

Trusting God's Plan When You Don't See Him

Lessons from the book of Esther

(A HealingStrong Bible Study written by Cheryl Collins)

Reading Plan:

Day	Passage	Topic
Day 1	Esther 4:12-14	Intro & "For such a time as this"
Day 2	Esther 1:1-12	Vashti's Story
Day 3	Esther 1:13-22	The Decree Against Vashti
Day 4	Esther 2:1-14	Esther Introduced & Beauty Contest
Day 5	Esther 2:15-18	Esther Becomes Queen
Day 6	Esther 2:19-23	Mordecai Uncovers the Plot
Day 7	Esther 3:1-6	Haman Hates Mordecai
Day 8	Esther 3:7-15	Casting the Pur – The Decree to Annihilate Jews
Day 9	Esther 4:1-11	Mordecai Mourns – Esther's Dilemma
Day 10	Esther 4:12-17	Esther's Turning Point
Day 11	Esther 5:1-8	The First Banquet
Day 12	Esther 5:9-14	Haman's Pride & Gallows Plan
Day 13	Esther 6	Mordecai Honored
Day 14	Esther 7	The Second Banquet – Haman Exposed
Day 15	Esther 8	Esther's Second Plea – A New Edict
Day 16	Esther 9	The Jews Defend Themselves – Purim
Day 17	Esther 10	Mordecai Honored – Final Reflections

Each day's entry includes:

- Scripture Reading
- Devotional Reflection
- Discussion Questions

How to Use This Guide

1. Read the daily Scripture.
2. Reflect on the devotional section.
3. Journal or discuss the questions.
4. Watch the “A Little Extra” clip on your app for bonus content and community insight.

Each day, you'll find practical takeaways that you can apply when facing your unknown future. So get ready for an exhilarating ride into the ancient past of the Persian empire. And while you're reading with us each day, if you would like to use the Bible App, you can download this exact study [here](#): or type in HealingStrong under the search icon for “Plans”. You can also find it at this URL address: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/52694-trusting-gods-plan-when-you-dont-see-him-lessons> If you use the Bible App, please don't forget to click on the “Little Extra” video clip at the top of your devotional page. You'll hear some friends from HealingStrong discussing each day's Bible passage. It's like having your friends sharing what they have learned with you, so please join us by listening in.

Day 1

Read Esther: 4:12-14

“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther 4:14 - This famous quote from the book of Esther, comes right at the pivotal moment in her story. If you were watching a movie, the camera would focus in closely on Esther’s worried face as she ponders risking her life to save her people or remaining silent and doing nothing. She is at a crossroads, but the decision she makes will propel her into the purpose and calling God has for her.

Take a minute and think about your own future. I’m not talking about tomorrow, but next year or several years down the road. What emotion does that stir up in you to think about what’s ahead? Is it fear? Excitement? Bewilderment? Trepidation? Are you looking forward to something that just hasn’t happened yet? Or are you facing a scary uncertain situation like a medical diagnosis, wondering how it will all turn out? We all have a big question mark in front of what lies ahead of us, but how each of us walks into our destiny can make all the difference. We have the opportunity to trust the One who knows our every twist and turn and has a plan for us. A good plan for us — a plan to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

I’m so excited that you are joining us in this amazingly colorful, intriguing and entertaining story of a young Jewish girl named Hadassah, whose Hebrew name was changed to the Persian name Esther to hide her identity as a Jew. As we read her story, you’ll get caught up in her whirlwind change of events. She started as an unknown Hebrew orphan, to queen of a mighty ancient empire, and finally fulfilling her true purpose, the one who saves her Jewish people from annihilation.

The title of this Bible plan, “Trusting God’s Plan When You Don’t See Him” has meaning. In fact, God’s name is not mentioned once in this book. But as you study with us, you’ll see the evidence of Him working all the details out for Esther and His chosen people, the Jews.

Questions

- 1) How does thinking about the future affect your emotions and perspective on life?
- 2) Can you relate to Esther's fear about stepping into the circumstances with faith?
- 3) What do you hope to learn from this Bible plan?

Day 2

Esther: 1: 1-12

Show and Tell

Celebrate good times, come on! That's the theme of today's passage as we start off the book of Esther with the party of the century! Xerxes, also known as Ahasuerus, is the King of Persia during this time in history, and he's feeling the need to show off all his wealth to everyone in the empire. Did you notice how long he was parading around his vast fortunes? A full 180 days! My goodness, that's a lot of wealth to showcase! It's very possible he was doing this to impress neighboring countries or potential enemies so that they wouldn't start a war with his nation.

After the massive 180-day show and tell, Xerxes throws a week-long party for everyone in Susa. And just for you history buffs, the ancient city of Susa was located in modern day Iran. While he's drinking and celebrating with the nobles in the palace gardens, his beautiful wife Queen Vashti was hosting her own banquet for the women in the palace.

Here's where things get very interesting. On the last day of Xerxes' big banquet, the Bible says he was high in spirits from wine. In other words, Xerxes was drunk! He was not in the right mind to make any decisions. Picture the scene. He's with all these men he's trying to impress. He knows he has a beautiful wife, and he wants to show her off. Some commentators think he wanted her to parade her around only wearing her royal crown and nothing else. We can't be sure of that, but even if he had just demanded that she come dance before his guests, she was seriously offended. Vashti's reaction to his request is a game changer in this story. She refuses to come before him. In those days, that is just not something a woman would likely do! She could have been put to death for her actions.

Xerxes is stood up by his wife in front of all the people he's trying to impress. Naturally, he doesn't take too kindly to her refusal. After all, she just embarrassed and humiliated him in front of all the guys. It's no surprise that he gets seriously angry.

So from the beginning of this story, in my humble opinion, Xerxes isn't the best guy out there. If his profile was on a dating app today, he'd be a really cute guy with pictures of himself in front of his chariot, palace, etc. But looking past the flashy exterior and toys, he has a God-shaped void that he's trying to fill with things of this world. Truth be told, we all have God-shaped holes in our hearts that nothing can truly satisfy, not even the wealth of the world. I can't blame Vashti for the decision she made to refuse this guy.

I told you all this is a story full of drama! We're only getting started!

Questions

Are we sometimes guilty of the same tendency to “show off” as King Xerxes did? Why do we do that?

Do you agree with what Vashti did? Why or why not?

Could there be an “emptiness” in us at times because we are trying to fill that space with people, money or things?

Day 3

Esther: 1: 13 - 22

Love and Respect

Yesterday, we left the scene with Vashti refusing to entertain the king and his nobles, which caused a huge problem in the King's court. Xerxes is furious and it seems he can't control his wife. This is a bad look for the king. Remember, he just held a week-long party to impress all the nobles of Susa. So if you're Xerxes, who ya gonna call? He summoned his lawyers and advisors, who "knew the times" and the laws of Persia. Notice the people he does not call are the Persian priests or religious leaders. No godly counsel here for Xerxes.

Can you relate to this situation? You have a problem that's happened today. What's your first reaction? Is it to call a friend? Your spouse? A parent? A coworker? Who do you talk to? Is talking to God about your problem your first go-to or your last ditch effort? Be honest! I know a lot of times, I forget to go to God first and just try to handle things in my own expertise. Then when things escalate or I feel more anxious, I finally remember to seek God's counsel on the issue. It's shocking to think of the peace I often forfeit just because I ask the wrong people for advice instead of going to God first. I'm just sayin'!

So all the advisors come in and tell Xerxes if he doesn't do something, then, "This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord." Esther 2:18. Let's be real, these guys were worried about their own wives, so they advised the king to issue a decree banishing Vashti and giving her position to "someone else who is better than her." This is important because they actually wrote this into law, and as we'll see later in the story, when something is written into law, it can't be repealed.

I love that the guys writing this law think that it will make for a better home environment. "Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest." v. 20 Ok, I'm no counselor or love guru, but making a law is not the way to earn respect. In fact, there's a great passage in Ephesians 5: 21 - 33 about husbands and wives that speaks to this concept.

"However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Ephesians 5:33 In this passage we see a wonderful cycle of love and respect. For the most part, women were created to want to be loved and men were created to want to be respected. If a guy wants respect, then the best way for him to earn that is to show his wife love. In return, she'll respect him because she feels his love for her. We could go on for days just on this topic alone, but demanding respect is not the way to get it.

As you saw, Vashti is out as queen, making room for someone new in the palace. If you haven't checked it out, listen to our "A Little Extra" clip at the top of this page. I can promise you we're having some great discussions about this passage that you won't want to miss.

Questions

How do you handle a problem when it comes your way, and who is your go to for counsel?

Do you choose to go to God first for your problems? What benefit is that to you?

What do you think about the reciprocity of love and respect? Is there truth to that in your relationships?

Day 4

Esther: 2: 1 - 14

Intro to Esther and the beauty contest

Yay, we finally get to meet our two heroes of this story, Esther and Mordecai! They are Jewish exiles living in Persia. Esther's parents have died, and her cousin Mordecai has raised her as his daughter. So even though she doesn't call him dad in this story, he is like a father to her.

Xerxes' anger, and might I add drunkenness, have finally subsided and he begins to remember Vashti. Perhaps he really cared for her because she was not executed for her actions. It's possible he regrets his actions but the decree he made is in effect and she's banished for good. His personal assistants suggest he put out a kingdom-wide search for "beautiful young virgins".

Many times when we hear the story of Esther, we romanticize what happened because it sounds like a lavish beauty pageant and love story. But the sad reality is these young girls were being taken from their families, most likely against their will, to be placed in the royal harem. I don't see where these young ladies were given a choice. Can you imagine a daughter or sister being taken from her home against her will and losing her innocence in the process? It's truly heartbreaking.

Esther was one of those girls taken, but as we soon see, the favor of God was on her. Hegai, the man in charge of the harem, was immediately impressed by her. He assigned her seven maids and put her in the best place in the harem. This special royal treatment was already preparing Esther for what it would be like as the queen, with attendants caring for her. And according to the scriptures, before any woman could see the king, she was given 12 months of beauty treatments. That's some seriously long prep time at the spa. Think of all the things Esther was learning about the palace and the role of a future queen during that year.

There's a verse I want to make sure you didn't miss. "Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so." Esther 2:10
Mordecai had his reasons and they will be crucial to the story later on.

Finally, please don't overlook the historical fact that once the young virgin was called in to see the king, she was going into his bedroom to sleep with him, thereby losing her virginity. And the saddest part of all, if he was not pleased with her, she would leave the next day to live in a separate part of the king's harem that was designated for concubines. That's the reality of what Esther was facing. These scared young girls were losing their purity and 99%

of them would not be chosen to be the queen. No wonder we see Mordecai checking on Esther all the time. He was probably wondering when it would be her time to see the king and secretly hoping the king would pick someone else before Esther's time.

Questions

Why do you think the Lord allowed Hegai to show favoritism towards Esther over the other girls?

Despite Esther being put in a terrible situation, can you see how God was watching over her and showing his favor upon her?

Could there be a situation in your life which seemed terrible, but looking back you can see the hand of God protecting you and guiding you through?

Day 5

Esther: 2: 15-18

Intro to Esther and the beauty contest

This is the part of the story where everything changes for Esther! For a year, her handmaids and Hegai have been diligently preparing her with beauty treatments to captivate the king. Finally, she is summoned into the king's royal residence. This major event occurs in the tenth month of the Jewish calendar, known as Tevet or Tebeth in some translations. It's a cold and wintry time of the year in the middle east, and she's just been called in to win the heart of a perfect stranger, the King of Persia.

Imagine the nerves Esther must have felt as she was escorted to his residence. It's unlikely she'd ever met the king before that night. Her mind must have raced with questions:

What is he like?

What should I say?

What will he think of me?

What if he doesn't like me?

Esther brought nothing with her except what Hegai had recommended for the royal residence. Goodness, I would have loved to witness those first introductions—talk about major nerves. If you've ever experienced first date jitters, magnify those feelings a thousandfold. If the king didn't like her, the next day she could have a dreadfully bleak future ahead of her as a concubine. The stakes were incredibly high!

“Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.” Esther 2:17

Esther becomes queen! A grand banquet is thrown in her honor. Talk about a life-changing day—from obscurity to royalty in a single moment. It almost reminds me of Joseph from the book of Genesis, who went from prisoner to second in command of Egypt in just one day, though God had been faithfully preparing him for that role for years. If you want to delve deeper into his story, we offer a great study called “Trusting God's Plan in the Waiting: Lessons from the Life of Joseph,” so be sure to check it out here on the Bible app. Esther is now Queen of Persia, and soon she will discover that God placed her in this position for such a time as this.

Questions

Esther changed from an unknown to the queen in one day, but God had been preparing her for a long time. How does obedience in the mundane events of life prepare you for God's greater purpose?

Have you faced a pivotal, nerve-racking moment that held the power to alter your life? What was going through your mind at that time?

Even though God is not explicitly mentioned in these verses, what are some ways that God was directing Esther's life?

Day 6

Esther: 2: 19 - 23

Mordecai hears plot

Have you ever watched a movie or read a book with a subplot that left you wondering, "Why is that there?" Today's reading is just that. And let me tell you, this subplot will have major consequences later on.

Esther's cousin Mordecai is sitting outside the King's gate. I can only guess he's trying to catch a glimpse of Esther to see how she's doing; after all, she's like a daughter to him. As he sits there, he overhears two officers arguing about the king and plotting to kill him. This must have been a huge shock. What if they were also planning to kill Esther? Since he happened to be there to witness their conversation, he quickly informs Queen Esther, who in turn tells the king. She gives all the credit to Mordecai. After an investigation, the two conspirators are found guilty and hanged. Crisis averted!

Please remember this crucial part of the subplot: "All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king." (Esther 2:23) In those days, it was customary for current events to be documented in the life of a king. Mordecai saved the king's life from an assassination attempt, it was recorded in the annals, yet there is no mention of any reward given to him at that time. He did the right thing by warning Esther, perhaps out of concern for her safety as well. However, this is where this subplot ends... for now.

Have you ever done something good to help someone but received no recognition at all? How did you feel? The scripture never says that Mordecai campaigned to let everyone know he potentially saved the king. He remained humble in nature. He likely kept a low profile because of his Jewish heritage. Even when Esther became queen, she kept her nationality a secret: "... for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up." (v. 20) I love how she demonstrates respect to him as her father figure, even when she's in such a powerful position herself. We can learn a bit of humility from these two people.

Questions

Have you ever done something good that went unnoticed? How did you react?

What do you think of Esther following Mordecai's instructions as an adult? Did that show weakness or strength?

How can we apply the lessons of humility from Mordecai and Esther to our own lives?

Day 7

Esther: 3: 1 - 6

Hamaan hates Mordecai

Hate. That's a pretty strong word and it conjures up a lot of different feelings as well. Can you think of someone in your life that you don't like? What about someone that really annoys you? Let's take it a step further than that, is there someone that you hate? If you've ever felt that way, why? What did that person or people do to you that you can't seem to forgive? We're about to meet the villain of our story who's allowed hatred to rule his heart.

"After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles." Esther 3:1

In the previous chapter, Mordecai had thwarted an assassination plot to kill king Xerxes, yet now this guy named Haman enters our story. He's suddenly getting the royal treatment with the king's officials bowing down and paying him honor wherever he goes because the king commanded it. Um, I don't remember them doing that for Mordecai. Everybody is bowing down to Haman, but not Mordecai. Why? It's time for a little history lesson.

Did you notice in Haman's introduction that he was called the Agagite? An Agagite, is a descendant of King Agag, the ruler of Israel's enemy called the Amalekites. This group of people attacked the Israelites in the desert after they escaped from Egypt. In fact, Israel waged its first battle as a nation against the Amalekites.

Haman is a descendant of the Amalakites. Mordecai was not about to bow down to this man. It's possible that "paying honor" to Haman was a type of worship, which would have been strictly forbidden by Jewish law, yet another plausible reason why Mordecai did not bow down to Haman.

When the king's nobles noticed Mordecai's actions, they made sure to tell Haman that Mordecai was a Jew. Haman had made it clear what he thought of Jews, otherwise they wouldn't have mentioned that key description. "Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes" Esther 3:6.

Talk about a serious grudge! Haman is messed up! Sure, he's full of pride and furious Mordecai won't bow down to him, but his racism and hatred go deep. He wants to wipe out

an entire race of people. This kind of evil has followed the Jewish nation throughout history. And sadly, Haman has the power to do something about it. In tomorrow's reading, we'll see just what he plans on doing.

Questions

- 1) What do you believe influenced Mordecai's decision not to bow down to Haman?
- 2) If you faced a moral dilemma like Mordecai's, how would you handle it? If you faced the possibility of death, would you still adhere to your convictions?
- 3) How did Haman's background shape his prejudice, and what prevented him from overcoming his hatred?

Day 8:

Esther 3: 7 - 15

Proverbs 13:20

Casting the Pur; setting fate for Jews

Picking up from where we last left the story, Haman was so mad he wanted to kill all the Jews. We could have hoped those were just words, but no, he let that hatred boil and put a plan into action. They cast the “pur,” which was like rolling dice, to select a day and month to kill the Jews. Again, this is just an indicator of just how evil, evil really is. The pur happened to land on the 12th month, the month of Adar. So this is almost a year away.

Esther’s husband, King Xerxes, is self-absorbed and easily persuaded. Xerxes allows Haman to convince him that “a certain people” in his kingdom aren’t obeying his laws and should be destroyed. Never once do we see him ask Haman who these people are, how they are disobeying him and why such a harsh punishment is being recommended. This plot to annihilate the Jews is just one of many plots throughout history to destroy God’s chosen people.

And shame on Haman! He has ONE man not bow down to him and now he wants to wipe out all of the Jewish people. He’s even willing to throw in 10,000 talents of silver of his own money to make it happen. But foolish, lazy, godless Xerxes literally hands the Jews over to Haman on a silver platter by giving his signet ring and saying, “Keep the money and do with the people as you please.” Esther 3:11

Again, anyone that romanticizes the book of Esther hasn’t really studied King Xerxes. This is a man easily persuaded by evil, and whose very actions prove likewise. Had it not been for Esther, he would have been the author of another attempt of the genocide of the Jewish people!

The royal secretaries send couriers out to all the provinces to announce Haman’s decree to “destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews - young and old, women and little children” on the 13th day of the Jewish month of Adar. How godless does a nation have to be to find that kind of edict acceptable? Making matters worse, once the king made a royal decree, it could not be rescinded.

Afterwards, royal messengers traveled the kingdom to deliver the horrible news. “The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.” Esther 3:15 Um, ya think? Can you imagine going to your mailbox to read a government order writing that in a year, every person of your race was to be killed and all their stuff plundered? No wonder everyone was confused. This came out of nowhere! Proverbs 13:20 is a great description of

Xerxes and Haman's friendship, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

Question:

Why is it important to surround yourself with wise godly people?

As a leader, what are some red flags that Xerxes exhibited in his handling of Haman's complaint? What would you have done if you were him?

Do you have any deep-seeded hatred towards someone that you need to confess to God and seek forgiveness? The only person you are hurting by holding onto the hate is yourself.

Day 9:

Esther 4: 1 - 11

Setting the problem - Mordecai knows what's to happen but Esther hasn't seen the king

Don't you love spotting things in the Bible that you didn't notice the first two or three reads? Mordecai heard about the king's order to kill all the Jews and he immediately mourned by putting on sackcloth and ashes, a very external sign of his grief. This was a practice customary for the Jewish people to show their grief and sorrow. All around the kingdom Jews were doing the same thing, wailing, fasting and mourning, but Esther didn't know this. She was living a life of royalty, out of touch with her people.

So when Esther's maids tell her Mordecai is in anguish, her first response is to send him some new clothes to wear. Why? This is what I finally noticed this time reading the passage. "But he went only as far as the king's gate because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it." Esther 4:2. This was basically the "no shirt, no shoes, no entry" policy of the palace. But Mordecai was not about to take off his mourning clothes to visit Esther because he was still lamenting. He refused to come.

Esther is living an out of touch life in the palace these days. She has no idea that all the Jews are wailing, mourning and fasting around the kingdom. No blame here on Esther either. This was probably customary for the royals to live secluded from the common folks. We also don't see where Esther runs out into the city streets to find Mordecai either. That's not what queens do. She orders one of the king's eunuch's, Hatach, to go find out what's troubling her cousin. Sadly, she's trapped in the confines of royal life.

When Hatach finds Mordecai, the situation is so dire that Mordecai gives a copy of the edict to bring to Esther and he urges her to "go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people." Esther 4:8 Remember, Mordecai had explicitly told Esther to NOT reveal her Jewish heritage, but now the stakes are so high, there's really no other choice.

When Esther hears the bad news, she reacts like many of us. She makes excuses! "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." Esther 4:11 Esther had the natural response of fear for her life!

I'm guessing Esther and Xerxes aren't in that honeymoon stage of their marriage any more. After all, it's been nearly five years since she was made queen. We'll see that the "it's not

my problem” or “my hands are tied” response will not cut it with Mordecai. Something has to be done! Stay tuned tomorrow for what happens next. It’s do or die!

Questions

Do you see similarities today with people being disengaged and disconnected from reality?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where taking a certain course of action would result in a significant sacrifice or trade-off?

How can you seek guidance and support from God when facing a seemingly impossible or no-win situation?

Day 10:

Esther 4: 12 - 17

For such a time as this

This is the best part of the story!!! This is Esther's pivotal moment, when Mordecai tells her there's no more time for excuses.

"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:13 - 14

Let's stop here for a second and talk about "remaining silent." We can all be guilty of this to avoid conflict. We simply don't say or do anything and hope that the problem goes away or someone else takes care of it. That's not how we as believers in Christ should act when something evil is happening around us. Even with the threat of death, the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8: 36-37 about this concept. "As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

So, Mordecai says in his message to Esther that doing nothing is not an option. And here's also where we see his belief that God may have put her in the position of the queen "for such a time as this." Again, he never mentions God in the text, but we see his perspective that Esther's life is not all by chance. This had divine orchestration written all over it.

So finally after some excuses, Esther comes to her senses and decides she will act. And did you notice her plan of attack? It involved fasting. And what is fasting? It's denying yourself food to draw close to God to seek Him out and hear His voice. Esther knew that prayer and fasting was what leads to breakthrough. Better yet, she asks all the Jews to join her for a 3-day fast, most likely begging for the ultimate King of Kings and Lord of Lords, God himself to act on her people's behalf.

"I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish. I perish." Esther 4:16
She now knows that only God can save her at this point.

Questions

Have you ever experienced a moment when you opted not to take action to address a problem? How did things work out?

If Esther were to remain silent, what did Mordecai say would happen to her family, and to the Jewish nation? Are there times it is better to simply remain silent?

Have you ever fasted over a situation or problem in your life? If so, what happened as a result?

Day 11:

Esther 5: 1 - 8

Inviting to the banquet

Esther and her maids have been fasting for three days for God's favor, wisdom and mercy as she petitions the king. Remember, it's been a month since she was last called in to see her husband. Now the big issue is how will Esther ask to save her people? That means she has to reveal her Jewish heritage to the king.

After all the prayer and fasting for favor in approaching the king, guess what? He extends his golden scepter to Esther! What a huge sigh of relief! Now she makes her request to Xerxes, but get this, it's not what you think. Instead of bluntly telling her husband about Haman's genocidal decree to destroy the Jews, she invites both the king and Haman to a banquet she has prepared. What? I didn't see that coming!

Fast forward a bit later to Esther's banquet. When the king is in good spirits from the wine, he becomes curious about her request. She says, "My petition and request is this. If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question." Esther 5: 7 - 8

Esther is keeping Xerxes engaged with intrigue and building the moment up. She's clever to spend some more time with the King before addressing such a serious issue. Let him be reminded of how beautiful she is and how important to him she is as his Queen. And this tactic is working! Tomorrow, we'll check in on what's going on in Haman's mind during all of this.

Questions

What do you think was the purpose for Esther and her maids fasting for three days, following a practice of her faith she would have been taught as a child?

What are your thoughts on Esther's decision to delay revealing her true request? Was it strategic or manipulative?

Why do you think she wanted to invite Haman to the banquet instead of just telling her husband alone?

Day 12:

Esther: 5: 9 - 14

Haman plots with this family

The old phrase “misery loves company” couldn’t be more true in today’s events. Haman is on top of the world after attending Queen Esther’s banquet with the King. “But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.” Esther 5: 9

It’s really telling that Haman was hoping to see fear in the eyes of Mordecai since he knew that Mordecai and the Jews had a death sentence coming. But he saw no fear from Mordecai. Could it be that Mordecai was trusting in God to take care of the situation? Put yourself in Mordecai’s shoes. You know that Haman is responsible for this edict, yet you show no fear. Peace in the middle of the storm is extremely tough, so our anchor in the storm is to trust that God is working behind the scenes, even when we don’t see evidence of that yet. Perhaps Mordecai’s faith in his God is more powerful than his fear of his enemy.

When Haman gets home, he gathers his wife and friends and spends his time bragging about himself. Proverbs 16:18 tells us that pride precedes destruction, and this is certainly on full display here. It's a time for a heart check. If you find the need to boast about yourself or something you have done, ask yourself why? Perhaps a seed of insecurity is growing that needs to be addressed. Even when we feel justified in bragging about something that has happened to us, it’s never a good idea for us to boast.

Haman’s wife and friends know just what to say to this shallow man. “Have a gallows built, seventy-five feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy.” Esther 5:14 Could it be that Haman’s wife was tired of hearing about Mordecai and wanted him to do something about it? Whatever the reason, Haman LOVED this idea and had the gallows built. Pride in oneself breeds evil toward others.

All of this evil planning is happening and Mordecai has no idea. The enemy is delighting in evil, but while the hammers are striking the nails on the gallows, God is also behind the scenes working to fight for Mordecai. I can’t wait for you all to see what happens next!

Questions

When you feel angry about something, do you find yourself wanting to vent to your friends? What motivates this, and what tends to be the outcome?

Have you ever felt the urge to boast to others? If so, what drives you to do so?

How can you compassionately navigate relationships with individuals who exhibit signs of insecurity and feel compelled to boast about themselves?

Day 13:

Esther 6

Mordecai honored

Ever have a night where you can't sleep? That's no fun, right? The hours seem like an eternity. Xerxes has one of those sleepless nights. He asks an attendant to read the book of chronicles, a Persian historical record of kingdom events, most likely hoping this will put him to sleep. Ironically, the reading just so happens to land on the account of how Mordecai exposed the conspiracy of the king's officers who wanted to kill Xerxes. Seriously, of all the parts of that book to read, they just so happen to read that section, and more importantly, the king is awake to hear it. This is one of those great examples of God at work behind the scenes when we don't see Him.

Xerxes finds out from his attendants that nothing was done to honor Mordecai. At the exact same time, Haman is walking into the courtyard to seek an audience with the king and ask to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows.

Xerxes asks Haman what should be done for the man the king wants to honor. So Haman tells him his idea of dressing the honoree in the king's robe and parading him around on a royal horse yelling out, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor." All the while, Haman is thinking "that man" is himself.

Now, picture Haman's face when Xerxes says, "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew." v. 10 Oh to see Haman's reaction! I bet all the blood just ran out of his face! What's worse is that he is the person that will have to parade Mordecai around. Can you even imagine how humiliating this is when Haman has made such a big deal of Mordecai not bowing down to him? Think if you had to do the same, parading your mortal enemy around when you had hoped you would be getting all the glory. As Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

You know it was mortifying for Haman because it says he "rushed home, with his head covered in grief." Esther 6:12 Even upon arriving home to complain to all his friends and wife Zeresh, she says, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him – you will surely come to ruin!" Esther 6:13 I wonder if she's had a change of heart about those gallows?

Questions

Can you recall a situation in your own life where someone's attempts to undermine or bring harm to you inadvertently backfired? How did you handle the outcome?

God uses circumstances in our lives to grow us and teach us humility. Have you felt like He has done that in your life?

What are times in your life where you saw God's divine intervention?

Day 14

Esther 7

2nd Banquet and Esther tells what happened

Who says the Bible is boring? If they say that, then they haven't read this chapter from Esther. It reads like a best selling dramatic novel! Let's dive in!

As we last left our story, Haman faced the humiliation of parading Mordecai around town on a horse, praising him to the town's people. Now, Haman is headed to the palace to take part in the second banquet of Queen Esther. From the beginning of the banquet, the king is very curious about Esther's petition, after all, she has planned two banquets and he really doesn't know why. He's drinking wine and wants to know what her big request is. He says he'll give her whatever she wants. This is HUGE! If she believes him, perhaps she could ask for her life and half his kingdom, but Esther stays true to her purpose.

Esther displays pure brilliance in how she presents her request. "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life - this is my petition. And spare my people - this is my request." Esther 7:3 This was the big microphone drop moment, if they had them back then. This request had to come out of the blue for the king. He has no idea someone wants to kill his wife. Notice she starts her request with something he'd care about - his wife. That was really smart of her to make the request personal.

She also reveals that she and her people have been sold off for annihilation and destruction. Did you catch something there as well? She never names her people as Jews. She simply says "her people". She points the proverbial finger at "this vile Haman" as the one responsible. Upon learning this, Xerxes is so mad that he has to go burn off some steam and heads to the garden. With the king gone, Haman knows he's a dead man, so he begs Esther for his life. But just like out of a movie, Xerxes happens to come back in right when Haman is looking like he might assault Esther right there on the couch.

Xerxes has had enough! One of the king's eunuch's says, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." Esther 7:9 Doesn't it kinda feel like the eunuch didn't like Haman too? Anyway, the king orders Haman to be executed, so they kill him on the same gallows he built for Mordecai. Mind you, this all happened in just a few days. Look what God did when Esther and the Jewish people fasted and prayed for Him to intervene!

Questions

In examining closely how Esther approached the King for her request, what stands out to you?

How important is it to provide context to someone when making a request of them?

What role did the eunuch have in turning things around for Esther and her people?

Day 15

Esther 8: 1 - 17

Esther begs again and gets to make second edict

Evil Haman is dead, having been executed on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. Back at the palace, the king gives Esther all of Haman's estate, who in turn puts Mordecai in charge of it. Think about that for a minute. Mordecai is now in charge of the estate of the man that tried to kill not only him but all of his people. I'd call that a divine reversal! By the way, I'm pretty sure Haman's wife and sons weren't too happy about that arrangement.

Here's another first for our story. Esther reveals to Xerxes that Mordecai is actually her cousin. Because of this, Mordecai is called into the presence of the king. This is the first time we hear of the two of them meeting since Mordecai's relationship to Esther was kept under wraps. And if it couldn't get any better for Mordecai, the king gets his signet ring, the one he took back from dead Haman, and presents it to Mordecai. This is essentially the king giving Mordecai his seal of approval and the keys to the empire!

Can we stop here and celebrate for a second? Mordecai, took a stand to not bow down to Haman and was targeted by him for execution. Yet it was Haman who was ultimately destroyed by the trap he set. But wait, we have a problem! The edict to kill all the Jews is still in effect. Remember, once the king issues an edict, it can't be undone.

Esther cries and falls to the feet of the king begging that he put an end to this evil plan, but see how she uses humility in her request. “` If it pleases the king, she said, ` and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me'....”
Esther 8:5 The king allows both she and Mordecai to write another decree on behalf of the Jews. This new decree doesn't remove the death sentence of the Jews on a future date, but they now will have the right to assemble and fight anyone who attacks them. That day of reckoning will come - the 13th day of Adar.

When the Jews find out that the new decree buys them some time, their mourning turns to gladness. Oh, they still have a battle to come, but they can now fight back. With many months still ahead of them, they will have time to prepare for battle.

Questions

- 1) How does the unexpected turn of events reflect a divine reversal and a victory over the forces of evil?
- 2) How does Esther's strategic thinking persuade the king?
- 3) What significance do you see in King Xerxes giving his signet ring to Mordecai? Can you see the heart of God in this story and how does that translate to us today?

Day 16

Esther 9: 1 - 32

The day of the original edict is finally here. It's a day the enemies of the Jews were hoping to overpower them, but God had a different plan. How many "but God" moments have happened in your life? Something bad could have happened, but God saved you in the nick of time. Maybe something bad did happen, but God allowed good to come out of it. We need to look at those "but God" moments in our life and remember them. And, who knows how many times we have been rescued from something that we didn't even know anything about!

The Bible says the tables were turned on this day! Knowing those that hated the Jews were coming to destroy them, Esther's new edict allowed the people to assemble together and prepare to fight back.

I couldn't help but see the power of assembling when God's people come together. Don't get me wrong, God can do big things just through one believer, but when we come together and unite under a God-given purpose, we can accomplish so much more for the kingdom. As Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "One man is able to have power over him who is alone, but two can stand against him. It is not easy to break a rope made of three strings."

The enemy likes to scatter, isolate and keep us from gathering together in Christian fellowship. There are still countries that don't allow Christian churches to assemble to this day. The enemy of our soul can isolate us on an individual level as well. If you battle depression or anxiety, you may feel the desire to draw away from friends and family and be alone. You may even feel like you're a bother to others. Don't believe that lie! Learn the power of community with fellow believers. You weren't meant to go through this life alone! Fight the urge to hide and instead seek out relationships. It's your first step in fighting back for your very life!

Back to our story, Esther asks for one more day to allow the Jewish people to "protect themselves and get relief from their enemies." Esther 9:15 She also asks that Haman's sons be hanged on the gallows. The king grants her requests. In the end, the Jewish people are saved and celebrations ensue.

"Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor." Esther 9: 20 - 22

And that my friends, is the story of Purim and why it is still celebrated to this day. It's always important to remember the past and in this instance, to celebrate what God did to protect His people.

Questions

What "but God" moment has happened in your life?

Have you experienced a time in your life where you didn't feel like going to church or gathering with other believers? Why and how did that make you feel?

Why is it important to set aside time to remember what God has done in your life?

Day 17

Esther 10

“Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.” Esther 10: 3

We end our study of the book of Esther with a wonderful tribute to Mordecai. He worked behind the scenes to counsel Esther and encourage her to speak up to save her people. God elevated two of the most unlikely people to a status of power with the ultimate purpose of saving His people. Doesn't that give you some encouragement today? If God can use exiles in a foreign land, no one of any true power or significance, and make one of them the 2nd in command of the country and the other the queen, what more can he do through you? There is NOTHING that is impossible for our God. He may have been working behind the scenes in this story, but most assuredly, you can see the work of His mighty hands in every divine circumstance.

I hope you took some takeaway lessons with you as we studied Esther:

God is working on your behalf, even if you don't sense His presence.

Go to God first with your problems before everyone else.

God will elevate you in due time.

Doing nothing is not an option when God calls you to act.

I hope you've been encouraged by Esther's story that God is working on your behalf, even when you don't see Him. Ask Holy Spirit to show you what He's up to and to give you the ability to see and hear what He's doing. God is speaking and directing your steps. You just have to tune in!

We always end each HealingStrong Bible plan by pointing you to our ultimate victor, Jesus. He fought for each of us by taking on the sins of the world and dying on the cross for you and me. Each of us is a sinner, and there's nothing we can do to earn salvation on our own. But Jesus Christ, God's perfect Son, took your sin and mine, and He died on the cross so that we could have eternal life. If you haven't asked Jesus to be the Lord of your life and to forgive your sins, we want to invite you to ask Him now. It doesn't stop here. He desires a true relationship with you to guide you in life and help you along your own healing pathway.

Pray this prayer out loud:

“Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner and need your forgiveness. I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead. I trust you as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

If you prayed that prayer of salvation, please let us know! We’d love to hear from you! We have an amazing prayer team at HealingStrong that prays for each prayer request sent to us, and it would be our honor to lift your prayer need before our Heavenly Father. Please email us at prayerrequest@healingstrong.org and tell us how you heard about us.

Questions

1. What was your biggest lesson you learned from Esther’s story?
2. In what ways can you make more of an effort to see and hear what God is doing in your life?
3. Have you made Jesus the Lord of your life? If you haven’t, please do so today!

Trusting God’s Plan When You Don’t See Him: Lessons from the book of Esther was written by Cheryl Collins, a volunteer with HealingStrong. Find more of our Bible plans at our Ministries page at healingstrong.org.