

ESTHER STUDY 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.

Pre-Article Questions:

1. 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/she do?
2. What are some of the biggest issues of injustice in the world and our society today?

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."¹ 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."² 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. "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."³

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."⁴ 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 broken by her only living relative's distress, she practiced restraint and wisdom by sending the King's eunuch, Hathach, rather than going herself.

1. Moore, Beth. *Esther: It's Tough Being A Woman*. LifeWay Press: Nashville, TN. 2008. p. 90.

2. Joel 2:12-13. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 1996.

3. Ironside, H.A. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. Kregel Publications: Michigan, 2008. 177.

4. *Esther 4:2. The Holy Bible, New International Version*.

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.”⁵ 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.”⁶

As college students, we need to realize that we too are in a place of power and influence, coming into 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.⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.

Esther 4, NIV

1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. 4 When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great

5. Esther 4:15. The Holy Bible, New International Version.

6. Breneman, Marvin. The New American Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. Vol. 10. Ed. E. Ray Clendenen. B&H Publishing Group: Nashville: TN. 1993.

7. “World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision. File 1: Total population (both sexes combined) by five-year age group.” United Nations: Population Division. <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/publications.htm>. 13 February 2012.

8. Ephesians 1:11. The Holy Bible, New International Version.

distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. 9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 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 your royal position for such a time as this?" 15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." 17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions

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 we are Your daughters and walk in Your power. I bless You and thank You, God, for all You want to do through me. Amen.

Scripture 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 vent 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 Partner Assignment:

This week you will be meeting with a girl from your small group to memorize scripture, re-read the text for this week, and discuss what God is speaking to you through the Chapter. Please use this time to pursue the Lord together and deepen your relationship as sisters.

1. Memory Verse: Joel 2:12-13
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Four