

Day 1
September 30



Pray | For God to help rid your heart of all anger

THE PLOT

He couldn't stop thinking about it. That man – a Jew, no less – who refused to kneel. The arrogance! He would have revenge on the man. No, he would have more than that – he deserved more than that; he had worked doggedly to get to this position of power and no Jew was going to stand before him as though they were equals. He would destroy them all. Every man, woman, and child. He knew how to prey upon the king's weaknesses – his worries about another assassination plot, his recent devastating failure against the Grecian army. He would convince the king that these Jews were causing trouble and that they must be annihilated. Revenge. Wait, not revenge... justice.



Read | Esther 3:5-9; Ephesians 4:26-27, 30-32



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

Haman wasn't just angry at Mordecai – he was 'enraged' and he held on to his rage, cultivated it, and followed it to an evil outcome. Imagine if Haman had followed Paul's words in Eph 4:26-27 instead – how might the story have been different?

No one is immune to the feeling of anger. However, the Bible is very clear on what we should and shouldn't do with our anger. Why? What happens when we let anger take hold of us? Take some time to ask God to search your heart for any bitterness or anger and ask for his forgiveness.

According to Ephesians, anger 'grieves the Holy Spirit of God' (Eph 4:30). Do you struggle with anger or bitterness? Would you consider confessing this struggle to someone and seeking out both prayer and help?

Day 2

October 1



Pray | For discernment when listening to what the world says

THE DISCERNMENT OF DECEPTION

In his podcast ‘The Briefing,’ Albert Mohler – president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary – looks at current news articles and discusses them from a Christian worldview. He pays attention both to what is said in the articles and what is not said; he asks questions about the use of specific terms and how they might be used to influence the reader. He does this because he knows that language can be used to manipulate an audience, and sometimes people withhold information or state opinions as facts. By asking questions and paying close attention to the use of language, Mr. Mohler is able to distill the message of the article and compare it to Biblical truth. If only King Xerxes had payed closer attention to Haman’s request in today’s verses – he may have realized he was being deceived.



Read | Esther 3:8-10; Proverbs 2:1-5



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

Look carefully at Esther 3:8-9. How does Haman’s choice of words influence the king? What information is Haman leaving out? Where is he stating opinions as facts, or perhaps is exaggerating? Reflect on those who influence you – are they like Haman?

There are plenty of ways the world around us uses language to influence our thinking. It can be subtle, like exchanging ‘tax cuts’ with ‘tax relief,’ or the slightly less subtle ‘marriage equality’ replacing ‘same-sex marriage.’ As Christians, how do we recognize and respond to worldly influence over our values?

Proverbs 2:1-5 gives answers to the question of how to discern truth in a cacophony of competing voices. Read this passage again, slowly, and list the ways God gives us wisdom. How can you start applying these concepts to your life today?

Day 3
October 2



Pray | That God will be first in your heart

CARELESS CRUELTY

The potential is there – we all have the capacity for it. There are myriad ways we trample over others; not because we’ve been wronged and we’re angry, but because our focus has gradually shifted to be centered on one person: me. When our quest turns from serving God and others and becomes a journey to fulfill the self, the inevitable result is careless cruelty; the complete disregard for others because there is absolutely no consideration of anyone else.

For King Xerxes, it was an extreme example of careless cruelty. To preserve his own power and authority, he handed a death sentence to thousands of innocents with a toss of his ring to Haman. And then he sat down to have a drink.



Read | Esther 3:10-15; Philippians 2:3-8



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

It’s likely that you’ll never unfeelingly order the death of thousands of innocent people. However, there are countless ways that we carelessly cause pain to other people. What are some examples of this in your own life? How can you reconcile with those you’ve hurt?

Putting our own desires first is human nature, so we can easily fall into a habit of it – and the result is selfishness, pride, and sometimes, careless disregard for others. God desires a better life for us. How is Jesus a model for this, as Paul describes in Phil 2:3-8?

Think over your thoughts and actions during the past few days. How often have your thoughts and actions been focused on yourself rather than on God and on serving others? What are some ways you can train your mind to put God and others first?

Day 4
October 3



Pray | To no longer conform to the pattern of this world

JUSTIFYING THE MEANS

In his book, *Faith Among the Faithless*, Mike Cospers posits, “One of the ideological fantasies of a secular age is the dream of absolute tolerance” (p. 100). In this utopia, everyone would be free to pursue happiness in any way they want, without shame or guilt, and free from moral judgments. This is a captivating vision for many people, and Cospers’s point is that once people are captivated by the fantasy, any evils done in the achievement of it get justified. Here’s where the problem arises: Christians see that the vision of such a world, one of absolute tolerance, is a lie. We become ‘the enemy,’ due to our biblical views on the fall, the presence of sin in the world, the sanctity of life, on marriage, and on sexuality. We become like the Jews in Esther: separate, with different customs and beliefs; easy to point to as an enemy. And any means of destroying an enemy can be justified.



Read | Esther 3:6-11; Romans 12:2



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

U.S. Christians have never suffered evil persecution like that suffered by our brothers and sisters in North Korea or Afghanistan. What we have seen in the U.S. is a growing pressure to abandon traditional biblical beliefs, or at least remain silent about them. In what ways have you observed this? In what ways have you been directly affected?

Paul exhorts us to no longer conform to the pattern of this world – to be in the world but not of it. What are some ways you can practice this in your daily life?

Ironically, the secular dream of ‘absolute tolerance’ seems to have little tolerance for bible-believing Christians. How will you respond to the growing intolerance of orthodox views - will you change your beliefs? Have you already changed your beliefs? Will you remain quiet? Spend the next few minutes in prayer, seeking the Spirit’s guidance.

Day 5

October 4



Pray | For a life rooted and built up in Christ

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO EVIL

The darkness is obvious in Haman’s plan of genocide, and in King Xerxes’ willing participation. The murder of innocent men, women, and children is unequivocally evil. However, evil is not always so obvious. Anyone who is not saturated in God’s Word and not abiding in Jesus is vulnerable to the lies of the culture, such as: there is no objective truth, there are no universal standards for marriage and sexuality, how you feel is who you are, and life is about your personal happiness. As Mike Cosper reveals in *Faith Among the Faithless* (p106), our Christian response should be twofold: to relentlessly fight to “unmask and unroot” the culture’s lies, and to “compassionately help” those who have been taken in by the lies.



Read | Esther 3:12-14; Colossians 2:2-10



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

To unmask evil in our world, first we must recognize it. Paul tells us how in Colossians 2; to paraphrase, we must know Christ. How can knowing Christ help us recognize evil? What are the ways we can get to know Christ?

One way to help an unbeliever see the culture’s lies is to open their eyes to how God sees the world and each of us. Think about how you would explain this to someone who doesn’t know God. What would you say?

Perhaps you’re just beginning to understand how you have been shaped by a secular culture and there is a part of you that longs for truth. Did you know that truth is a person, and you can know him? His name is Jesus, and he has been longing for you, too! Ask a pastor or trusted friend about him today.

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