elizabeth George says that one common reason was that "Jews bowed to their kings, but when Persians bowed to another, it was the same as paying homage to a divine being." This act could have constituted idolatry. Furthermore,



according to Beth Moore, “Many scholars lean more heavily toward the persisting generational rivalry as the cause for Mordecai’s refusal...Mordecai knew Haman’s heritage.” Either way, Mordecai was a man who submitted to his king, but would not put a Persian custom above his love and devotion for God. He also would not bow to someone who was on God’s list of enemies. He stood, literally, for what he believed in, even if it meant putting his own life in jeopardy.

As the chapter closes, Haman continues plotting the extermination of Mordecai and the Jewish people. Although he wasn't the sovereign, he knew exactly what to say to get the king on his side. He brought Xerxes' ego into play by mentioning that “a certain people did not obey the King's commands” (Esther 3:8). He also recognized the times and realized the king was in need of finances. Haman offered Xerxes an enormous bribe in exchange for carrying out this plan. To put his financial offer in today’s terms, the value of ten thousand talents of silver ranges from \$12 million to over \$1 billion in modern currency, depending on the effects of exchange and inflation. Haman was on a Satan-inspired mission to destroy God’s chosen people. Thankfully, our God is faithful and always keeps his promises. As the prophet states in Zechariah, chapter two, verses eight and nine:

For this is what the Lord Almighty says: “After the Glorious One has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye — I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them.”

Text Questions:

1. Why did Haman become furious with Mordecai? What reasons do you think Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman? (verses to consider: Exodus 20:3-6; Deut. 25:17-19; I Samuel 15:32-33; Matthew 4:10)
2. Read Genesis 39:2-10 and compare with Esther 3:3-4. How are these two stories similar?
3. Why do you think Haman felt threatened by Mordecai? What do his actions say about the level of insecurity he holds within?
4. In what ways was the suggested decree to the king full of deceit? (hint: he didn’t even tell the king it was the Jews he was speaking of, the Jews were very assimilated into the culture of the time, how else would Esther be mistaken for a Persian? He had no evidence for their disobedience to the king).

Application Questions:

1. Read Daniel 3:8-18. How are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego similar to Mordecai in their resolve and conviction? How are Haman and Nebuchadnezzar similar in their reactions and emotions? Have you ever taken a stand on something you believed was right that caused the other party to be offended or enraged? How did God get glory in your situation?
2. Haman is filled with rage in this passage. Have you ever known a person who got mad and never got over it? What are they like today?
3. Read the following verses on anger Ephesians 4:26-27, 31, Proverbs 19:11, and Philippians 4:5, how do these scriptures give us perspective on anger?
4. From the time the royal decree went out, the Jews had eleven months before its fulfillment. How do you think they felt, and their Persian neighbors felt? Read Psalm 23:4, on what basis did David withstand mental torment while enduring a ten-year long death sentence and how does this scripture impact you?
5. (Key Question to get to!) Re-read Esther 3:13 and compare Haman’s plot to Satan’s plot for humans in John 10:10. How do you see spiritual warfare playing out in Esther Chapter Three? In



what ways or areas of your life have you been experiencing spiritual warfare lately and how can our small group help encourage/be there for you in the current battle you are facing?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are faithful. We thank You that You have a plan even when circumstances surrounding us look bleak. Thank You that You have not and never will forget us nor forsake us. You keep Your promises and You avenge our enemies. Help us to trust You in hard times as Esther did and to gain insight from godly counsel as well as Your word. Fill us with the humility to assert ourselves in our times of need with prayer. Give us favor and help us to walk with integrity, no matter what comes our way. Let us be a people who are willing to take a stand for You and for Your Word as truth even if it means loss. We thank You that You protect us from the enemy and that his plans for us will not prevail. Sovereign God, we offer You our hearts and lives today and always. We love you. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignments:

1. Memory Verse: Zechariah 2:8-9
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Three
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Four: Esther 4

Wallflower or Warrior?

Opening Questions:

1. Can you tell about a person in your life that was willing to make a fool of him/herself because they were passionate about an issue? What did he or she do?
2. What are some of the biggest issues of injustice in the world and our society today?

Article:

If in the past four weeks you have found it possible to shut out the still, small voice of God's Spirit stirring in you and calling you into His marvelous plan for your life, we pray that you will find that impossible this week. Chapter Four is the crisis, the defining moment, not only of Esther's life, but also of this period in Jewish history.

At the beginning of Chapter Four, Esther has been queen for quite a while. It is safe to assume that she adjusted to royal life and was pampered and isolated from the gritty realities of common life. She literally had a staff whose primary goal was to help her "avoid every unpleasantry, fix every hangnail, and anesthetize every headache." (Beth Moore) In other words, she may have forgotten how to deal with any difficulty, small or great, simply because she had none. Predictably, this isolation came to a startling halt when word came to Esther of Mordecai's breakdown at the King's gate.

At this point, Mordecai and the Jewish people may have wished they could have taken back their decision not to return to Jerusalem when they had been given the chance decades earlier. But it seems they remembered the exhortation of the prophet Joel, "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity" (Joel 2:12-13). They had a mighty weapon in place of regret: repentance. Their weeping and wailing and fasting and donning of sackcloth and ashes were signs of their earnest repentance, a profound, active response to a situation over which they had no visible control. H.A. Ironside says, "There was no levity on the part of the wailing multitude in our chapter. They were in desperate earnestness. They wished to be delivered from the condemnation. Nothing else would satisfy them. Sackcloth and ashes speak of repentance and self-judgment. In this garb Mordecai and the Jews arrayed themselves."

This was by far the greatest moment of crisis in Mordecai's life, yet he did not rush to Esther himself and tell her what was happening immediately. In verse two of Chapter Four we find, "... he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it" (Esther 4:2). Mordecai was unashamed to put aside his façade and appear weak and broken to his prestigious co-workers. Yet he practiced self-control with integrity even amidst the most turbulent grief in his experience. Our protagonist, Esther, mirrors Mordecai's strength of character by upholding his original command not to reveal her identity as a Jew. If she had immediately gone to Mordecai in his sorrow, her Jewish heritage surely would have been discovered. Although she was in deep confusion and brokenness at her only living relative's distress, she practices restraint and wisdom by sending the King's eunuch, Hathach, rather than going herself.



Through Hathach, Mordecai delivers an earth-shattering call to action. He points out that Esther was divinely positioned and endowed with the power to act, but if she chooses not to use these gifts, God will still accomplish His plan. However, her fearful failure to act and her attempt to save her life would only result in failure. "You and your father's family will perish." He urges her not to give way to fear, but rather to seek the fulfillment of the call God placed on her life.

As the chapter closes, we hold our breath, eagerly waiting for dear Esther's response. Perhaps there is no better phrase that captures Esther's intrepid move of courage and faith than the one found in verse 15, "...I will go to the King even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." Commentator Mervin Breneman writes on this scripture:

Both Vashti and Mordecai displayed courage in life-threatening situations, and now so did Esther. Vashti showed courage in her refusal to humiliate herself for the whimsical desire of her husband and Mordecai did so in refusing to bow down to Haman. Esther proved braver still. She had decided to break the law of her husband and risk her very life for her people. God's providential care had brought Esther to this point, but Esther accepted the challenge that might cost her life.

As college students, we need to realize that we too are in a place of power and influence, coming in contact daily with many of our country's wealthiest and/or most gifted students who are poised to lead in the next few decades. Moreover, like Esther, we are in a place of privilege constituting 0.2% of the global population ages 15-24 who have the chance to experience college life here in America. Acts 17:26 reminds us that God "determined the times set for [us] and the exact places that [we] should live." Just as He sovereignly positioned Esther as Queen of Persia, knowing the times and choices she would face, He has also placed you precisely in your sphere of influence, no matter how small it may appear in your eyes, for a specific purpose. God doesn't make mistakes and He never acts randomly.

You, dear daughter of the King, are truly royalty. You were "chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will" (Eph. 1:11). It is time for women of God to rise up and fulfill their God-given destinies to reach our campuses, cities, and this broken world for Jesus. This is a call to courage, a call to stand for what's right, a call to recognize the power of one.

One man, Jesus Christ, changed not only the course of history, but also of eternity, by standing courageously in obedience to God's plan. What has God called you to stand for? You may stand alone in earthly terms. David was "alone" when he faced Goliath; Daniel was "alone" when he defied Darius' decree and was thrown into the lions' den; Esther had no one who dared to go with her, uninvited, into the king's presence. She knew she was only one woman. But she went. She obeyed. And that choice has affected us all.

Text Questions:

1. Looking back at Esther 2:19, 21, where did Mordecai work? Why might he have chosen to go all the way to the king's gate to give vent to his grief?
2. Who told Esther about Mordecai's predicament? Why didn't he have access to her himself?
3. What did Mordecai bring to the gate with him to prove the validity of his reaction? How might this information have informed Esther's decision? Do you think it gave weight to Mordecai's argument/request? How?



4. What are two hesitations that Esther voices about going to see the king? Do you think she thought Mordecai was asking too much?

Application Questions:

1. "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the belief that something is more important than fear." Do you agree with this statement? Has there been a time in your life when you have faced your fear to stand up for a cause you believed in?
2. Please read Joel 2:12-17. Do you see any similarities between the actions Esther took and the commands set forth in this passage? Are there any issues in our nation (or the world today) that would move you to radical action?
3. How does the calming integrity and wisdom that both Mordecai and Esther use in their greatest moment of crisis and grief challenge you or encourage you when facing a dire situation? How do you tend to react?
4. In what ways can you see that the Lord has placed you exactly where He wants you? Check out Romans 11:29. What gifts has God given you that you can use to grow His kingdom? Do you believe He can use you today to accomplish His purposes?
5. It is always a battle to die to self, but when we discipline ourselves to die to the "little things," we have the "spiritual muscle" built up to die to the big things. Look up Luke 9:23-24. What things is the Lord calling you to die to in your life so that you can be wholly abandoned to loving and serving Him?

Prayer:

Dear Father, Thank You for caring for the one; thank You for loving me enough to send your only Son to pay my ransom. Lord, it is amazing to see how You have used the most unlikely people to bring about great changes in the world throughout history. Please help me to believe that You want to use me today. Forgive me when I let indecision cripple me; for when I fail to stand courageously and obediently for what is right and just. Please guide me and show me what issues I need to take a stand on. Help me to be courageous and to recognize those things that are more important than my fear. I want to grow to be more like Christ in my attitude and my actions; to be willing to give up my pride, my reputation, and even my life for You and for the gospel. Show me how to walk boldly, yet humbly, with great courage in this life. Show us that we are Your daughters and can walk in Your power. I bless You and thank You, God, for all You want to do through me. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignments:

1. Memory Verse: Joel 2:12-13
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Four
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Five: Esther 5

Walk of Life

Opening Questions:

1. Who is the wisest woman or man you know on earth? What have they said, done, or taught that made them so wise to you?
2. Thus far, in our study of Esther, what has impressed you the most about her?

Article:

All heroes have their defining moment, the moment they were born for, trained for, and, in many cases, have been waiting for. As we begin our Bible study today in Chapter Five, Esther's move toward the throne room places her right there with so many other courageous men and women who have died standing up for their faith. Esther walks with courage, trust, and the unshakable faith that may not have come immediately, but arrived just when she needed it. Her last statement in Chapter Four, verse sixteen sets the stage for today, "...if I perish, I perish." Esther has decided to move, to say yes to her God-given destiny and make an appeal on behalf of the Jews to God and Xerxes.

As Esther prepared for her "walk" she brilliantly demonstrated her wisdom once again as she asked all the Jews in Susa to pray and fast for her. Furthermore, she prayed and fasted for three days herself to prepare for this task. She understood she was ultimately appealing to both Kings. She humbled herself before God, seeking for His counsel and deliverance, and in the meantime made sure she was physically ready to see King Xerxes. One can only imagine how she felt as she was putting on her robes and getting ready to enter the throne room, all the thoughts racing through her mind, sweat pouring off her hands. "Esther had never felt more alone. More forsaken. Ironically, a person is never less aware of divine intervention than when he or she has been chosen to render it. Sometimes God's hand is so close that it covers the eyes." (Beth Moore) Esther did not know what would happen, but she was resolved and in that resolve she found herself at the entrance to the king's hall.

While she was standing at the entrance, King Xerxes was taken with her. "The King looked up from a document and then drew down his brow as if focus would help him fathom the sight. Only her beauty exceeded her audacity, and feeling the weight of the crowd's expectation, King Xerxes somehow found himself more intrigued than insulted. His thoughts and feelings towards Esther in that moment are revealed in verse two, "When he saw Queen Esther standing in court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand." (Beth Moore) Imagine the relief Esther felt. She had obeyed, fulfilled her calling, perhaps expecting the worst, but receiving mercy instead.

Let's pause a moment to apply this profound happening to our own lives as daughters of the King of Kings. Christ as our King longs for us to come to Him, to come as we are, even if we feel as though every law is against our coming. Our King is not too busy, He is not shocked at our sin, and He is not concerned about what others think. This is one of the greatest pictures in the Bible of how we are to "boldly approach the throne of grace." (Hebrews 4:16) We are to come knowing we are royalty, adopted into the King's family. Not only are you a princess, but you are His bride and what you have to say matters. He has not forgotten us, though sometimes it may seem as though we have forgotten Him. This scene is a picture of intercession at its best. Some critics and scholars are shocked by the book of Esther, saying it is a



Godless narrative. However, here and in so many other places, we see the nature of the Kingdom of God whispering to our hearts, calling from the shadows.

In the second half of the chapter, Esther demonstrated immense self-control. When the King asked her what troubled her and declared that whatever she wished was his command, she humbly invited him, and the sinister Haman, to a royal banquet she had arranged. This invitation was a brilliant and wise move, as Dr. Charles Swindoll writes,

“Notice what Esther doesn’t do. She doesn’t point a finger at Haman. She doesn’t rush ahead and tell the King what is troubling her. She doesn’t play on his emotions or try to manipulate him by bursting into tears. She very calmly says, without frenzy or sobs, ‘I’ve planned a banquet, and I’d love to have you and Haman attend.’...The king may rule the kingdom of Persia, and Haman may sign edicts with the king’s official seal, but it is the Lord who is in control of this entire situation. And in the nucleus of His divine plan, Esther becomes invincible.”

In the process of waiting, praying, fasting, and preparing for this moment, Esther sought the Lord for His wisdom in what she should say to the King if, by the grace of God, she was alive when she reached him. We know her plan did not come out of thin air, but from a heart that was recklessly confident in God’s sovereign grace. It would be difficult for any one of us not to fall to our knees and fall apart at the feet of the king, particularly if the fate of our entire nation was resting on our shoulders, but Esther stands tall, confident, and poised. Once again, Scripture’s Cinderella truly rose to the occasion, in more ways than one.

Text Questions:

1. How many days had it been that Esther prayed, fasted, prepared, and waited on the Lord?
2. Explain what you think was going through her heart and mind right before she entered the king’s hall?
3. Why do you think Esther invited Haman to the banquet too?
4. In Chronological Order, list three things that happened after Haman attended the banquet.
5. What do you gather about Haman’s wife from this passage?

Application Questions:

1. Read Hebrews 4:14-16, what are your first thoughts and/or reactions to this scripture? How does this passage encourage you on the topic of coming to God in prayer?
2. What is the difference between prayer and intercession? (intercession is a specific type of prayer/communication with God, that deals with making a request or petition on behalf of someone or something) Has God called you to intercede for someone or something lately, how did it go?
3. Last week we saw how Esther had self-control in her great crisis of confrontation with Mordecai. In today’s passage she demonstrates great restraint and wisdom again as she goes before the king. Tell about a time or crisis in your life where you had to use restraint or self-control? What recently or in the past few months has God been using in your life to produce more self-control in your life?
4. Has there been a time where your pride prompted you to overreact when the circumstance didn’t necessarily call for an extreme response? How did you grow from that situation or what did you learn about yourself from that situation?



Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that in You we are royal. We are the Bride of Christ Jesus and we have authority on those grounds to come boldly to Your throne of grace. Help us to make time, put away all the excuses we make, and to reach out to you through prayer and intercession. Use us to intercede for our families, for ourselves, and for this broken world. Forgive us for allowing our false perceptions of You and our false perceptions of ourselves keep us from coming to You in confidence. Give us wisdom and self-control as we navigate the trials of this life and the trials I we are facing now. Give us a plan of action; show us your divine will in all matters we are facing right now. Make us women of courage, unshakeable faith, and ruthless trust in our God who never fails us or forsakes us. We love you. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignments:

1. Memory Verse: Hebrews 4:16
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Five
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Six: Esther 6

Exalted Humility

Opening Questions:

1. Have you ever done something nice for someone only for it to go totally unnoticed? How did that make you feel? What was your response to their lack of response?
2. People say, "Pride goes before a fall." Have you ever seen this happen? Has it ever happened to you?

Article:

The message of chapter six is summed up in a verse from James, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6) Off the top of my head I can't think of a more direct example of this truth in Scripture. Let's dive right in to the passage to see the Lord's hand at work in the lives of Haman and Mordecai.

After a night of tossing and turning in the royal bedchamber (a divine bout of insomnia, as many commentators agree), King Xerxes calls for the records of his reign to be read to him. During the reading, he realizes that an act of great loyalty has been sorely overlooked. Mordecai's message about Bigthana and Teresh's plot was received and acted upon, but never rewarded. Let's pause here for just a moment. Have you ever felt like your act of kindness, friendship, or loyalty was completely overlooked? Or perhaps that God missed a time when you acted in obedience? Mordecai might have felt that way, especially considering the immense favor Haman was experiencing at the king's hand. However, we don't hear about any pity parties thrown by Mordecai; in fact, the lack of recognition doesn't even seem to phase him. I think maybe he had learned the secret of contentment in God, regardless of earthly recognition.

I have to admit, when I feel overlooked, especially when I feel like God hasn't seen what I have "done/given up/acted in obedience on," I feel slighted, maybe even angry. What a contrast we find in the Scripture concerning how our attitude ought to look: "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" (Luke 17:9) Does this passage chafe your pride? I know it has mine. When I find myself reacting negatively to these words, I have to do a perspective check: How do I really see God?

In contrast to the humility of Mordecai, we are abruptly confronted with Haman's ego as he enters the outer court to seal Mordecai's fate. Haman decided on the same night that the king couldn't sleep to have the gallows built. He was so eager for the destruction of one common Jew that refused him the honor he obviously thought he deserved that he arrived in the outer court at the crack of dawn to get the death warrant. God couldn't have had more perfect timing in reminding the king of the great service Mordecai had rendered to the crown. But look how close to the deadline He acted! If He had waited several more hours, Mordecai would have been a goner! God is seldom early, but He is never late. Depend on Him to accomplish His plan in His time, and you won't ever be disappointed. You'll probably be a whole lot less stressed as well!

Haman shows his true colors when the king requests his advice on this issue of honor. The author of Esther gives us the inside look at Haman's thought process in response to Xerxes' question, "What should



be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” Haman immediately jumps to conclusions: “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?” The banquet the night before has gone to his head. He thinks that there is no one in the kingdom so immersed in Xerxes’ good graces as he. In his reply we get an even closer look at his enormous ego:

For the man the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set....Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: ‘Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king delights to honor. (Esther 6:7-9)

Haman doesn’t hesitate for a second. He’s dreamed about this moment. Let’s look at this statement in cultural context: If you look back at 1 Kings 1:28-35 you will see David transferring the kingship of Israel to his son, Solomon. He gives very specific orders on how the ceremony is to occur, one of which was “have Solomon my son ride on my own mule.” And then in Luke 19:30, Jesus requested that the disciples bring Him a colt, “which no one has ever ridden” for His triumphal entry. Riding on someone else’s mount in effect bestowed the same honor (or dishonor) on you that was accorded to its master. Haman shows his hand here, he wants to be king!

Does this pride (that heralds Haman’s fall) look familiar to you? I would be a liar to say I don’t look at Haman and see myself. As Beth Moore observes:

We can develop a ravenous appetite for honor – even if we try to keep it hidden... One of the bad things about an insatiable desire for honor is that sooner or later it is going to make a fool of us, robbing us of the very thing we intended to receive.

Haman not only lost the honor he intended for himself, but was forced to bestow it on his greatest enemy. Talk about humbling! We need to be reminded daily to “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so at the proper time He may exalt you.” (1 Peter 5:6) I encourage you to examine your heart and confess the pride you find there. It is much more pleasant to humble ourselves voluntarily than to be humbled forcibly. And God has a precious promise for those who humble themselves: “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:12).

Text Questions:

1. Even though God is never directly mentioned in the book of Esther, we certainly see His hand at work. Where do we see Him intervening in this chapter?
2. How did Xerxes describe Mordecai when commanding Haman to carry out his own suggestions? Look back at Esther 2:19-23. Where is Mordecai? Do you think he felt forgotten by the king? What effect does this have on his attitude.
3. Read Esther 6:6-10. Then turn to 1 Kings 1:28-35. Compare Haman’s suggestions with the orders David gave to his chief counselors concerning his son, Solomon. Do any of David’s commands sound familiar?
4. Characterize Haman’s attitude leading up to verse 10. Why do you think Zeresh and the friends respond to him the way they do at the end of the chapter?



Application Questions:

1. Look at Haman's response to having to honor Mordecai and compare it with Mordecai's response to the honor. How have you been tempted to respond when someone you don't like has been forced to eat "humble pie?"
2. Please read Proverbs 29:23 and Luke 18:9-14. Are there areas in your life that you need to lay before the Lord and ask Him to take control? What are some practical steps you can take to humble yourself before the Lord.
3. Look at the quiet faith expressed in the simple statement of where Mordecai could be found: "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate." Have you experienced a situation where you felt like your faithfulness was overlooked? Please read Hebrews 6:10. How does this verse change your perspective?
4. Mordecai exemplified the attitude Jesus said we should have in Luke 17:9. Who else had this attitude? (See Philippians 2:5-11.) How can we also have this attitude?
5. What has encouraged you most about this passage and looking at how Haman and Mordecai acted in response to their environment (or their God)?

Prayer:

Father, You are so gracious to us. Thank you for being longsuffering and merciful when we have too high an opinion of ourselves. Thank you for never letting any act of obedience, however small, go unnoticed. You are so just, Lord, and Your timing is always perfect. Please help us to trust You to work out Your sovereign plan for our lives. Forgive us when we allow ourselves to sink into self-pity, believing the lie that You don't value Your children. Please teach us to humble ourselves under Your mighty hand and to see ourselves as You see us. You are great and exalted high above every man. Your ways are not our ways and Your thoughts are not our thoughts. Let us act with the faith of Mordecai and persevere in whatever task You have given us, heedless of men's accolades. And keep us from the snare of an insatiable desire for honor. We only want to seek to delight Your heart, finding our hope and purpose in You. Teach me to seek You and Your glory above all else. Thank You for Your promise to exalt those who humble themselves before You. We love You, Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignments:

1. Memory Verse: Matthew 23:12
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Six
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Seven: Esther 7

This Vile Haman!

Opening Question:

Have you ever had a moment when you could finally tell the truth about someone or something that you had to keep a secret for a long time? How did it go or how did you feel leading up to the moment, in the moment, and after the fact?

Article:

"It is easy to anticipate that this year will be very much like last and the one before it, when in fact, chances are good it will be altogether different. So when events begin to turn, realize that none of it is merely coincidental...Nothing is coincidental! "Luck" has no place in a Christian's vocabulary." (Charles Swindoll)

In Esther Chapter Seven, we see the mighty hand of God working through Esther once again. Luck truly has no place at the second banquet table. Only the great tact and wisdom granted to her by a God who loves His people intensely could have turned the heart of the king so dramatically.

During the wine course of the second Banquet, King Xerxes once again asks what Esther's petition. She responds directly to the King this time, "If I have won the King's favor." (Esther 7:3). Esther wisely used intimate language that immediately connected the king and queen on an intimate level, as husband and wife. She proceeds to tell the King that she and her people, the Jews, were sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated. As commentator Frederic W. Bush notes:

She understands full well the delicate and precarious nature of her position. The threat against her and her people has two perpetrators, Haman and the king, and both are present with her. She must somehow fully expose the culpability of Haman, while at the same time never appearing in any way to be bringing any charges against the king. Hence, her response is extremely well thought out and presented with the utmost tact.

The king's passivity had made him just as responsible for the deadly decree but Esther framed the situation to appear as though he was victimized as well. Using the three words, "destroyed, killed, and annihilated," would help the king remember the decree and using the word "sold" presented the decree as something he was deceived or bribed into.

The king's response is astonishing; the English translation cannot come close to disclosing the amount of emotion, anger, and rage conveyed when he commands Esther to reveal who this man may be. Things continue to crescendo as Esther matches the king's emotion and boldly declares, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman!" (Esther 7:6). "Brilliantly, she left out Haman's identity in verse 3 so she could put a bow and arrow in Xerxes' hands before she pointed him toward the target. Had he known from the beginning that the culprit was his own right hand man; the king might have protected him. What could he do but follow through?" (Beth Moore) Once again, we see Esther's great wisdom as she uses the perfect place, time, audience, and words to deliver the truth. This day could have resulted in disaster just as easily as triumph. Esther put her life on the line again at this banquet hoping, praying, and believing the



king would be favorable to her over Haman and he was. Her moment arrived and she did not hesitate to reveal the truth.

As the chapter proceeds, the king runs out and Haman falls to his knees in terror, begging Esther for his life. She does not move, although surely her heart was breaking in that moment. Imagine having a desperate man pleading with you for his life, all the while knowing full well the torturous death he will suffer if you remain silent. But if she had spared Haman, he would always have been a threat to the Jews, herself, and Mordecai. Cary Moore notes, "To say here that Esther was merciless and unfeeling is to misinterpret the entire situation. Thus, while her heart might have prompted her to be merciful, logic and prudence restrained her." Moreover, we must remember the history of Haman's people and God's heart toward them. From the beginning, Haman was an enemy of God and of His people. The job one Jewish man, King Saul, failed to finish, one Jewish woman, Queen Esther, finally accomplished.

In only a few minutes, Haman's life is finally ended. What a scene, what a great God, and what a brave woman! "All the time Haman was having the gallows built, he could see - enthusiastically anticipate - Mordecai impaled there. Now, he is condemned to die there himself. We call this irony. Theologians call it sovereignty." (Charles Swindoll)

Text Questions:

1. How do you think Esther must have felt going into this second banquet? Can you give any evidence that she was prepared to answer the question, "What is your petition, up to half the kingdom?"
2. Reread verse 4. Esther used a disclaimer that if they were being sold as slaves, she would not have bothered the king, how did this aid her in winning his attention and favor in that moment? (Hint: She was appealing to his pride, because a good king is busy; also appealing to his need for a healthy economy and the annihilation of the Jews would affect his kingdom and economy).
3. Why do you think the king ran out of the building once Esther accused Haman? What do you think was running through his mind in that moment?
4. How did the king's false assumption that Haman was molesting or coming on to Esther aid in the decision to impale Haman? (Hint: The king may have already been jealous since Esther kept inviting Haman to banquet. Sometimes you never appreciate what you see it through someone else's eyes. He knew Haman had eyes and could see how beautiful Esther was, already probably jealous, it was the final straw. Moreover, in that culture no man is to be left alone with any woman in the harem except the king, and Haman also violated a cultural rule).

Application Questions:

1. Reread Esther 7:5-6 and glance at the subject matter in 2 Samuel 11 then read 2 Samuel 12:1-7a. How are these two stories similar in identifying the wrongdoing of a reluctant confessor?
2. The name Satan means adversary, Read the following scriptures that describe the character of Satan and compare his character to Haman who Esther describes as an enemy and adversary as well: 1 Peter 5:8, Ezek. 28:17, Isa. 14 13-14, Luke 4:13, John 8:44.
3. Has there been a time in your life or recently where you experienced any attack from Satan in any of the ways listed above? What helped you to overcome the attack or receive a breakthrough?
4. Telling the truth about ourselves cost us. It makes us vulnerable. Beth Moore states, "Sometimes you simply decide that people are worth telling on yourself." Our small group is a soft and safe place to fall. Is there any area in your life you would like to share about that you currently need encouragement in from us this week?



5. For the first time Esther and Xerxes stood together on a matter. This was so powerful it produced a result immediately. When was the last time you were unified with another believer in prayer for someone or something? How did that prayer time go? Have you seen a result? Let's take some time to pray together as a small group for each other and for God to deliver us and our loved ones, "one of us can put a thousand to flight but two of us can send the legions fleeing."

Prayer:

Dear Father God, thank You that we can ask for wisdom in any situation we are facing and You will grant it to us. Thank You that You know the perfect words to say and actions to take always. Help us to know how to use wisdom and tact when discussing the truth with those You are calling us to. Help us to not shrink back in fear or doubt about what others will think about us if we are vulnerable about ourselves and our needs. Help us to confess our sins and receive the encouragement we need from other brothers and sisters in Christ. We see Your sovereignty in the Book of Esther and how You removed the enemy from her life and delivered the people. Remove our adversary and enemy and deliver us from his evil ways and tactics. Take us deeper with You this week and make us wise, tactful, courageous, and humble women of You. We love You. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignments:

1. Memory Verse: 1 Peter 5:8
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Seven
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Eight: Esther 8

Pressed, But Not Crushed

Opening Questions:

1. Are you easily distracted by the glitz and glamour of the world? Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you missed out on what the Lord had for you to do because your eyes were on what you could gain?
2. Think of a time when you looked to someone in your life to “rescue” you from a difficult situation. Did they come through for you?

Article:

When you read verses 1 and 2 of chapter eight, it’s easy to miss the significance of the action taking place. For Xerxes to give Esther Haman’s property would have been a huge deal. We learn from extra-biblical sources, like Herodotus, that the property of condemned persons reverted back to the crown. Remember back in Esther 3:9? Haman offered to put ten thousand talents of silver in the royal treasury to dispatch with the Jews. Haman may very well have had more money than the king, due to royal wars and massive parties that lasted half a year draining the royal treasury. But Xerxes handed it over to Esther. Not only did he relinquish this great wealth, but Mordecai was appointed over Haman’s household! Talk about God having a sense of humor... What a striking example of God lifting up those who humble themselves.

Despite this massive power shift and the acquisition of wealth unimaginable, Esther does not lose her focus or forget the reason she was brought to the palace in the first place. Esther knows that there is still a death warrant standing for her whole people. And she falls to her knees in desperation and humility: “Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews.” (Esther 8:3)

The enemy may be dead, but his plan is not. Esther again risks her life on behalf of her people. See verse four? A tiny sentence that means life, rather than death – “Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose...” She once again risked the wrath of the king to fulfill God’s call. And He made her victorious.

Esther asks that the king reverse Haman’s edict, an impossibility in regard to Medo-Persian law that the king soon reminds her of. He responds with a tone that could almost be read as annoyance, “Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows. Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you...” Another translation says it this way: “Now go ahead and send a message to the Jews in the king’s name, telling them whatever you want...” Xerxes is like, “I already gave you property worth about half a kingdom and had my right hand man hanged. What else do you want from me?”

Have you ever felt like the one person you thought you could turn to for help got annoyed, threw up their hands and said, “I’ve helped you before! What do you want me to do now?” Esther probably felt crushed until the king gave her and Mordecai his royal permission to write “whatever you want” to their people. Once again, God gets to be the hero amidst the failure of a flawed human being. I think God lets us



experience these moments of urgent hope and crushing despair to remind us that He fills the role no one else can fulfill for us.

Imagine the flurry of activity that came after that “blank check” permission. The royal secretaries were summoned “at once” and were ordered to transcribe a royal override to Haman’s decree in every language and script of the empire. Think for a minute about the atmosphere of Jewish homes for the seventy days that had passed since Haman’s edict went out. Charles Swindoll writes, “A gloom had settled over the city of Susa and the other provinces of the kingdom. The scene probably resembled the atmosphere at Auschwitz or Dachau or Birkenau [during the Jewish Holocaust]. No one laughed. Every day brought everyone another twenty- four hours closer to doom.”

And then, with the advent of the good news, “Mordecai left the king’s presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration.” (Esther 8:15)

Can you imagine living in a home where the threat of coming destruction, certain death, loomed every day? Then, all of the sudden, God’s mighty hand moves and He authorizes a decree that allows every enemy to be swept away before you? But that is what God has done! The threat of certain death loomed over you every day before He revealed His sovereign redemption for your life in Christ Jesus. Now He has overridden the law of sin and death and has allowed you to accept Christ’s sacrifice as payment for your sin and authorized you to put every enemy under your feet. It might have been difficult for the Jews to believe there was a new decree and to stand firm in their new right to defend their lives and their families, but they did! And they were saved through the provision of an Almighty God, their loving Father. And that very same Almighty God and Father has done the very same thing for us.

Text Questions:

1. Look at verses one and two of chapter eight. Describe the emotions of Esther and Mordecai as the king tells them what he is going to do with Haman’s estate and his old position as second-in-command.
2. Verses three and four are a poignant picture of desperation. Think about all the emotions that Esther has managed to keep under control until now. How do you think you would have reacted in her place? Would you have been distracted by the king’s generosity? Would you have been willing to risk your life again?
3. How does Xerxes’ response to Esther’s request show his emotional removal from the queen’s desperation?
4. Go back and reread Esther 3:13-15, 4:1-3. How do the emotions and actions in these passages compare with what we see in Esther 8:15-17?

Application Questions:

1. Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-9. How does this passage apply to this scene in the book of Esther? Can you feel the extreme contrasting emotions Esther was probably experiencing? Have you ever been in a situation where you felt crushed, persecuted, or struck down?
2. Have you ever made someone other than God your hero? Why did you put that person on a pedestal, or lift them up in your life? Why is that dangerous? Did God allow him or her to fail you? If so, did God reveal Himself to you in a new way through your disappointment?
3. Are you facing an enormous obstacle today that seems immovable? Have you asked God to step in? 1 John 5:14 says “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything



according to His will, He hears us.” Talk with your prayer partner about any obstacle you might be facing, whether it is an internal struggle or an external circumstance. Read Matthew 18:20 together and pray together that God would reveal Himself as your Savior and Hero in that situation.

4. Jesus came with the power to reverse the curse on your life and make you a new woman. Have you had the opportunity to share that with someone who does not know Him? Is there such a dramatic difference that someone might ask you why? If you haven't had this opportunity lately, how can you and your small group create one?

Prayer:

Dear Father God, thank You for being the Hero in my story. Thank You for using every difficulty and disappointment in my life to draw me closer to Yourself and to conform me more to the image of Christ. Please forgive me for when I have been distracted by the glitz and glamour of earthly rewards and for the times I have succumbed to the temptation to look to other men and women to be my heroes. Help me to seek Your kingdom and Your righteousness first as I walk through the ups and downs of life. I see Your amazing faithfulness continuously portrayed in Esther's story. I see how You purposefully moved insurmountable obstacles to make a way for Your people. I patiently expect to see You move as I wait on Your direction and walk in the truth You reveal to me. Thank You for Your patience and love as You continuously shape me into the woman You created me to be. We love You more and more. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignments:

1. Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 4:7-9
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Eight
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





Week Nine: Esther 9-10

Purim and Providence

Opening Questions:

1. Do you think the saying, "All's well that ends well" is true? Please explain.
2. In what ways have your families way of celebrating the holidays brought you to a place of remembrance of the holiday's original intention or veered away from the holiday's original intention?

Article:

It's hard to believe we are coming to a close. What a story. A narrative that has left many of us astonished that a drama such as this took place on the pages of our Bibles. Eugene Peterson writes:

Story doesn't just tell us something and leave it there, it invites our participation. A good storyteller gathers us into the story. We feel the emotions, get caught up in the drama, identify with the characters...They bring us into the spacious world in which God creates and saves and blesses...they offer us a place in the story, invite us into the large story that takes place under the broad skies of God's purposes.

Our hearts have been captured and faith strengthened by what we have seen recorded in the power-packed book of Esther. We have been brought into this narrative and are leaving it as different women.

Chapters Nine and Ten of Esther begin with a statement in verse one that is the perfect summary of how this book ends, "the tables were turned." Indeed they were, Esther walks in a new and confident royal authority, demanding decrees be made and no loose end left untied. Mordecai is praised and honored by the king and is feared throughout the entire nation. The Jews defend themselves and they take the victory by a landslide. All the while, beneath the surface of this script, we, the readers, know who the real hero is: our God. Only God could do the impossible things we have seen done in this book.

One Jewish rabbi wrote of the Holocaust something that is a tremendous parallel to the ending of this attempted annihilation in Susa, "Our deliverer did indeed come. He just came a little later than we expected. Had our enemy had his way, none of us would have survived. Yet here we are." God came in with atomic power and deliverance, and a timeless message of providence for the Jews in Susa. If you have been a part of this study, the enemy of your soul has been pushed back, and make no mistake, you have arrived for such a time as this. Thank you for your diligence. May God bless you with the courage, humility, and wisdom of Esther every day of your life and may you rise up and walk in the royal authority you have been given as the bride of Christ.

Text Questions:

1. What are a few reasons Esther may have asked for a second day to avenge their enemies?
2. Read Esther 9:16-19, why did the Jews in Susa celebrate and have their day of feasting on a different day than the Jews outside the citadel?
3. In what ways were the "tables turned" for the Jews in Chapter nine? Esther 9:22



4. If you could surmise the book of Esther in one sentence what would you say?
5. What are the last things we read about Esther and Mordecai in these chapters?

Application Questions:

1. Dr. Jon Levenson says the key is not that the Jews destroyed the enemy but that they assumed a new status of honor and dominion. The Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. How have you grown in your God-given power and authority in Christ as a daughter of the King in the past nine weeks?
2. Three times in Chapter nine we read that the Jews refused to plunder the property of their enemies even though the edict permitted them to. This practice originated with Abraham. Read Genesis 14:17-23, why wouldn't he receive from the king of Sodom? Compare with the most probable reason why the Jews didn't plunder their enemies property in Susa.
3. Read Isaiah 28:5-6, do you see any connection to these scriptures and our Esther narrative? (A divine work through ordinary means, he is the spirit of Justice in Esther. Awesome). How has God, "The Spirit of Justice" brought justice in your life or the life of your loved ones through ordinary people, places, and things?
4. "The Jews did not commemorate the day of their victorious battle, but the day on which they rested from their enemies."⁵⁵ The Jews did not make an anniversary of their war but of their rest. Do you have a day set aside where you rest and focus on the Lord? If so, how does this day make a difference in your week? If not, what are some practical steps that can be taken to have a "Sabbath?"
5. What have you learned about God's providence through the book of Esther? What are the three things you are going to never forget and take away from this study that will encourage your heart forever?

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the journey you have taken us on in the book of Esther. Thank you for all the things You have revealed to us about your sovereign power and glory and your heart for us. May we leave this study never forgetting the truths we learned about You and about this woman of faith Esther. Help us to walk in divine humility, wisdom, honor, and authority all the days of our lives. Forgive us for the moments in our lives we have acted in our flesh and have tried to take control. We relinquish control of our lives and hand it to You. We trust You, we love You. Fill us with divine purpose and destiny. May we never settle for less than Your perfect plan for our lives. Make us woman of destiny. May we leave a legacy of deliverance for the lost and dying world around us and may we rescue many through a heart abandoned to You. To You belongs all the glory, honor, praise. Amen.

Memory Verse & Partner Assignments:

1. Memory Verse: Psalm 18:24-26
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Nine and Ten
3. Fill out Purim Chart together. Please keep all your Purim charts together so you can look through and see the progression of this incredible book and God's providence in and through each chapter.





PURIM Chart

Sample Subtitle, including Author or Book of Origin

Parties:

Keep a record of every banquet, festival, or dinner party (public or private) in the Book of Esther and a brief synopsis of who attended and what happened. As we wrap up Esther 1, you already have several to note.

Unknowns:

Record every instance when something is hidden or concealed, whether temporarily or permanently, in the Book of Esther. One of the most profound examples of something hidden in Esther is the hand of God, but as you keep watch you'll discover many more unknowns or concealments. (Hint: keep an eye out for hidden identities and schemes!)

Rescues:

Note every time a rescue of any kind-obvious or inferred-takes place in the chapters of Esther

Ironies:

Ironies are sprinkled all over the storyline. In fact, you don't have to wait until the next chapter. You should already have at least one irony to record: Xerxes commanded other husbands to do what he could not.

Moments:

The Book of Esther is filled with single moments that may seem isolated and independent at the time but end up profoundly impacting destinies. These "moments" occur whenever a decision, encounter, or action becomes pivotal in the storyline.



P Parties	U Unknowns	R Rescues	I Ironies	M Moments





Introduction

Fairy Tale or For Real?

The classic tale of Cinderella has delighted the hearts of young girls and women of all ages for centuries. This enchanting story has been told all around the world and has thousands of variants. Surely, all the elements of a great narrative are present, yet we feel in our hearts that it is more than a tale. Has there ever been a historical woman who went from obscurity to fame, from injustice to redress, from fear to faith, from hopeless to heroine? Has there ever been a fairy godmother or, better yet, a faithful God who works in the shadows, unseen, yet all the while present?

As we journey back to 460 B.C., we find our answer, our Cinderella. She lives on in the pages of one the greatest books of the Bible, Esther. This incomparable biblical work was written by an unknown Jewish author from a Persian city. The author's primary intention was to "record the institution of the annual festival of Purim and to keep alive for later generations the memory of the great deliverance of the Jewish people during the reign of Xerxes." (TNIV Study Bible)

As we look at the historical arc of Scripture, we find that this deliverance was crucial. The events that unfolded in the Persian city of Susa, the winter capital of the Persian court where King Xerxes was residing "threatened the continuity of God's purposes in redemptive history... the future existence of God's chosen people, and ultimately the appearance of the Redeemer- Messiah..." (TNIV Study Bible)

God is undoubtedly at work in this fascinating book even though He is not explicitly mentioned. The omission of God's name is a unique feature, one that leads many critics to question the book's religious value altogether. It is clear, though, that our brilliant author was deliberate and intentional in his choice of words. His style served the greater purpose of highlighting God's sovereignty and control of every circumstance and situation we find in the book. It goes without question, God is moving even when he cannot be seen or heard. As Dr. Charles Swindoll writes,

"This is the wonder of God's sovereignty. Working behind the scenes, he is moving and pushing and rearranging events and changing minds until He brings out of even the most carnal and secular of settings a decision that will set His perfect plan in place."

Ladies, get ready to meet one of the Bible's most courageous women. May her story be yours, and may her once upon a time awaken your heart to believe you also have been called "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).





Week One: Esther 1

A Royal Disaster!

As college students, we can appreciate a good party. When times look bleak, days are long, and our brains are fried, attending a well thought out fiesta is so refreshing. The desire to take a period of time and set it aside to relax, regroup, or just celebrate is not a 21st century phenomenon; throughout history, and especially in the Bible, we see people from all times and places enjoying similar “social gatherings.” In fact, our Biblical text today opens up with what may be one of the longest, most expensive, lavish, and influential banquets of all times.

King Xerxes, also called Ahasuerus, (a title meaning “high father or “venerable king”), was hungry for more power. Although he had brought the Medo-Persian Empire to its zenith, reigning over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia, and was one of the wealthiest men in the world, he was discontent. According to Herodotus’ Histories, he was hot-tempered and foolish; desiring to surpass the greatness of all the rulers before him. To this end, he was determined to conquer Greece, a quest that would ultimately lead to his demise and the downfall of the Empire.

The Medo-Persians were not unfamiliar with God or His people, the Jews. In fact, many of Xerxes’ predecessors had encountered God in and through the life of Daniel the Prophet. These men were not perfect, but their respect for the God of the Jews was demonstrated in their laws and decrees that helped His chosen people return to the Promised Land. Xerxes, however, did not follow in the footsteps of his fathers. As G. Ricciotti says, he inherited none of his predecessor’s good qualities, “but only a love of opulent display which progressively sapped his moral fiber.” Xerxes was not interested in winning God’s favor; he wanted to win a war and he had a clever plan to gain his nobles’ support.

He decided to hold a banquet that lasted 180 days to display his power and resources, producing confidence in all the royal officials and military leaders from each province that Xerxes was the ruler to bring Persia to world dominance. At the end of the festivities, he held one last banquet in his astonishing garden as a “grand finale” that lasted seven days. In one last strategic move, the king saved the best show of all for last: Vashti.

In the midst of this drunken revelry, we meet Xerxes’ first queen. Biblical scholar and teacher Beth Moore writes:

Enter Vashti, the crowned Queen of Persia. Think of the most beautiful woman you’ve ever seen...Some scholars suggest her beauty even surpassed our yet-to-be introduced protagonist, Esther...One reason some scholars surmise that Vashti’s beauty may have even exceeded Esther’s is that, in a genre where words mean the world, Vashti was twice attributed with beauty and Esther, once.

As you may know, beauty is not always a blessing. In Vashti’s case, her beauty drew undesired attention. Her extremely, intoxicated husband interrupted the banquet she was hosting for the royal women and summoned her to come to court wearing her royal diadem. “This would create a dramatic and majestic entrance for her before the men being asked to go to war for the empire. Perhaps the sight of the queen in her royal glory was intended to inspire patriotism and loyalty...”



The request would create a drama indeed, one that Xerxes' never foresaw, Vashti refused to go. There are many suggestions as to why she refused, but one of the key reasons could have been the insult to her personal dignity and honor. Entering a room filled with drunken men only to be ogled and hooted at, was not on the top of her royal priority list.

As the story continues, the drunk lead the drunk, so to speak. The king's seven eunuchs and seven advisors conspire and suggest that Xerxes get rid of Vashti and give her position to someone "better than she." Their reasons are farfetched and seemingly fear-based, but they are unimportant. God is working behind the scenes to place every man and woman exactly where He wants them. The royal disaster will become a fairy tale-come-true under His sovereign hand.





Week Two: Esther 2

Hadassah, The Star

“A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it.” Proverbs 16:14

We begin Chapter Two with a despondent, lonely Xerxes who is “remembering” Vashti. The Hebrew word for remember infers a note of compassion. Now that Xerxes has had time to reflect on his failed marriage (and a failed campaign in Greece since the edict), he may have wished he hadn’t been so hasty to take the counsel of his advisors. His personal attendants took his distress to heart and scrambled to alleviate it, knowing that he needed a queen to ensure some level of stability for the rest of the Persian court. As we find out, God had just the woman for the job.

The first time we hear about Esther, she is described as an orphan, “Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had no father or mother.” (Esther 2:7). She seems to have had every excuse to play the victim: Hadassah, soon to be known as Esther, was an orphan, presumably being raised by an older, single male relative. She did not have an older woman in her life to guide and mentor her in what it means to be a woman of God (at least, if she did, this woman is never mentioned or referred to). So perhaps we could understand if she didn’t know how to present herself or maybe we would excuse depression and bad habits with a statement like this: “You can’t blame the poor girl, with a childhood like that...” Without a doubt, many women in our culture are in similar situations, some coming from broken homes, some having emotionally absent fathers or mothers; however, our protagonist, Esther, dealt with much more than a broken home.

Not only was Esther an orphan, but it is also fair to assume that she was forced to participate in the “contest” suggested by Xerxes’ attendants. Beth Moore paints a vivid picture of the search process:

The large numbers [of girls] were herded like coddled cattle to the stalls of Susa, no questions asked. They were taken captive as surely as the exiles of Judah years earlier, even if some were foolish enough to be happy about it.

Some of you may be wondering, “What’s the big deal? A giant beauty contest, where you get pampered 24-7, and live in the lap of luxury, with the chance of being chosen queen? It couldn’t have been that bad...” Not that bad, until you read verse 14: “In the evening [each girl] would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.” Not only did many of the girls feel used and rejected, but Marvin Breneman explains that they faced a life of “perpetual widowhood” as a concubine, unable to ever enjoy the kindness of a faithful husband or the chance to raise a normal family.

Even so, in the midst of these dark circumstances, we are introduced to Esther, which literally means “star” in Persian. She truly shone brightly in the dark, worldly competition of Xerxes’ harem. Our author makes it very clear that Esther distinguished herself. While it was customary for the king to choose a bride from the seven leading families of Persia, this unconventional contest shows God’s providence in placing Esther right where she needed to be to have an enormous sphere of influence.



The amazing and overwhelming response to Esther upon her arrival at the harem was favor. Again and again, the author drives home that she won everyone's favor. In fact, he describes her as pleasing, notes that she won favor, or someone was attracted to her at least six times in eight verses. (Esther 2:9-17) Esther sought favor through her actions, her countenance, and her gracious manner. It is obvious that Hegai, a eunuch with nothing to gain personally from Esther's advancement, saw something special in her that particularly qualified her to be the king's consort. Moreover, he was so certain of her potential, he did everything in his power to give her an advantage, even to the point of giving her advice on what she ought to take with her for her night with Xerxes.

One thing Hegai might have identified in Esther was her humility. While it is not directly addressed in Chapter Two, we see in Esther's interactions with Mordecai her humble and obedient spirit. While Esther could have made a case excusing a lack of grace, poor manners, a downcast countenance, or even deep depression, she chose instead to actively pursue favor, to seek wisdom, and to remain humble; all of these choices God honored by lifting her up.





Week Three: Esther 3

Super Sinister

Most of us have seen and heard the horrific stories that are told of how our Lord's precious people, the Jews, endured World War II under the tyranny of the Nazi regime. It is not as commonly known, however, that there was another "Hitler" in history, found right here in the pages of Esther. His name was Haman, and like Adolph, his agenda included the complete annihilation of the Jews. In Chapter Three we read of a horrific plan that would have cut short God's glorious plan, but for the provision he made through one young Jewish girl becoming Queen of Persia.

The ghastly degree came from Xerxes' highest noble, Haman the Agagite. It is important to note Haman's ancestry. He is a descendent from King Agag of Amalek (1Sa 15:20). "The Amalekites had attacked Israel after she fled from Egypt; for this reason the Lord would "be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation." (Ex 17:16). Israel was not to forget the Amalekite treachery, but was commanded to "blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven" (Dt 25:19)." At one point, God had King Saul pursue the Amalekites in order to kill them all and end their future permanently (perhaps in His foreknowledge of what was going to come from this group of people if left alive). King Saul disobeyed and only killed some of them, not all. If Saul from centuries past would have done as the Lord had commanded him and obeyed by destroying all the Amalekites, he may have kept his crown, but more importantly our sinister villain, Haman, would not even exist.

During Esther's reign, her cousin, and adopted father, Mordecai was promoted to work alongside other royal officials at the king's gate where he uncovered a vicious plot to kill Xerxes. He proceeded to tell Esther, who in turn, "reported to the king, giving credit to Mordecai." (Esther 2:22). Thanks to Mordecai, Xerxes was safe, yet still restless. He wanted to win a war, but lacked the resources, human and financial, to bring his dream of worldwide conquest to fruition. His impulsiveness and ego, along with his double-minded advisors, were his larger problems. So it is no surprise when we find him, blinded by deceitful counsel and bribery, sanctioning a royal decree that is utterly diabolical.

Four years after Mordecai saved the king's life, Haman devised a plan to kill Mordecai and all the Jews throughout the kingdom of Xerxes. Haman was enraged that Mordecai would not bow to him as the other royal officials did at the King's gate (and we thought Xerxes had an ego problem...). There are several reasons scholars believe might have prompted Mordecai not to bow. Elizabeth George says that one common reason was that "Jews bowed to their kings, but when Persians bowed to another, it was the same as paying homage to a divine being." This act could have constituted idolatry. Furthermore, according to Beth Moore, "Many scholars lean more heavily toward the persisting generational rivalry as the cause for Mordecai's refusal...Mordecai knew Haman's heritage." Either way, Mordecai was a man who submitted to his king, but would not put a Persian custom above his love and devotion for God. He also would not bow to someone who was on God's list of enemies. He stood, literally, for what he believed in, even if it meant putting his own life in jeopardy.

As the chapter closes, Haman continues plotting the extermination of Mordecai and the Jewish people. Although he wasn't the sovereign, he knew exactly what to say to get the king on his side. He brought Xerxes' ego into play by mentioning that "a certain people did not obey the King's commands" (Esther 3:8). He also recognized the times and realized the king was in need of finances. Haman offered Xerxes an enormous bribe in exchange for carrying out this plan. To put his financial offer in today's terms, the



value of ten thousand talents of silver ranges from \$12 million to over \$1 billion in modern currency, depending on the effects of exchange and inflation. Haman was on a Satan-inspired mission to destroy God's chosen people. Thankfully, our God is faithful and always keeps his promises. As the prophet states in Zechariah, chapter two, verses eight and nine:

For this is what the Lord Almighty says: "After the Glorious One has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye — I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them."





Week Four: Esther 4

Wallflower or Warrior?

If in the past four weeks you have found it possible to shut out the still, small voice of God's Spirit stirring in you and calling you into His marvelous plan for your life, we pray that you will find that impossible this week. Chapter Four is the crisis, the defining moment, not only of Esther's life, but also of this period in Jewish history.

At the beginning of Chapter Four, Esther has been queen for quite a while. It is safe to assume that she adjusted to royal life and was pampered and isolated from the gritty realities of common life. She literally had a staff whose primary goal was to help her "avoid every unpleasantness, fix every hangnail, and anesthetize every headache." (Beth Moore) In other words, she may have forgotten how to deal with any difficulty, small or great, simply because she had none. Predictably, this isolation came to a startling halt when word came to Esther of Mordecai's breakdown at the King's gate.

At this point, Mordecai and the Jewish people may have wished they could have taken back their decision not to return to Jerusalem when they had been given the chance decades earlier. But it seems they remembered the exhortation of the prophet Joel, "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity" (Joel 2:12-13). They had a mighty weapon in place of regret: repentance. Their weeping and wailing and fasting and donning of sackcloth and ashes were signs of their earnest repentance, a profound, active response to a situation over which they had no visible control. H.A. Ironside says, "There was no levity on the part of the wailing multitude in our chapter. They were in desperate earnestness. They wished to be delivered from the condemnation. Nothing else would satisfy them. Sackcloth and ashes speak of repentance and self-judgment. In this garb Mordecai and the Jews arrayed themselves."

This was by far the greatest moment of crisis in Mordecai's life, yet he did not rush to Esther himself and tell her what was happening immediately. In verse two of Chapter Four we find, "... he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it" (Esther 4:2). Mordecai was unashamed to put aside his façade and appear weak and broken to his prestigious co-workers. Yet he practiced self-control with integrity even amidst the most turbulent grief in his experience. Our protagonist, Esther, mirrors Mordecai's strength of character by upholding his original command not to reveal her identity as a Jew. If she had immediately gone to Mordecai in his sorrow, her Jewish heritage surely would have been discovered. Although she was in deep confusion and brokenness at her only living relative's distress, she practices restraint and wisdom by sending the King's eunuch, Hathach, rather than going herself.

Through Hathach, Mordecai delivers an earth-shattering call to action. He points out that Esther was divinely positioned and endowed with the power to act, but if she chooses not to use these gifts, God will still accomplish His plan. However, her fearful failure to act and her attempt to save her life would only result in failure. "You and your father's family will perish." He urges her not to give way to fear, but rather to seek the fulfillment of the call God placed on her life.



As the chapter closes, we hold our breath, eagerly waiting for dear Esther's response. Perhaps there is no better phrase that captures Esther's intrepid move of courage and faith than the one found in verse 15, "...I will go to the King even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." Commentator Mervin Breneman writes on this scripture:

Both Vashti and Mordecai displayed courage in life-threatening situations, and now so did Esther. Vashti showed courage in her refusal to humiliate herself for the whimsical desire of her husband and Mordecai did so in refusing to bow down to Haman. Esther proved braver still. She had decided to break the law of her husband and risk her very life for her people. God's providential care had brought Esther to this point, but Esther accepted the challenge that might cost her life.

As college students, we need to realize that we too are in a place of power and influence, coming in contact daily with many of our country's wealthiest and/or most gifted students who are poised to lead in the next few decades. Moreover, like Esther, we are in a place of privilege constituting 0.2% of the global population ages 15-24 who have the chance to experience college life here in America. Acts 17:26 reminds us that God "determined the times set for [us] and the exact places that [we] should live." Just as He sovereignly positioned Esther as Queen of Persia, knowing the times and choices she would face, He has also placed you precisely in your sphere of influence, no matter how small it may appear in your eyes, for a specific purpose. God doesn't make mistakes and He never acts randomly.

You, dear daughter of the King, are truly royalty. You were "chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will" (Eph. 1:11). It is time for women of God to rise up and fulfill their God-given destinies to reach our campuses, cities, and this broken world for Jesus. This is a call to courage, a call to stand for what's right, a call to recognize the power of one.

One man, Jesus Christ, changed not only the course of history, but also of eternity, by standing courageously in obedience to God's plan. What has God called you to stand for? You may stand alone in earthly terms. David was "alone" when he faced Goliath; Daniel was "alone" when he defied Darius' decree and was thrown into the lions' den; Esther had no one who dared to go with her, uninvited, into the king's presence. She knew she was only one woman. But she went. She obeyed. And that choice has affected us all.





Week Five: Esther 5

Walk of Life

All heroes have their defining moment, the moment they were born for, trained for, and, in many cases, have been waiting for. As we begin our Bible study today in Chapter Five, Esther's move toward the throne room places her right there with so many other courageous men and women who have died standing up for their faith. Esther walks with courage, trust, and the unshakable faith that may not have come immediately, but arrived just when she needed it. Her last statement in Chapter Four, verse sixteen sets the stage for today, "...if I perish, I perish." Esther has decided to move, to say yes to her God-given destiny and make an appeal on behalf of the Jews to God and Xerxes.

As Esther prepared for her "walk" she brilliantly demonstrated her wisdom once again as she asked all the Jews in Susa to pray and fast for her. Furthermore, she prayed and fasted for three days herself to prepare for this task. She understood she was ultimately appealing to both Kings. She humbled herself before God, seeking for His counsel and deliverance, and in the meantime made sure she was physically ready to see King Xerxes. One can only imagine how she felt as she was putting on her robes and getting ready to enter the throne room, all the thoughts racing through her mind, sweat pouring off her hands. "Esther had never felt more alone. More forsaken. Ironically, a person is never less aware of divine intervention than when he or she has been chosen to render it. Sometimes God's hand is so close that it covers the eyes." (Beth Moore) Esther did not know what would happen, but she was resolved and in that resolve she found herself at the entrance to the king's hall.

While she was standing at the entrance, King Xerxes was taken with her. "The King looked up from a document and then drew down his brow as if focus would help him fathom the sight. Only her beauty exceeded her audacity, and feeling the weight of the crowd's expectation, King Xerxes somehow found himself more intrigued than insulted. His thoughts and feelings towards Esther in that moment are revealed in verse two, 'When he saw Queen Esther standing in court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand.'" (Beth Moore) Imagine the relief Esther felt. She had obeyed, fulfilled her calling, perhaps expecting the worst, but receiving mercy instead.

Let's pause a moment to apply this profound happening to our own lives as daughters of the King of Kings. Christ as our King longs for us to come to Him, to come as we are, even if we feel as though every law is against our coming. Our King is not too busy, He is not shocked at our sin, and He is not concerned about what others think. This is one of the greatest pictures in the Bible of how we are to "boldly approach the throne of grace." (Hebrews 4:16) We are to come knowing we are royalty, adopted into the King's family. Not only are you a princess, but you are His bride and what you have to say matters. He has not forgotten us, though sometimes it may seem as though we have forgotten Him. This scene is a picture of intercession at its best. Some critics and scholars are shocked by the book of Esther, saying it is a Godless narrative. However, here and in so many other places, we see the nature of the Kingdom of God whispering to our hearts, calling from the shadows.

In the second half of the chapter, Esther demonstrated immense self-control. When the King asked her what troubled her and declared that whatever she wished was his command, she humbly invited him, and the sinister Haman, to a royal banquet she had arranged. This invitation was a brilliant and wise move, as Dr. Charles Swindoll writes,



“Notice what Esther doesn’t do. She doesn’t point a finger at Haman. She doesn’t rush ahead and tell the King what is troubling her. She doesn’t play on his emotions or try to manipulate him by bursting into tears. She very calmly says, without frenzy or sobs, “I’ve planned a banquet, and I’d love to have you and Haman attend.”...The king may rule the kingdom of Persia, and Haman may sign edicts with the king’s official seal, but it is the Lord who is in control of this entire situation. And in the nucleus of His divine plan, Esther becomes invincible.”

In the process of waiting, praying, fasting, and preparing for this moment, Esther sought the Lord for His wisdom in what she should say to the King if, by the grace of God, she was alive when she reached him. We know her plan did not come out of thin air, but from a heart that was recklessly confident in God’s sovereign grace. It would be difficult for any one of us not to fall to our knees and fall apart at the feet of the king, particularly if the fate of our entire nation was resting on our shoulders, but Esther stands tall, confident, and poised. Once again, Scripture’s Cinderella truly rose to the occasion, in more ways than one.





Week Six: Esther 6

Exalted Humility

The message of chapter six is summed up in a verse from James, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6) Off the top of my head I can’t think of a more direct example of this truth in Scripture. Let’s dive right in to the passage to see the Lord’s hand at work in the lives of Haman and Mordecai.

After a night of tossing and turning in the royal bedchamber (a divine bout of insomnia, as many commentators agree), King Xerxes calls for the records of his reign to be read to him. During the reading, he realizes that an act of great loyalty has been sorely overlooked. Mordecai’s message about Bigthana and Teresh’s plot was received and acted upon, but never rewarded. Let’s pause here for just a moment. Have you ever felt like your act of kindness, friendship, or loyalty was completely overlooked? Or perhaps that God missed a time when you acted in obedience? Mordecai might have felt that way, especially considering the immense favor Haman was experiencing at the king’s hand. However, we don’t hear about any pity parties thrown by Mordecai; in fact, the lack of recognition doesn’t even seem to phase him. I think maybe he had learned the secret of contentment in God, regardless of earthly recognition.

I have to admit, when I feel overlooked, especially when I feel like God hasn’t seen what I have “done/given up/acted in obedience on,” I feel slighted, maybe even angry. What a contrast we find in the Scripture concerning how our attitude ought to look: “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” (Luke 17:9) Does this passage chafe your pride? I know it has mine. When I find myself reacting negatively to these words, I have to do a perspective check: How do I really see God?

In contrast to the humility of Mordecai, we are abruptly confronted with Haman’s ego as he enters the outer court to seal Mordecai’s fate. Haman decided on the same night that the king couldn’t sleep to have the gallows built. He was so eager for the destruction of one common Jew that refused him the honor he obviously thought he deserved that he arrived in the outer court at the crack of dawn to get the death warrant. God couldn’t have had more perfect timing in reminding the king of the great service Mordecai had rendered to the crown. But look how close to the deadline He acted! If He had waited several more hours, Mordecai would have been a goner! God is seldom early, but He is never late. Depend on Him to accomplish His plan in His time, and you won’t ever be disappointed. You’ll probably be a whole lot less stressed as well!

Haman shows his true colors when the king requests his advice on this issue of honor. The author of Esther gives us the inside look at Haman’s thought process in response to Xerxes’ question, “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” Haman immediately jumps to conclusions: “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?” The banquet the night before has gone to his head. He thinks that there is no one in the kingdom so immersed in Xerxes’ good graces as he. In his reply we get an even closer look at his enormous ego:

For the man the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set....Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of



the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king delights to honor. (Esther 6:7-9)

Haman doesn't hesitate for a second. He's dreamed about this moment. Let's look at this statement in cultural context: If you look back at 1 Kings 1:28-35 you will see David transferring the kingship of Israel to his son, Solomon. He gives very specific orders on how the ceremony is to occur, one of which was "have Solomon my son ride on my own mule." And then in Luke 19:30, Jesus requested that the disciples bring Him a colt, "which no one has ever ridden" for His triumphal entry. Riding on someone else's mount in effect bestowed the same honor (or dishonor) on you that was accorded to its master. Haman shows his hand here, he wants to be king!

Does this pride (that heralds Haman's fall) look familiar to you? I would be a liar to say I don't look at Haman and see myself. As Beth Moore observes:

We can develop a ravenous appetite for honor – even if we try to keep it hidden... One of the bad things about an insatiable desire for honor is that sooner or later it is going to make a fool of us, robbing us of the very thing we intended to receive.

Haman not only lost the honor he intended for himself, but was forced to bestow it on his greatest enemy. Talk about humbling! We need to be reminded daily to "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so at the proper time He may exalt you." (1 Peter 5:6) I encourage you to examine your heart and confess the pride you find there. It is much more pleasant to humble ourselves voluntarily than to be humbled forcibly. And God has a precious promise for those who humble themselves: "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12).





Week Seven: Esther 7

This Vile Haman!

“It is easy to anticipate that this year will be very much like last and the one before it, when in fact, chances are good it will be altogether different. So when events begin to turn, realize that none of it is merely coincidental...Nothing is coincidental! “Luck” has no place in a Christian’s vocabulary.” (Charles Swindoll)

In Esther Chapter Seven, we see the mighty hand of God working through Esther once again. Luck truly has no place at the second banqueting table. Only the great tact and wisdom granted to her by a God who loves His people intensely could have turned the heart of the king so dramatically.

During the wine course of the second Banquet, King Xerxes once again asks what Esther’s petition. She responds directly to the King this time, “If I have won the King’s favor.” (Esther 7:3). Esther wisely used intimate language that immediately connected the king and queen on an intimate level, as husband and wife. She proceeds to tell the King that she and her people, the Jews, were sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated. As commentator Frederic W. Bush notes:

She understands full well the delicate and precarious nature of her position. The threat against her and her people has two perpetrators, Haman and the king, and both are present with her. She must somehow fully expose the culpability of Haman, while at the same time never appearing in any way to be bringing any charges against the king. Hence, her response is extremely well thought out and presented with the utmost tact.

The king’s passivity had made him just as responsible for the deadly decree but Esther framed the situation to appear as though he was victimized as well. Using the three words, “destroyed, killed, and annihilated,” would help the king remember the decree and using the word “sold” presented the decree as something he was deceived or bribed into.

The king’s response is astonishing; the English translation cannot come close to disclosing the amount of emotion, anger, and rage conveyed when he commands Esther to reveal who this man may be. Things continue to crescendo as Esther matches the king’s emotion and boldly declares, “The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman!” (Esther 7:6). “Brilliantly, she left out Haman’s identity in verse 3 so she could put a bow and arrow in Xerxes’ hands before she pointed him toward the target. Had he known from the beginning that the culprit was his own right hand man; the king might have protected him. What could he do but follow through?” (Beth Moore) Once again, we see Esther’s great wisdom as she uses the perfect place, time, audience, and words to deliver the truth. This day could have resulted in disaster just as easily as triumph. Esther put her life on the line again at this banquet hoping, praying, and believing the king would be favorable to her over Haman and he was. Her moment arrived and she did not hesitate to reveal the truth.

As the chapter proceeds, the king runs out and Haman falls to his knees in terror, begging Esther for his life. She does not move, although surely her heart was breaking in that moment. Imagine having a desperate man pleading with you for his life, all the while knowing full well the torturous death he will suffer if you remain silent. But if she had spared Haman, he would always have been a threat to the Jews, herself, and Mordecai. Cary Moore notes, “To say here that Esther was merciless and unfeeling is to



misinterpret the entire situation. Thus, while her heart might have prompted her to be merciful, logic and prudence restrained her.” Moreover, we must remember the history of Haman’s people and God’s heart toward them. From the beginning, Haman was an enemy of God and of His people. The job one Jewish man, King Saul, failed to finish, one Jewish woman, Queen Esther, finally accomplished.

In only a few minutes, Haman’s life is finally ended. What a scene, what a great God, and what a brave woman! “All the time Haman was having the gallows built, he could see - enthusiastically anticipate - Mordecai impaled there. Now, he is condemned to die there himself. We call this irony. Theologians call it sovereignty.” (Charles Swindoll)





Week Eight: Esther 8

Pressed, But Not Crushed

When you read verses 1 and 2 of chapter eight, it's easy to miss the significance of the action taking place. For Xerxes to give Esther Haman's property would have been a huge deal. We learn from extra-biblical sources, like Herodotus, that the property of condemned persons reverted back to the crown. Remember back in Esther 3:9? Haman offered to put ten thousand talents of silver in the royal treasury to dispatch with the Jews. Haman may very well have had more money than the king, due to royal wars and massive parties that lasted half a year draining the royal treasury. But Xerxes handed it over to Esther. Not only did he relinquish this great wealth, but Mordecai was appointed over Haman's household! Talk about God having a sense of humor... What a striking example of God lifting up those who humble themselves.

Despite this massive power shift and the acquisition of wealth unimaginable, Esther does not lose her focus or forget the reason she was brought to the palace in the first place. Esther knows that there is still a death warrant standing for her whole people. And she falls to her knees in desperation and humility: "Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews." (Esther 8:3)

The enemy may be dead, but his plan is not. Esther again risks her life on behalf of her people. See verse four? A tiny sentence that means life, rather than death – "Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose..." She once again risked the wrath of the king to fulfill God's call. And He made her victorious.

Esther asks that the king reverse Haman's edict, an impossibility in regard to Medo-Persian law that the king soon reminds her of. He responds with a tone that could almost be read as annoyance, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows. Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you..." Another translation says it this way: "Now go ahead and send a message to the Jews in the king's name, telling them whatever you want..." Xerxes is like, "I already gave you property worth about half a kingdom and had my right hand man hanged. What else do you want from me?"

Have you ever felt like the one person you thought you could turn to for help got annoyed, threw up their hands and said, "I've helped you before! What do you want me to do now?" Esther probably felt crushed until the king gave her and Mordecai his royal permission to write "whatever you want" to their people. Once again, God gets to be the hero amidst the failure of a flawed human being. I think God lets us experience these moments of urgent hope and crushing despair to remind us that He fills the role no one else can fulfill for us.

Imagine the flurry of activity that came after that "blank check" permission. The royal secretaries were summoned "at once" and were ordered to transcribe a royal override to Haman's decree in every language and script of the empire. Think for a minute about the atmosphere of Jewish homes for the seventy days that had passed since Haman's edict went out. Charles Swindoll writes, "A gloom had settled over the city of Susa and the other provinces of the kingdom. The scene probably resembled the atmosphere at Auschwitz or Dachau or Birkenau [during the Jewish Holocaust]. No one laughed. Every day brought everyone another twenty-four hours closer to doom."



And then, with the advent of the good news, “Mordecai left the king’s presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration.”(Esther 8:15)

Can you imagine living in a home where the threat of coming destruction, certain death, loomed every day? Then, all of the sudden, God’s mighty hand moves and He authorizes a decree that allows every enemy to be swept away before you? But that is what God has done! The threat of certain death loomed over you every day before He revealed His sovereign redemption for your life in Christ Jesus. Now He has overridden the law of sin and death and has allowed you to accept Christ’s sacrifice as payment for your sin and authorized you to put every enemy under your feet. It might have been difficult for the Jews to believe there was a new decree and to stand firm in their new right to defend their lives and their families, but they did! And they were saved through the provision of an Almighty God, their loving Father. And that very same Almighty God and Father has done the very same thing for us.





Week Nine: Esther 9-10

Purim and Providence

It's hard to believe we are coming to a close. What a story. A narrative that has left many of us astonished that a drama such as this took place on the pages of our Bibles. Eugene Peterson writes:

Story doesn't just tell us something and leave it there, it invites our participation. A good storyteller gathers us into the story. We feel the emotions, get caught up in the drama, identify with the characters...They bring us into the spacious world in which God creates and saves and blesses...they offer us a place in the story, invite us into the large story that takes place under the broad skies of God's purposes.

Our hearts have been captured and faith strengthened by what we have seen recorded in the power-packed book of Esther. We have been brought into this narrative and are leaving it as different women.

Chapters Nine and Ten of Esther begin with a statement in verse one that is the perfect summary of how this book ends, "the tables were turned." Indeed they were, Esther walks in a new and confident royal authority, demanding decrees be made and no loose end left untied. Mordecai is praised and honored by the king and is feared throughout the entire nation. The Jews defend themselves and they take the victory by a landslide. All the while, beneath the surface of this script, we, the readers, know who the real hero is: our God. Only God could do the impossible things we have seen done in this book.

One Jewish rabbi wrote of the Holocaust something that is a tremendous parallel to the ending of this attempted annihilation in Susa, "Our deliverer did indeed come. He just came a little later than we expected. Had our enemy had his way, none of us would have survived. Yet here we are." God came in with atomic power and deliverance, and a timeless message of providence for the Jews in Susa. If you have been a part of this study, the enemy of your soul has been pushed back, and make no mistake, you have arrived for such a time as this. Thank you for your diligence. May God bless you with the courage, humility, and wisdom of Esther every day of your life and may you rise up and walk in the royal authority you have been given as the bride of Christ.

