

Day 1
September 9



Pray | For your faith to endure in a secular society

A GREAT way for governments to harvest the confidence of their people and instill fear in their enemies is to put their military power, riches, and nobility on display.

As repeated time and time again throughout history, wealth, power, and riches are temporary. It's difficult to imagine the United States not being the World's top superpower. It's all we know. It's all the people of the following nations, empires, and superpowers knew throughout their histories: Great Britain, France, Spain, Russia, Ottoman, Mongolia, Persian, Roman, Greece, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt. The leaders of each of these nations as well as King Xerxes in today's scripture readings and even one of the heroes of our faith, King Solomon, were not immune from the desire for prestige, power, and excess. Their leadership styles most likely reflected their own interpersonal relationships.



Read | Esther 1:1-4, 2 Chronicles 9:15-16



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Every nation or empire mentioned in today's introduction, including the United States, have something in common...God is not central. What are the main driving forces behind the rule of nations and empires over time? What might this reflect how the powerful relate to their people? How might it reflect some of our own relationships with others in our lives?

Temporary is another commonality the aforementioned nations and empires share. They probably all had great 100-year plans in place, but they ultimately failed. Only God's kingdom and plans are eternal. How can you make God central to your hopes and plans?

Apart from God, temporary or short-term success can be found, but failure and destruction will be the ultimate result. Spend time in prayer today and ask God how you can come alongside individuals in your life that are living apart from God.

Day 2
September 10



Pray | Tell God you will celebrate him

IMAGINE A 4th of July celebration lasting for six months. Then the President provides an extension of the celebration continuing for another seven days of limitless, intense excess and debauchery.

This would be a great way for any nation's leader to gain the love and admiration of their people. Make no mistake, Jesus and his disciples often partook in meals and parties. However, their purposes were very different from the party in today's scripture verses. They were not for selfish reasons, were not excessive, and served a purpose in God's mission.



Read | Esther 1:5-8, 1 Peter 4:1-11



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

The type of banquet described in today's scripture verses was based on idolatry and pride. Idolatry and pride are resilient and they persevere through all cultural boundaries. What are some idols, ungodly sources of joy or pride, in your life? Start with concentrating on just one and pray about how you can overcome it.

The activities mentioned in 1 Peter 4:3-4 indicate our society is not all that different from Peter's time or any other time in history. What do you think it is about the human condition that allows for activities like these to take place? How can you, as a follower of Jesus Christ, set yourself apart from a society where some of these activities are considered normal?

Consider hosting a gathering for members of your small group, your neighbors, co-workers, or schoolmates. Prayerfully ask God how you can make your gathering glorify him and ask for the Holy Spirit to be present.

Day 3
September 11



Pray | Ask God for the strength to live just for him

WE LIVE in a society where marriage can sometimes be cheap or meaningless. People “earn” their way in and out of friendships or family relationships. Interpersonal relationships are often conditional or based on what people think others deserve.

Thankfully, we do not have to earn our relationship with God and his grace is unconditional even though we do not deserve it!



Read | Esther 1:9-12, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Xerxes issued his command to Vashti as her king, not as a husband. Her subservience seemed to be a condition of their relationship. What are some conditions that people put on their marriages or friendships in our society? How might 2 Corinthians 12:9 impact the nature of your relationships?

What conditions do you put on your relationship with God? How do you react when you perceive that he has not met your conditions or answered your prayers?

God’s grace and love are present even during times of great personal turmoil and suffering. How has God presented his grace and love to you during a difficult time? Share your experience with someone in your life who might be far from God.

Day 4
September 12



Pray | Ask Jesus to be central in all your relationships

A RELATIONSHIP with Jesus is not forced on anyone. Faith in Jesus has more to do with a heart transformation than laws, requirements, or force. The relationship, as revealed in today's scripture verses, demonstrates how Xerxes was trying to make himself the center of his marriage to Vashti.

Interpersonal relationships not centered in Jesus have conditions which no one can realistically meet. The grace of Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and impending return is unconditional. Relationships with people can never be perfect or easy, but can be filled with grace, kindness, love, and forgiveness with Jesus as the focus.



Read | Esther 1:13-18, Matthew 6:21



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

The relationship between Xerxes and Vashti was clearly not based on love, mutual respect, or grace. Instead, the relationship was based on Xerxes' own vanity, his power, and his status. What conditions have you put on some of your closest relationships? Pray for room for Jesus in those relationships.

Consider some of the best-selling rock bands, top grossing movies, and most watched TV shows over the past few decades. How do some of them mimic the relationship between Xerxes and Vashti? What can you learn from this and apply to your relationships?

Where do you spend most of your time and money? If your answer does not align with love for God and love for others, what might you need to ask God to change within you?

Day 5
September 13



Pray | For God's power and presence

God is not mentioned by name in the book of Esther. However, his power and providence are quite evident. God used the damaged relationship between Xerxes and Vashti to bring Esther onto the scene. God used Esther to rescue his people and fulfill his promise of the Messiah.

God is the only true eternal superpower. God's relationship with his people is completely reliable, eternal, graceful, and trustworthy. God always keeps his promises and never lets his people down.



Read | Esther 1:19-22



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Can you think of any difficult circumstances or relationships in your life that God used to bring you closer to him? Spend time in prayer and give thanks to God for remaining faithful through your difficulties and making your relationship with him stronger.

If you do not yet have a relationship with Jesus Christ, know that he loves you unconditionally. You cannot earn his grace—it is given to you as a gift without conditions. Open your mind and open your heart today. Ask Jesus to be your partner and ask him into your heart.

This week's scripture verses indicate Esther's era was dark and untamed. God's presence may have seemed absent back then and it may seem absent today. God is not losing. He will use the shortcomings and sinfulness of today's society for his good, just as he has done all throughout his eternal history. Pray about how you can make God's hope evident to someone who does not yet have a relationship with him.

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