

Day 1

September 16



Pray | Praise God for his faithfulness throughout his story

GOD'S WILL IS accomplished through *all* of creation

If you read the book of Esther as a stand-alone short story, you may not realize that it's part of the Bible; the story never once mentions God.

However, when you read this story in the larger context of the Bible, you quickly see God at work behind the scenes, keeping his promises and executing his plan to redeem our fallen world. We see God using unlikely people -- weak, compromised and lost people -- as heroes. His enemies are used as integral parts of the plan, and God's chosen people once again are spared from destruction.

As you read the story of Esther, you might be tempted to judge the actions of Esther and Mordecai, but by the end, most of us can see ourselves in them. We live in the same fallen world that they did, and we all face difficult choices in this life. We also serve the same Almighty God who accomplishes great things through weak, compromised and lost people, people like us. Praise God!



Read | Esther 2:1-11, Jeremiah 29:11



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

Read the words of Jeremiah 29:11 again. These words were written to give the children of Israel hope as they faced exile in Babylon, but they apply to followers of Jesus today as well. Reflect on a situation in your life in which these words brought you hope when you needed it most. Or perhaps a situation where these words could've brought hope, but didn't, because you were not depending on God. Ask God to help you make this hope your primary hope, so it never leaves you.

History says that four years passed between the dismissal of Queen Vashti and the story we read today. In that time, King Xerxes had suffered a great defeat in battle with the Greeks. He returned from battle less angry and desiring the companionship of a wife, which makes this entire story of Esther possible. Isn't it truly amazing how God used these events to accomplish his purposes? How does this reality encourage you as you observe the events of the fallen world around us?

Day 2
September 17



Pray | Ask God for strength to live as a citizen of his kingdom today

IF JESUS IS your Lord, you are a foreigner and alien in this world

Mordecai and Esther were Jews living in the governmental center of Persia, but they were so assimilated into the culture that they were no longer recognizable as Jews. They had faced a difficult choice: to live distinctly in obedience to God, and bear the consequences of such a life, or compromise and make life easier. This willingness to assimilate and compromise identity was the great failure of God's chosen people in the Old Testament. But that was just an Old Testament problem, right? Wrong! Followers of Jesus today are also called to a distinct lifestyle with priorities that declare that Jesus is Lord. The story of Mordecai and Esther should be both a wake-up call and a source of encouragement. Compromise and assimilation into the world is contrary to everything Jesus taught, but we can be encouraged knowing that God is still active and in control.



Read | Esther 2:1-11, 1 Peter 2:11-17



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

Like Esther and Mordecai, we all need to make choices about how we live our lives. If you are a follower of Christ, take a few minutes to reflect on how you are living as a citizen of God's kingdom. Does your life reflect God's priorities, loving God above all and your neighbor as yourself? A life lived like that will get people's attention, and open doors to tell others about the source of your hope, and ultimately bring glory to God. Ask God to reveal areas in your life in which you can better make his priorities yours.

If you are not yet a believer in Christ, it's not too late to ask Jesus to be your Savior. If God is using the story of Esther to call you to make Jesus your Lord, please respond. Go to God in prayer and share your thoughts and your heart. Then reach out to a Christian friend or pastor and share your decision with them, so you can get connected into a local church – the body of Christ.

Day 3
September 18



Pray | Ask God to continue to reveal your role in his plan

GOD REGULARLY USES unlikely people to accomplish his plan

The Bible is full of stories of imperfect people being empowered by God to accomplish great things in his unfolding story. Esther and Mordecai eventually save the Jews from destruction. Joseph comes out of prison to lead Egypt and save the father of Israel in a famine. Rahab the prostitute helps Israel conquer Jericho. Mary, the teenager from Nazareth, is the mother of Jesus.

More than just great stories, these are examples of what our all-powerful God can accomplish with normal people who choose to obey. Every follower of Jesus is called to fill an important role in God's unfolding plan. We start by trusting in God's strength, not our own, and then stepping out in obedience to the direction God has given.



Read | Esther 2:12-18, Genesis 41:37-40, Daniel 2:46-49



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

Which of the stories of unlikely people being used for God's purposes inspires you the most? Reflect on opportunities in your life where God might be calling you to accomplish even more for his purposes. Pick one and take a first small step in that direction today.

As beings created in God's image, we were created to live in close communion with God. This is why living in a fallen and sinful world is never fully satisfying and complete. The closest we can get to that perfect communion, in this world, is when we're living in obedience and dependence on God. In a recent sermon, Pastor Craig Groeschel said, "I believe, you are never closer to God than when you are caring for widows and orphans." (James 1:27). If your life is feeling empty, that's God calling you into a closer relationship with him. Go to him in prayer today and ask him to reveal new opportunities for you to serve him, and in doing so be closer to him.

It's easy to limit our own vision for what God could do through us based on our own skills and resources. We forget that everything we have comes from God, and he will always provide the things we need to accomplish his purposes. Reflect on some concrete ways to remind yourself each day that your potential is limitless in God's hands.

Day 4
September 19



Pray | Ask God to give you a new heart for the powerless in the world

IN GOD'S EYES, the powerless are most powerful.

As you read the story of Esther it may be fairly easy to gloss over the tragedy that took place in the lives of all the women who were rounded up by the king and forced to become his wives. Those women were faced with a choice of compliance or death – that is the definition of human powerlessness. From our empowered lives in the US, it's next to impossible to relate to true human powerlessness, but for millions in our world today, slavery and absolute poverty are real. The Bible is packed with evidence that God's heart is with the powerless, and that we are called to align our hearts with God's.

It's also critical to remember that human powerlessness does not mean true powerlessness. Those with the least human power often have the most powerful connection to God, and their witness of God's faithfulness is a most powerful way to bring glory to God.



Read | Psalm 12:3-5, Isaiah 58:6-10, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29



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

Isaiah 58:6-10 states that if you care for those in need two things will happen for you (at least): 1. God will answer your cry for help (v 9). 2. Your light will rise in the darkness (v 10). Serving those in need helps grow both the server and the person being served. How does this reality impact your desire and obedience when it comes to serving people in need? The Five Oaks Impact ministry helps all of us find ways to serve people in need. Check out the Impact Center at church, grab an Impact Passport, and get started!

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Paul reveals the true contrast between how humans and God each view status, strength, influence and human wisdom. Take a few minutes to reflect on your own perspective. Are you more closely aligned with the world's view or God's view? Ask God to help you align your views and your heart more closely to his.

Day 5
September 20



Pray | Ask God for wisdom to live a life that draws his favor

GOD'S FAVOR AND man's favor are signs of a citizen of God's Kingdom

Esther had finished all her preparations, and finally it was her time to be with the king. The story shares an interesting assessment of Esther here: she "*won the favor of everyone who saw her.*" While we don't know the full context, the idea of **winning favor** is a common theme in the Bible, used to describe someone who will achieve great things for God's kingdom. Noah, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, Mary and Jesus are all described as having God's favor. The good news is that God's favor is available to each of us. Proverbs 3:3-4 tells us that love and faithfulness are the keys to winning God's favor. Lives lived with love and faithfulness at the core are unique. They reflect the heart of God, provide a glimpse of life in God's perfect kingdom, and draw others into that kingdom.



Read | Esther 2:15, Proverbs 3:1-4, Luke 2:52

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

Proverbs 3:3-4 calls out love and faithfulness as the key to winning God's favor. Later in the same chapter (verse 34) says that the humble and oppressed receive God's favor. Reflect on these four words (love, faithfulness, humble, oppressed) and then picture a life that reflects them. Is this the life you are striving to live? Ask for God's wisdom and guidance on how you can increasingly win his favor. Identify a meaningful next step you can take now to move you more into God's favor.

The idea of winning God's favor and man's favor are frequently mentioned together in the Bible. Does it surprise you that the Bible includes winning man's favor as well? Take a few minutes to reflect on why the Bible might include both, the relationship between winning God's favor and man's favor, and how that plays out in your life.

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