The Chosen Life
Studies in Esther

Session 16 – The Turning Point | Esther Chapter 5

Esther risks her life by approaching the king without permission. Haman escalates his revenge against Mordecai.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how events begin to shift in favor of God's people.
- Consider the contrast between Esther's wisdom and Haman's pride.
- Pray honest prayers that surrender complacency and stretch your capacity to trust.

Ice Breaker

When was the last time you did something way outside your comfort zone?

Esther's Wisdom

Esther 5:1–8
After three days of fasting, Esther was prepared to go to the king. Her plan was simple, but it involved great risk.

1. **Hurry up and wait.** Esther waited for three days to act, even though her decision was made. Most of us don't wait well. But in the Bible, waiting is more than just passing time. In the Psalms, David (who preached to himself through song) wrote, *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord"* (Psalm 27:14 NASB).

   Remember Nehemiah? While he prayed and fasted, a plan was forming in his mind. Esther did the same thing for those three days between chapter four and chapter five. God put iron in her soul and a plan in her mind.

   At this point in the story, what stands out most to you about Esther?

In Hebrew, ***wait*** comes from a root word for twisting or winding a cord. It means "*hope*" and indicates **active** and **focused planning** as you wait to hear from God with the intent to obey.

2. Esther's first risk was going to the king's inner court. Explain why his response was crucial.

   a. Esther's approach was crucial as well. It wasn't enough to show up and say *did I catch you at a bad time*. She took care to approach the king in a pleasing, respectful manner. Note what she did to accomplish this.

      Verses 1–2

      Verses 3–5

Good to Know

Excavations of Xerxes' palace reveal a vast hall thought to be the king's court. Measuring over 120,000 square feet, this vast area was supported by 72 columns estimated to be 68 to 80 feet tall. That's nearly double the size and taller than the White House.

3. Esther exhibited strength and courage, and now we see another crucial trait: discernment. She possessed intuitive good timing. But that does not guarantee a risk-free environment. Imagine Esther's relief as Xerxes extends the scepter and the immediate danger is past—but there are more hazards to navigate.

   a. After the king and Haman enjoy their meal, Xerxes again asks Esther what her request is. Why did she wait and invite them back for a second banquet? Consider some possible reasons and share your thoughts.

   b. The narrator doesn't explain Esther's motive for delaying her request, but there is more here than meets the eye. Safe to say, Esther went to bed that night praying the next day would go as she hoped. Haman climbed into bed gloating about his "in" with the king and queen—and dreamed of hanging Mordecai high. But the king? Look at Esther 6:1 and note how *he* spent that night.

   c. Providence is easier to spot in hindsight. We see how the king's sleepless night fit into God's plan but what about our sleepless nights? Do you believe that God is actively involved in the daily affairs of your life? In what way?

4. Mordecai's *for-such-a-time-as-this* challenge woke Esther up. She had to do something. But what? And how? Three days of focused waiting on God gave Esther courage and wisdom she didn't know she had.

   a. Does Esther's example motivate you to action? In what way?

The will to obey is our decision.

The power to obey is God's provision.

   b. Identify a situation you need courage and wisdom to deal with. Is it more difficult for you to pray and wait? Or to plan and take action? In either case, what can you be certain of?

      2 Corinthians 3:5

      2 Corinthians 9:8

      Philippians 4:13

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,
making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.
Ephesians 5:15–16 NIV

Think About It . . .

If you could discuss this verse with Esther, what do you think she would say? What might she tell us about being intentional with our time and opportunities?

Haman's Pride

Esther 5:9–14
Previously, Mordecai would not bow to Haman when he walked by. This time, he refused to stand or even acknowledge Haman's presence.

1. Haman was in high spirits when he left Esther's banquet. But his mood flipped like a nickel when he encountered Mordecai. After legislating a death warrant against him, what reaction did Haman want from Mordecai?

   a. What did Haman do to nurse his bruised ego?

   b. What did Haman's wife and friends suggest to make him feel better?

2. **Self-importance and other annoying habits.** Haman is the villain we boo, a wicked man who apparently had no redeeming qualities. So, who in the group wants to raise their hand first to identify with Haman? Truth be told, we all know something about this. Human hearts just naturally default to pride.

   Haman is the extreme. The magnifying-glass version of lessons we do well to learn.

   a. Pride's appetite. Listening to Haman prate on and on about himself, you'd think he could talk himself right back into a good mood. But he wasn't counting his blessings—he was keeping score. Selfish ambition poisoned everything Haman touched. What about us?

      Romans 12:3

      1 Timothy 6:6–7, 11

   b. Pride's fool. Haman thought the gallows was a great idea! By the next day, he would be asking himself why he ever listened. But they only told him what he wanted to hear. Have you ever followed (or given) bad advice because it went along with how you felt? What would you do differently now?

      Where can we *always go* for good counsel?

      Proverbs 8:14, 17

      2 Timothy 2:16–17

3. Haman's *every-time-I-see-Mordecai* rant sent his ego into a tailspin. Why so consumed? It wasn't about protocol, it was about control. Does Haman's example warn and motivate you to action? In what way?

"God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves."

D.L. Moody

a. Why is pride such a dangerous attitude to indulge or even tolerate in ourselves? Consider the warnings in Scripture and explain in your own words.

Proverbs 26:12

James 3:14–16

Revelation 3:17–19

b. What is the perfect antidote for pride?

1 Corinthians 13:4–6

Philippians 2:3–4

James 4:6–8

Gospel at a Glance: The Golden Scepter | The king who could justly sentence Esther to death for coming unbidden into his presence, extended the golden scepter. When Esther came near and touched the tip, her safety in his presence was assured and her petition would be granted. All she had to do was ask. We see traces of the gospel, not in Esther's flawed king, but in her approach to the throne. "For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). God graciously extends salvation to all who come near through the cross of Jesus Christ. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24 NIV).

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will take time to pray—for others and for ourselves, for our church, our communities, and our nation.

As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

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