

Day 1

October 28



Pray | For unity among God's people

A NEW TRADITION

Even if you don't wear your team colors to the big game, you won't be able to hide your fan identity for long. It will be obvious as soon as you celebrate your team's first score! The things we celebrate, the traditions we keep, the events we commemorate – they can both set us apart from, and tie us together in, community. For a people facing the choice to assimilate into the prevailing culture or remain true to their ethnic and religious roots, establishing traditions and celebrations unique to their own culture both encourages unity among a people group and helps to separate them from the rest of society. This is what happens near the end of the book of Esther.



Read | Esther 9:20-25



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

It would have been tough for a Jew in Persia to keep their heritage hidden while participating in a Jewish festival. Have you ever found yourself hiding a part of who are among one group, but celebrating it openly when with another group? Have you ever hidden your Christian faith? Why?

Most ethnic and religious groups have their own unique traditions and celebrations. What are the Christian traditions or celebrations that mean the most to you? Why? If you thought of a tradition about which you don't know the whole history, take some time to research why and how this tradition began.

As Christians, we walk a tightrope between interacting with the world yet remaining separate from its sinfulness. This is no easy task. In what ways are you being led by the current culture away from God? Consider confessing your answers to a trusted Christian friend and asking for prayer.

Day 2

October 29



Pray | Celebrate what God has done in your life

A NEW CELEBRATION

The festival of Purim was the first new festival established by the Jewish people in over 800 years, which says something about the importance of the events of the book of Esther in Jewish history. In fact, Purim is still celebrated today. The festival begins with a reading of the book of Esther, during which the audience is encouraged to boo, hiss, and use noisemakers every time Haman's name is read. This is a lively, fun festival, with kids and adults sometimes dressed up in costumes and most adults enjoying plenty of alcoholic beverages. There is also a feast, of course; in addition, it's customary to give gifts to the poor. How incredible that for over 2,500 years, the Jewish people have been commemorating, through the Purim festival, God's preservation of Israel.



Read | Esther 9:23-27



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

Once each year, the Jewish people come together to listen to, and participate in (using noisemakers and their voices), a reading of the Book of Esther. If you were to choose one book of the Bible that you think all Christians should read together once a year, what would it be and why?

What are some of the reasons that Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish people decided to establish the festival of Purim? Why do you think this celebration has survived for 2,500 years? Do we have anything similar in our Christian faith tradition?

The Purim traditions form a tie between the Jewish community of the past, the present, and the future. What are some things we, as Christians, can do in the present to ensure that our faith continues to be passed on through future generations?

Day 3

October 30



Pray | Praise God for your identity as his child

A WAY OF LIFE

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. experienced a mini religious revival – significant increases in church attendance and sales of Bibles. It lasted only a short time; a bubble that quickly popped. The big, crucial events in life may cause a moment of spiritual awakening – which is important – but it doesn't last without a deeper commitment. Being Christian involves more than making a one-time decision to accept Jesus; it is a way of life. As Mike Cosper explains in his book, *Faith Among the Faithless*, Esther ends with the call to celebrate Purim as a reminder “that our identity is easily forgotten, that the enemy is prowling and hungry, and that no matter what, God preserves his people” (p169).



Read | Esther 9:28-32



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

The annual celebration of Purim is one way the Jewish people are reminded of their identity as Jews. What types of regular events or practices do you observe that serve as reminders of your identity as a child of God? Spend a few moments brainstorming a new event or practice you could institute as a reminder of your identity in Christ.

Following Jesus is not about making a one-time decision; it's about a way of life. Is this apparent in your life lately? What evidence of your commitment to God can be seen by the people in your life?

Why do you think church attendance increased, then quickly decreased again, after the 9/11 attacks? How is this similar to and different from the story of Esther and the establishment of Purim?

Day 4
October 31



Pray | Remember with thanksgiving the miracle of your salvation

A TIME TO REMEMBER

The Book of Esther could have ended at chapter 9, verse 19. The Jews were victorious over their enemies in Persia, and then they had a party to celebrate. The end. But it's not the end – it's the beginning of a renewal of the Jewish faith. Through God's provision to them, Mordecai and Esther are elevated among the Jewish people to the point where they have the authority to establish the festival of Purim. God also gives them the wisdom to understand the importance of remembering the miracle of the salvation of the Jewish people and the renewal of their religion. Mordecai and Esther created an annual event that, to this very day, serves as a call to all Jews to remember their identity as God's chosen people.



Read | Esther 9:29-31; Luke 22:13-20



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

The miracle of our salvation as Christians was Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus himself established the method we are to use to remember what he did for us on the cross, as we read in Luke 22. Take some time to think about the billions of Christians who have repeated the act of communion over the past 2,000 years. What does this mean to you?

Christians celebrate two holidays each year that are vital to our faith: Christmas and Easter. These two holidays have been commercialized to the point that they are no longer uniquely celebrated by people who confess faith in Jesus. What traditions have you created to 'take back' these holidays for Jesus? What are some new ways you can celebrate that will serve as reminders of the miracles of Jesus' birth and his resurrection?

Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross to save you from your sins? Have you made a decision to accept his gift of salvation? If not – if you're not sure what to believe and you have questions, please reach out to a pastor or Christian friend today!

Day 5

November 1



Pray | Thank God for his faithfulness even when we are faithless

THE WAY BACK TO GOD

“It is the story of a group of people finding their way back to God through a darkened world; finding their voice for faithful, vulnerable witness; and seeking to ensure that the generations after them don’t make the same mistake” (Mike Cosper, *Faith Among the Faithless*, p172). Cosper wrote this description about the book of Esther, but it could easily describe our story today. Maybe you feel overwhelmed by how far our culture has strayed from God. Or perhaps you’ve strayed along with it and are lost in this dark world. Wherever you find yourself today, step into this truth: The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.



Read | Esther 10:1-3; Psalms 100:1-5



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

At some point in our lives, all of us need to remember the lessons Esther teaches us about re-awakening our faith and stepping back from a faithless world. Take some time to assess how assimilated you might be to our current culture. What are some ways you can step back from darkness and forward toward the light of God?

It took great courage for Mordecai to defy Haman and for Esther to approach King Xerxes, especially after hiding their faith for so long. Are there any ways that you’ve been hiding your faith in God? Ask God for the courage to be a faithful witness to him.

We all have a responsibility to teach and disciple the next generation in the Christian faith. It could be as a parent, a youth group or children’s ministry volunteer, a relative, or even by sharing your faith with other adults who then pass their faith on to their own children. What are some of the ways you are doing this now or that you could start doing in the future?

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