



# ESTHER

for such a time as this

*This devotion was written by Common Ground Church in Cape Town, South Africa in 2020, during the national COVID-19 lockdown.*

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*All Bible references are from the New International Version translation, accessed through <https://classic.biblegateway.com/>*

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*Commentaries leaned on for developing this resource include:*

- Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars (Zondervan, 2010).*
- Michael Eaton, Preaching Through Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (2001).*
- Terran Williams, Esther Commentary developed for a Common Ground Church sermon series in 2013 by the same name.*

# INTRODUCTION

The book of Esther is set in Susa, capital of the Persian Empire. In the Bible, it fits between Ezra 6 and 7 (chronologically). Some Israelites had returned to Israel following their exile under Babylon, but most were scattered throughout the Persian Empire. They had abandoned the idolatry that had brought them under God's judgement (and into captivity), but, as exiles, they still lacked the freedom to freely proclaim the God of salvation.

Esther occurs from about 483 BC. By the time this account begins, Xerxes had been ruling the vast Persian Empire for 3 years. Persia stretched from India to Ethiopia (1:1), an area of about 2 million square miles. The Persian king would soon face a nation changing crisis - the Greeks (who had submitted to the previous kings) began to rebel. War would break out between Greece and Persia

This book teaches us about how God positions his people for impact, sometimes even national impact. While trials and uncertainty can abound, God's purposes are still being realised and his kingdom is still advancing. We learn much about God's sovereignty over empires, circumstances and history in Esther. We also see how he uses ordinary individuals to do great things when they live in humility and obedience to his call.



# ESTHER 1:1-8



*This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: 2 At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, 3 and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. 4 For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.*

*5 When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. 6 The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. 7 Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. 8 By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.*



## CONSIDER:

Xerxes was arguably the most powerful king of the world's greatest kingdom at the time of Esther. Over the 180 days and following 7-day banquet, Xerxes displayed his priorities well: power, popularity, possessions and pleasure. History tells us that all Xerxes' abundance would be lost in the end. The Greeks would defeat the Persians and usher in a new kingdom. What Xerxes thought was stable and permanent, would turn out to be temporary and unstable. Similarly, our

world today seems to be facing their own seismic shift in stability as this virus has spread.

- What has Covid-19's impact on the world highlighted to you in terms of what is temporary and unstable versus permanent and stable in society?
- Over this time, have you noticed that you have placed more of your confidence in temporary things than you've realised? Name some of them.

### **PRAYER:**



*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17)*

Spend some time prayerfully considering how steadfast Jesus and his kingdom are in comparison to all that is being stripped away and shown to be temporary. Ask him to help you see the truth of his faithfulness. Praise Jesus that he is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

# ESTHER 1:10-22



*10 On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas— 11 to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. 12 But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger. 13 Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times 14 and were closest to the king—Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.*

*15 'According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?' he asked. 'She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.'*

*16 Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, 'Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. 17 For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.' 18 This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord. 19 'Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. 20 Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his*

*vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.'*

*21 The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memukan proposed. 22 He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.*



### **CONSIDER:**

Xerxes reaction to boundary-setting was volatile, unreasonable and had national and societal ramifications that were incredibly toxic.

Think about the behaviours he displayed - vanity, greed, inconsideration, selfishness, rage, seeking advice from self-serving advisors, instituting ungodly laws and policies, substance abuse, impulsiveness. These are things we all battle with or experience in people to varying degrees, perhaps even more so in a global crisis.

It is understandable as we face uncertainty and trying times that we will slip into some of these unhealthy and sinful behaviours. But God wants to fill us with his power and strength to resist and to be his light-bearers in this complex time.



### **PRAYER:**

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. (Eph 5:8)*

Pray that God would fill you with his comfort and light. Pray he would empower you to take his light into your home and spheres.

# ESTHER 2:1-9



*Later when King Xerxes' fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. 2 Then the king's personal attendants proposed, 'Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. 3 Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. 4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.' This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.*

*5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, 6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin[a] king of Judah. 7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.*

*8 When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. 9 She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.*





## CONSIDER:

Esther's short life had already seen sorrow. She had lost her parents as a child. Then she was selected by the king's men and unjust societal order to be taken from her family and put in a beauty pageant where she would either become a queen or a concubine in the king's harem.

Yet, as we see over Esther's life, God would use her for national impact. But she couldn't have guessed that as she was being taken from her home into a future she didn't choose or know how it would turn out. Circumstances would have seemed very unfair and scary then.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28). *'God is so great that he works out a plan, a plan to work everything out for your good if you belong to him, and his glory, which takes into consideration your choices, and still works his plan out infallibly.'* (Tim Keller)

- Where have you been placed in this time (work/home/family)? What about your life's journey has led you to this setting?
- What about your unique wiring, skills, personality do you feel God is using in your home and spheres? How might God be wanting to use you more in this time for his purposes?



## PRAYER:

Pray that God would deepen your faith in him and his purposes today. Pray that he would show you where he wants to use you. Pray that he would put people around you or in your thoughts to serve and pray for.

# ESTHER 2:10-11



*Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. 11 Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.*



## CONSIDER:

As Jews living under Persia's rule, Mordecai forbade Esther to be open about her faith, calling her Esther rather than her Jewish name, Hadassah. As we read yesterday, Esther had lost her parents, then her cousin and community. Stripped of her name, her home, her family, her faith, and her dignity as she faced the likely prospect of being a harem woman for the remainder of her life, Esther could be excused for being despondent.

Yet, God was with Esther and he gave her favour even in the palace, and provided her with community even in the isolation. Her adoptive father would walk past where she lived every day to ensure she was safe and taken care of.

Matthew 7 compares the love of an earthly father knowing how to take care of their child with the magnitude and unfathomable love of our heavenly Father. Mordecai demonstrated an earthly father's love and concern. How much more so did God, who was directing her steps, orchestrating Esther's destiny to be used for his glory and purposes?

- Who has God placed around you to help you weather this storm? Where are you celebrating his provision and kindness for? (Who is your Mordecai?)
- Who might God be wanting to reach through you? (Who do you think God want you to be a Mordecai to during this time?)



## **PRAYER:**

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. [John 16:33]*

Thank Jesus that he came to bring us peace and hope eternal. Thank him that he promises never to leave us, but walks with us and prays for us even now.

Bring to mind some of the Fatherly provision God has brought to you over this time. Thank him for being a good Father.

## ESTHER 2:12-20



*12 Before a young woman's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. 13 And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.*

*15 When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. 16 She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.*

*17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.*

*19 When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. 20 But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.*



## CONSIDER:

The contrast in character between Xerxes in Chapter 1 to Esther here, is stark. We see that Esther is patient, humble and wise. Where Xerxes was impulsive, Esther endures the long months of not knowing the outcome of her future.

Where Xerxes seeks advice from foolish advisors, Esther humbly and wisely seeks counsel for how to best approach the situation from the individual who understands the king best and listens to him, Hegai (v15). Esther was also mentored by Mordecai (v11-12, 20). Like Esther, we need to stand on the shoulders of mentors.

Also, like Esther, we need to place ourselves in God's hands to be used, by learning not to grasp, demand or self-promote but rather, how to humbly receive those opportunities and resources that God gives. Esther sought to serve rather than be served.

- Where do you turn to when facing uncertainty, anxiety, or a big decision? How has this helped or harmed you?
- Where might God be inviting or prompting you to look to first?



## PRAYER:

Proverbs 19:20 says *'Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.'*

Pray for the experts helping our government navigate policy decisions. Pray that as a nation, we would be quick to listen to expert advice and quick to discern fake-news. Pray that God would surround you with wise mentors. Pray for the mentors you have.

# ESTHER 2:21-23



*21 During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. 22 But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. 23 And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.*



## CONSIDER:

We see God's favour and pleasure in many stories in scriptures where they submitted to leaders irrespective of how they felt about them. David wouldn't raise a hand against Saul because he was God's appointed king, even though Saul was trying to kill him (1 Samuel 24:6-7). Mordecai and the Jews in Persia were facing a level of persecution, and more would come, and yet, still, Mordecai seemed to recognize Xerxes as God's appointed authority, even though a foreign faith and nation.

Similarly, we should be loyal and obedient to those whom God appoints to be our leaders. Loyalty leads to trust, which can open doors to influence and responsibility. Leaders seldom delegate meaningful responsibilities to those they do not feel they can trust.

- How does your speech, quickness of sharing opinions, memes and jokes on social media, demonstrate your commitment to your leaders?
- How can we serve and pray for our leaders during this time and beyond? What might God be calling you to do more or less of in how you relate to authority?



## **PRAYER:**

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

Spend some time praying for our local and national government. Pray for the leadership of our church too. Thank God for those he has placed in authority. Pray for their wellbeing, safety and favour.

Pray that God would move powerfully in levels of authority for his glory and plan to be worked out in our day. Pray that we as God's people would be humble and submitted, loyal to the people God has put over us.

# ESTHER 3:1-4



*1 After these events, King Xerxes honoured Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. 2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.*

*3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, 'Why do you disobey the king's command?' 4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.*



## CONSIDER:

Yesterday, we learned that God puts people into authority and expects his followers to submit to them, no matter their faith or political leanings. Today, we see where God does not expect us to submit, in fact, in these areas we are commanded to resist.

Many times in God leading his people, he had reminded them of the command to not bow to any but him. Such as 2 Kings 17:35 *'with whom the LORD made a covenant and commanded them, saying, 'You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down yourselves to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them.'*

Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3), Mordecai refused to obey an order like this because of his faith in God. But, he also explained why. Instead of hiding his faith, as he had instructed his cousin to do to protect her, Mordecai made a stand when it would mean disobeying God if he didn't.

Mordecai demonstrated both wisdom and courage in his context. While we don't go out of our way to antagonise others by our faith, we don't hide it in order to make our lives



easier. There will be times when standing firm in obedience will mean our reputation, popularity, and even life may be at stake.

Later, Mordecai would encourage Esther to stand firm and courageous and share her faith in a similar way and for a similar reason. In both instances, their safety wasn't assured.

- What 'gods'/idols are we being encouraged by our society and culture to bow before?
- When have you needed to explain how your faith in bowing before Jesus alone is reason for behaving in a way that seems different or counter-cultural?
- In what ways do you think we are called to stand firm and courageous in our faith and reason for assurance in this time?



### **PRAYER:**

Pray for the courage and wisdom to share your faith with people around you. Pray for God to open opportunities or give you courage to create opportunities. Pray that you would bow before God alone.

# ESTHER 3:5-6



*5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.*



## CONSIDER:

Haman felt humiliated by Mordecai. It was as a result of pride. We see here how pride leads to resentment, which leads to hate and rage, which, in this case, resulted in a genocidal hatred against all Jews. We are all in danger of this type of progression. Left unchecked, pride and resentment against one person can lead to generalised prejudice and hatred against others like them.

- How has hurt pride impacted your relationships? (think past or present)
- Is there anyone you currently need to extend forgiveness to, or ask forgiveness from?



## PRAYER:

*See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.* (Hebrews 12:15)

Ask for God's grace to let any resentment you feel go and refuse any temptations toward prejudice. Ask God to show you any pride he wants to convert into humility.

## ESTHER 3:7-15



*7 In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.*

*8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, 'There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury.'*

*10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 'Keep the money,' the king said to Haman, 'and do with the people as you please.'*

*12 Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. 13 Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. 14 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.*

*15 The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered*



## **CONSIDER:**

A superstitious Haman threw a dice (pur) to see which month of the year to kill the Jews. It fell on the twelfth month (3:3) which would be eleven months later.

The Jews would later recognise the hand of God in that dice-throw as the date meant there was time for the decree to be able to be overturned. But the Jews couldn't see this at the time. The world likely seemed to be hopeless and chaotic to them as the decree went out. Events as random as a rolled dice could be relatable to how today's world seems to have been brought to its knees by an invisible virus. But as we see, God was in control and orchestrating his greater plan for the good of the nation of Israel. Proverbs 16:33 says 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.'

- How are you seeing God at move during this time of instability and chaos?
- How does knowing that sometimes the waiting period may be a gift of grace help with the frustrations of our current times?



## **PRAYER:**

Psalm 31:15 reminds us that our time is in God's hands. The whole bible teaches us that through seismic nation impacting changes, and individual circumstances, God is sovereign and his love endures. Pray for faith in his sight and work in this time. Pray that a deeper understanding of his ultimate glory and sovereignty would bring us comfort.

# ESTHER 3:7-15



*1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. 4 When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.*

*6 So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.*

*9 Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 'All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.'*



## CONSIDER:

The communication had gone out across Persia. It was official, in the twelfth month, all Jews would be exterminated. Yet, Esther faced an even more pressing and immediate challenge.

We know from Chapter 1, that Xerxes couldn't be relied on to be reasonable and rational when he felt his pride offended. Now Mordecai was asking Esther to approach Xerxes boldly, unsummoned, confess she was actually Jewish and ask him to reverse his own order. It was no small challenge facing Esther.

Sometimes, as happened here, one challenge can lead to an even greater challenge. The current crisis seems to be like this. COVID-19 presents a health danger to the world, but the combatting of it through lock downs and social distancing has led to the more immediate and felt challenges of interruptions to work, wellbeing, education and global economy.

- What mountain or challenge do you feel like you have been facing over this time?
- Have you felt God asking something of you that feels more than you are able to do or be?



## PRAYER:

*Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.* [Deuteronomy 31:6]

Pray for God's strength and courage as you consider your specific challenges. Pray for the challenges our society and nation faces. Pray that we would be driven to deeper dependence on God.

# ESTHER 4:12-14



*12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?'*

## CONSIDER:

Esther was afraid for her life. Knowing what had happened to Vashti, the first queen, she may have been concerned that what Mordecai was asking of her would insult Xerxes' pride. Mordecai reminded her that not only was her family in danger, but that God's will would be done and if not by her, he would use someone else to bring deliverance. He also reminded Esther that this may be the very reason for why she was in the position she was, at the time that she was.

God's call can be risky for us personally. We may lose resources, we may lose reputation, we may even lose our lives. That is why we need to ask for faith so that when we count the cost, the reward in front of us shines brighter than the cost.

For some, we are like Jonah, believing that God is calling us to reach out to people who are undeserving, who should rather receive God's judgement than mercy (Jonah 1). Like Jonah, we need to be reminded that we are all undeserving without Jesus rescuing and redeeming us.

For some, we are like Esther, afraid that our actions bring us risk, or even death. Like Esther, we need to be reminded that our paths are directed by a loving and sovereign God. In faith we need to pray like Paul to the Ephesians 1:11: In him



we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

*For such a time as this.*

- Has God been prompting you to do something, but you've been reluctant or found excuses about why you can't or won't do it?
- Do you have a Mordecai type person in your life who can help keep you accountable in these types of situations? Do you have someone you can approach?



### **PRAYER:**

*'For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?'*

[Esther 4:14]

Pray that God would reveal to you where he wants to direct and use you during this time. Pray for who you can reach out to and provide support and counsel to. Pray that God would give you wisdom and courage for the tasks he is calling you to do.



# ESTHER 4:15-17



*15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'*

*17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.*



## CONSIDER:

Even though Esther decided to do what she felt God wanted her to do, she did not know what the outcome would be.

She chose to do it, regardless of the outcome, saying, 'if I perish, I perish'.

Faith is believing in God's goodness and sovereignty even in the midst of suffering and trials. It is praying like Daniel's friends when they faced being thrown into the furnace for obeying God over an evil command. 'If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up (Daniel 3:17-18).

It is obedience even unto death. The same obedience that Jesus demonstrated when he died for us on a cross.

- How easy is it for you to obey God when you don't know what the outcome will be? Do you find your faith struggles in uncertainty?
- When trials and difficulty arise, do you go into problem solving mode or prayer first?



## **PRAYER:**

Pray for forgiveness for self-dependency and that God would help you to trust him with your life and circumstances.

Pray for wisdom and courage to face the difficulties with him at your side. Pray that he would show you that you are in the place and time he planned for you and ask him to help you to do the work he has set for you to do.

# ESTHER 5:1-3



*1 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. 2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the sceptre.*

*3 Then the king asked, 'What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.'*



## CONSIDER:

Knowing Xerxes' volatility, and not having seen him in a month, Esther couldn't know what reception she might get. She was walking towards Xerxes in obedience to God without knowing whether she would live to see the next morning.

There was great reason for having fear, but there was also great reason for having faith. God had provided and protected her this far.

This serves as a great example to us. When we are faced with doing something God has asked of us and risk a negative outcome, it is likely to lead to fear. But our assurance comes from something greater than the whim of a king, or government, or people or situation. Our assurance is that when God is for us, nothing can be against us (Rom 8:31). Even though we may lose our life, our eternal life is guaranteed and in God's hands.

- Are you facing situations that are out of your control that bring personal risk and danger? Or do you have loved ones facing this sort of risk and danger?



## PRAYER:

Esther demonstrates some great truths in how we are to approach God:

*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need* (Hebrews 4:16). Esther adorned her royal robes reminding others of her royal position. We are robed in Christ and in his righteousness alone, we can approach God in confidence – not because of our own confidence, but the confidence of being in Christ. Like Esther to Xerxes, we don't approach God on the basis of what we deserve, but rather on the basis of the king's mercy, which we can never deserve. Unlike Xerxes, we are assured of our reception based on who God is and what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

- Thank God that we don't approach in fear of the reception, but in absolute confidence.

In the life of Jesus, the most delighted we see him is when people demonstrated even simple acts of faith – the centurion who knew Jesus need just command his child healed and it would happen (Matt 8), the woman who knew merely touching his robe would cleanse her of illness (Luke 8), the friends who lowered their disabled friend through the roof to Jesus (Mark 2) – so too part of our worship is bringing audacious faith in our requests to our God, our Father.

- Approach God as your great Father, and bring your requests to him now.

Esther went before the king for her people, not herself. Scriptures tell us that we are to bring requests on behalf of others before God.

- Pray for those who God brings to mind today.

## ESTHER 5:4-8



4 *'If it pleases the king,' replied Esther, 'let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.'*  
 5 *'Bring Haman at once,' the king said, 'so that we may do what Esther asks.'*

*So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. 6 As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, 'Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.'*

*7 Esther replied, 'My petition and my request is this: 8 If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question.'*



### CONSIDER:

Even though Esther knew what she needed to do and who she needed to ask, she displayed wisdom and patience in ensuring that she didn't unnecessarily antagonise Xerxes.

Relationships matter. Sometimes we can work against our own goals by putting the goal above the person we need to work with. Esther shows tact and patience, putting the relationship before her task. She rightfully needs to build the relational bridge for her message. The more weighty the task and message you need to transfer, the sturdier the relationship needs to be. There is wisdom in ensuring the relationship is solid before trying to implement the task or give a heavy message. It is also honouring – we are to love God and people – it's the First and Second commandment – and Jesus demonstrated it time and again.

Sometimes we can move to try to alleviate our anxiety or 'to do' list before the time is right. In place of walking with Jesus, at his pace, we often try running ahead of him. This is as bad as disobedience as it puts the initiation and implementation of what God is doing into our own hands. It is a form of control and self-reliance, but in the name of God's work.

- Have you ever felt yourself walking ahead of God on something you know he is calling you to do?
- Have you had some situations where your task-orientation has damaged relationships? Are there any people you need to mend fences with?
- How do you still your soul to hear God's promptings when life feels frantic? How are you able to discern his whisper in your life?



### **PRAYER:**

Ask God to help you to discern how to honourably balance task orientation and relationship building.

Ask for wisdom to act rightly in each situation. Ask God to help you prioritise him and others in the way that you work.

# ESTHER 5:9-14



*9 Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, 11 Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honoured him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. 12 'And that's not all,' Haman added. 'I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. 13 But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate.'*

*14 His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, 'Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself.' This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.*



## CONSIDER:

Haman had all the things many of us aspire to have in life: he had friends, wealth, children and a great relationship with his boss, the king (v11). But we don't see a man grateful for what he has, but someone enraged when he can't have more.

The moment Haman feels slighted by one person, his high spirits turned into rage (v9). When slighted (in his eyes) by one person, Haman lost all his joy (v13).

Prosperity and seeking accolades from people can have a devastating effect on our lives too. Either we are terrified of losing our wealth and reputation, or it can lead to us being

arrogant and believing we are somehow worth more than others.

- Are there things or areas in your life where you are not sure how you would recover if they were gone?
- What occupies your mind most during the day? What grabs your attention when you daydream?
- How do you react to negative feedback from people? Does it ruin an otherwise good day?



### **PRAYER:**

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)*

Pray that God would help us to count our blessings in him and be a people marked by gratitude. Pray that our minds would be Christ-like in humility and service. Pray that we would see glory and honour in the way God sees it.



# ESTHER 6:1-11



*1 That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. 2 It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. 3 'What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?' the king asked.*

*'Nothing has been done for him,' his attendants answered.*

*4 The king said, 'Who is in the court?' Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling Mordecai on the pole he had set up for him.*

*5 His attendants answered, 'Haman is standing in the court.' 'Bring him in,' the king ordered.*

*6 When Haman entered, the king asked him, 'What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?'*

*Now Haman thought to himself, 'Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?' 7 So he answered the king, 'For the man the king delights to honor, 8 have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. 9 Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!''*

*10 'Go at once,' the king commanded Haman. 'Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended.'*

*11 So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'*



## CONSIDER:

At this point, Esther is planning on making her request to her husband that evening. The Jewish people are seeking God for deliverance. For those who know their queen is really Hadassah, a Jew planning to go before the king to ask for mercy for her people, are likely praying for her.

We often think we know when and how God should act, yet in Esther we get a glimpse into the wonder of God's wisdom and timing. God is the one who is orchestrating history for his purposes.



While Haman is dreaming about more accolades and honour, God is prompting the king to honour the humble Mordecai. In fact, part of Haman's humiliation is that he thinks that the king is talking about him and so expresses a plan for how to best be honoured. Instead though, Haman lands up being ordered to lead the city to honour Mordecai, the man that he hates.

- Who do you identify with most in this story? Xerxes who forgot to honour someone who served him well? Mordecai, the one who had been overlooked for so long? Haman, who felt he was owed more than what he had? All three?
- Who might God want you to reach out to in appreciation over this time?

## PRAYER:

Pray for some of the people that came to mind as you processed today's scriptures. Pray for those who may be a Xerxes to you. Pray for individuals whom you may need to show appreciation. Pray also for the essential workers, cashiers, delivery services etc who have been tirelessly serving our country during these months. Pray that God would protect them and show them favour.

# ESTHER 6:12-14



*12 Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, 13 and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, 'Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!' 14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.*



## CONSIDER:

Remember, Mordecai had risked facing death by defying the order to bow before Haman. In fact, Haman intended on having Mordecai executed for what he perceived as a slight against his honour. Now, instead, Mordecai had the king's robe thrown over him by his main accuser, and honoured by Haman and the city.

This is a picture of how we, who really deserved death, instead get to wear the king's robe and be exalted as brothers and sisters of Christ because of our King's mercy and sacrifice.

We will experience so much more than what Mordecai did (Hebrews 2:10). Because of God's great grace and mercy, we will share the honour that belongs to the King of kings, though we are completely undeserving.

And Haman? Well, his day was going from bad to worse, which we will see tomorrow. Not only had he not been honoured by the king when he felt he deserved it, he had been ordered to be the one to parade the man who had wounded his pride around the city – a Jew no less. And, his family and friends all knew about it.

This would have added salt to the wounds, and, again, instead of learning from this experience and developing character through it, we see it just spirals Haman into further destructive pride and his ultimate demise.

- In what ways do you think you can be slow to recognise pride in yourself? When do you find yourself becoming quickly defensive and entitled?
- What are some signs that you are seeking your worth in things that aren't God himself?
- What are some of the ways that God has helped you grow in your humility?



### **PRAYER:**

*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'* (1 Peter 5:5)

Pray that God would attune your heart to his and transform your mind into Christlikeness. That having the same mind of Christ, you would react to situations with humility and grace. Pray that he would help defeat the battle for pride that each of us has and that we would be especially soft-hearted and gentle in our reactions to others during these volatile and stressful times. Pray that even when you feel undervalued, you would turn to God for his perspective and mercy, responding like Mordecai, not like Haman.

# ESTHER 7:1-3



*1 So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, 2 and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, 'Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.'*



## CONSIDER:

If Esther had presented her request the first time she had approached Xerxes, or even the second, it wouldn't have occurred just after he had been reminded that his life had been spared because of a loyal Jewish citizen. Not only was the king honoured by his wife's attention to their relationship before her own wellbeing, and more curious and inclined to grant her request, he also would be more likely to receive this request well because of Mordecai.

God can soften the hardest heart. Esther had been afraid for her life, but God had been at work before she got to this moment, preparing the way and the work for her hands. All she had to do was be obedient in responding to his prompting. Although she didn't know what God was doing in the background, she stepped out in faith and obedience, knowing that to perish was better than not to act when called.

We too need to be wise and courageous. We need to act in faith when God is prompting us, willing to sacrifice our time, energy, resources, reputation and even life, for his cause. Yet, our courage is not to be without wisdom. We need to tread wisely and in God's timing.



## **PRAYER:**

*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*  
(Galatians 5:25)

Pray that God would give you faith, obedience and wisdom like Esther, neither running ahead of God's timing, nor lagging behind in fear, in self-preservation or in disobedience.

Pray that you would learn to discern God's voice through the noise of our world and emotions.

# ESTHER 7:3-7A



*3 Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. 4 For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.'*

*5 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, 'Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?'*

*6 Esther said, 'An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!' Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. 7 The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden.*



## CONSIDER:

Haman's moment of reckoning had arrived. His conniving and murderous intentions come to light as Esther reveals to her husband both her true identity and how it meant that she was also in danger of Haman's plot to eradicate the Jews.

Xerxes was confused. Yet he was the leader who had allowed himself to be manipulated into agreeing to such an evil plot. His decision is no longer theoretical now that he realizes the implications to two important people in his immediate sphere and his apathy is shaken because of these relationships.

One way to combat 'othering' which results in the sin of racism, sexism and other 'isms' is to develop a diverse community. As we see in the unfolding of this account, Xerxes had agreed to a terrible plot of great evil. He had already demonstrated his impulsive response to his pride being wounded, but now we see that God had brought at least two people into his path that had become important to him.



His wife, Esther, beautiful and full of respect, wisdom and courage. And Mordecai, who Xerxes had just remembered as being a loyal servant who had saved his life. It is far harder to have apathy or hatred towards people when you see faces that you love in those people.

- In what ways has God used relationships to soften your heart towards others?
- Do you have friends that develop you in different ways because of their backgrounds, economic realities, temperaments or intellect?
- Where might God be challenging you to deepen or expand some of your relationships in this regard?

### **PRAYER:**

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'*

[Revelations 7:9-10]

Pray prayers of gratitude for the people God has used to shape you more into his likeness. Thank him that we get to enjoy a sample of this 'one day' reality in South Africa. Pray that he would help us to worship him as a diverse and unified family and grow even more into his vision for his family.



# ESTHER 7:7B-10



*7 But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. 8 Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, 'Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?'*

*As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9 Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, 'A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.'*

*The king said, 'Impale him on it!' 10 So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.*



## CONSIDER:

In an interesting turn of events, the man who had orchestrated and manipulated to kill the Jews and had been furious when one wouldn't bow to him, now begs a Jewish woman for his life. In desperation, Haman physically confronts Esther, which the king witnesses as he walks back in. Haman is instantly condemned to execution, and he is impaled on the very device that he had ordered built for Mordecai.

There are two important learnings here. The first is that judgement is coming. The wrath of God is coming on those who sin and fall short of his holiness. In *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer says that 'God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil'. Whether in this life (as Haman experienced), or in the next, God is completely just and his judgement will be fair.

Secondly, we all are equally accountable before this righteous God (Rom 3:23). We all face the wrath of God for our pride and sin. But God has intervened and absorbed that wrath himself through Christ, if we choose to accept his scandalous gift of grace. An instrument of execution that rightfully had our names on it, instead was endured by God for us. A judgement that would have been far worse than Haman's, was paid for by Jesus. Jesus, who carried the cross meant for us on his innocent shoulders, who received the lashes for wrongs he wouldn't even think to commit, and who was ridiculed and mocked on an execution device saved for the worst form of criminal even though he was utterly pure and blameless. Jesus did that for you and he did that for me.

- Consider the reality of the depth of God's love for you and the steps he took to secure your eternal future as his. How might this be an invitation for you to respond to him today? This can be done by placing your faith in him (maybe even for the first time), and by offering your praise and worship to him.
- Who are you trusting God to bring to faith in your spheres?
- Who might he be inviting you to share your faith story with, or invite to church?



### **PRAYER:**

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)*

Pray prayers of gratitude for God's intervention in our eternal destiny. Thank him that he is completely just and merciful.

# ESTHER 8:1-2



*1 That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. 2 The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate.*



## CONSIDER:

Haman's possessions landed up belonging to Esther and Mordecai. While much of the bible, especially in Psalms and Lamentations, demonstrates that we can't necessarily expect the outcome that Esther received on this side of eternity, what happened here is a picture of the eternal reality of righteous versus unrighteous living. This principle is an eternal principle. Jesus tells us that the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

- What do you do when you face inequality or unfairness because of your faith?
- What comfort does Esther's story, and Jesus' words, bring you when the corrupt and wicked seem to win over the righteous?
- How do you think God would invite you to respond?



## PRAYER:

Pray that the righteous would stand firm and not be swayed by corruption or temptations. Pray for godly men and women in leadership, especially government. Pray that God would strengthen his people in all their spheres of influence to listen to his voice above all and to respond appropriately to him.

## ESTHER 8:3-6



*3 Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. 4 Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him. 5 'If it pleases the king,' she said, 'and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?' 7 King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, 'Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. 8 Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring—for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.'*



### CONSIDER:

Once again, Esther approaches the king to ask him to change the decree. This time she doesn't ask Xerxes to a private function to make her request, but asks him for something publicly. Her request could make him look weak if others interpreted it as admitting he made a mistake or if he couldn't grant her request. The same risk of causing offense and facing death presents itself and yet Esther still steps in obedience.

Most of us could forgive and understand if Esther felt she had done enough. She had risked so much already and had at least ensured the survival of herself and her family. Having already asked so much of Xerxes, we could understand a reluctance to ask for more and risk his

displeasure. But Esther demonstrates how entwined she is with her people. Her fate should be their fate. Her future should be their future. Esther did not just want to see only her own deliverance (and that of her immediate family), but the deliverance of her people too.

Esther demonstrates a community orientation. While, there is wisdom in ensuring our family is safe and taken care of, the temptation may be to stop there, potentially more so during a health and economic crisis. But God calls us to bless others, through service, resources and sacrifice.

This is a foreshadowing of how Jesus came to align himself with humanity. Jesus demonstrated the greatest example of sacrificing everything for the sake of others. And he calls his followers to model his example. 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.' (Matt 16: 24-25)

- How is God inviting you to respond in generosity and compassion over this time?



## **PRAYER:**

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*  
(Romans 12:21)

Pray now for God to show you his heart for the city. Pray that he would grow you in compassion and kindness. Pray for opportunities to be his hands and feet to others.

# ESTHER 8:7-13



*7 King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, 'Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. 8 Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring—for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.' 9 At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. 10 Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.*

*11 The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies. 12 The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. 13 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.*

## CONSIDER:



Esther's request was audacious. The law was that a decree sealed by the king's signet ring could not be revoked. Nevertheless, Xerxes commissioned Mordecai to act in the

king's name to save the Jews. The king shows some wisdom here. He knows he can't remove a law that stands, but he introduces another law that would nullify the first law. He also trusts and delegates the authority to make such a big decision to a trustworthy and wise advisor.

By sending a second decree to all the people of all 127 provinces, Mordecai, on behalf of Xerxes, made it legal for Jews to defend themselves on the day they were going to be attacked. They couldn't remove the first decree, but the second one neutralised the first and allowed the Jews to be saved.

This is a powerful foreshadowing of how God brought salvation to humanity. There was no chance we would ever fulfil the requirements of God's law for holiness. Destined to an eternity apart from God if left to our own agency, God stepped in to rescue us. Through the cross, Jesus fulfilled the requirements for justice and the Law completely. The fact that the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) was satisfied when Jesus paid the wage that was ours to pay.

- What response do these truths call for in your life?
- How does it shape your devotional and prayer life, knowing that Jesus brought you into direct access and acceptance of God the Father, our true King?



### **PRAYER:**

Pray prayers of gratitude for God's great work in sealing your eternal fate with him through his sacrifice. Pray that he would help you feel and know his love deeply and that it would shape you into his likeness.

## ESTHER 8:14-17



*14 The couriers, riding the royal horses, went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. 15 When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. 16 For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. 17 In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.*



### CONSIDER:

What looked hopeless for the Jewish people, had been turned around for good. God had provided them with a mediator, by placing Esther as the Persian Queen. She was able to represent the Jews to Xerxes, while being a royal herself. This made her the perfect mediator, able to gain more access to the king than any other. She was also able to represent the plight of the Jews to the Persian king.

God had also orchestrated that Mordecai would hear the plot to assassinate Xerxes, thereby winning the favour and trust of the king.

Now, not only did God orchestrate that the Jews not be exterminated as originally decreed, but instead the oppression of the Jews was overturned and they were liberated. They would now be in a better position than they were before.

As Joseph remarked after his story was similarly worked out for the good of the Jewish nation, 'What my enemy intended for my harm, God intended for my good' (Genesis 50:20).



Romans 8:28 says, 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.' While we won't necessarily be spared the storms and trials, seeing God working with Esther and Joseph and Daniel, we see the truth in Romans 8:28 that through our pain and suffering, through the storms and trials, God is working and ultimately his plan will work out for good. This is why Paul encourages us to rejoice in our sufferings.

The Jews could protect themselves, consider themselves citizens with the same rights as Persians, and they could be open about their faith. There was no mourning now, but feasting and thanksgiving and rejoicing. Some Persians even converted to their faith (v17).

Even more so today, when people hear the message of the gospel of Jesus and believe it, their lives are renewed. The message of salvation through Jesus, the better Esther – who represented mankind to God and God to mankind – standing in the gap we couldn't fill – overflows in great joy.



### **PRAYER:**

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)*

Pray for those that you are trusting God to reach with his message of salvation. Ask God for opportunities to be the messenger bringing good news of great joy.

# ESTHER 9:1-17



*1 On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. 2 The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. 3 And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. 4 Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful. 5 The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. 6 In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. 7 They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, 10 the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder.*



*11 The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. 12 The king said to Queen Esther, 'The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted.'*

*13 'If it pleases the king,' Esther answered, 'give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles.'*

*14 So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was*

*issued in Susa, and they impaled the ten sons of Haman. 15 The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.*

*16 Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. 17 This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.*

### **CONSIDER:**

The day came. It is nine months later and all over Persia, people were still ready to attack and kill Jews as the first edict had allowed, but the Jews were mobilised to defend themselves because of the second edict.

It can be difficult to read these types of accounts with our modern eyes. But it would still be over 400 years before Jesus would come with his message and influence of peace for all mankind. In the days of Esther, nations existed in a culture and context of war and occupation. Kingdoms constantly fought to extend their borders and power. The Jews would have been totally eliminated unless they fought for their existence.

Because of Jesus, the church is no longer one nation, but a community of people within nations. Jesus' message was to 'love your enemies and 'bless those who persecute you' (Matthew 5:44).

The church is a spiritual community. We do not conquer through violence, but through love. Ephesians 6 tells us that our battle and weapons are not physical now, but rather spiritual. As God's people, we are not called to destroy lives, but to work within his kingdom plan to liberate them.



- What does Esther's unrelenting strength against the enemies of her people suggest about how we are to stand up against spiritual oppression today?
- Are there any areas that you are feeling you need God's strength and protection? Where might God be inviting you to pray and seek his spiritual weapons of defence?



## **PRAYER:**

*Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. [Ephesians 6:13] 18 And 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 6:17-18]*

Pray that God would strengthen you in these days. Pray that he would help equip you to stand firm and to lean on him for your courage and strength.

## ESTHER 8:14-17



*18 The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. 19 That is why rural Jews—those living in villages—observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other. 20 Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, 21 to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar 22 as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.*

*23 So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. 24 For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the pur (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction. 25 But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles. 26 (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word pur.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, 27 the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. 28 These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never fail to be celebrated by the Jews—nor should the memory of these days die out*

*among their descendants. 29 So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. 30 And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of Xerxes' kingdom—words of goodwill and assurance— 31 to establish these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation. 32 Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records.*



### **CONSIDER:**

The Jews' victory was a time for celebration. It continued annually and, still today, Jewish people celebrate Purim (Festival of the Lots) every year. It is a time of remembering the hand of God in the events that led to their liberation rather than destruction.



While people often see events like this as coincidences, the Jews rightfully saw God's hand at work. From Esther becoming queen, Mordecai discovering the assassination plot, the day Haman's dice rolled, to Xerxes being unable to sleep and selecting instead to have chronicles read to him that reminded him of Mordecai's loyalty. All these 'coincidences' led to the reprieve of an evil plan to exterminate God's people. Since God had promised his people that he would provide for them, and protect them, they rightfully saw his hand in how these events unfolded.

Under a New Covenant with God, we too have received promises from God. Promises that he has saved us and will continue his work of sanctification in us. Like the Jewish people in Esther, we need to learn to recognise, celebrate and affirm God's work in our lives. Ready to pray prayers of faith and celebrate his faithfulness.

During trials and difficulties such as we are experiencing now, it is important to remember that God is never taken by surprise or overwhelmed by these events. He is sovereign over the complexities of health systems, food chains, governments and viruses. We can trust that he is working all things for his purposes and that he has ways for us to be partnering with him, like Esther and Mordecai, in our time and spheres.



## **PRAYER:**

*'This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'* (Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus taught us to pray. Use his words to pray now. Pray prayers of praise, ask God for what you need, pray for others, pray that God would help us all during this global pandemic. Pray that like Esther and Mordecai, you would be ready to be used by him for our times.

# ESTHER 8:14-17



*1 King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. 2 And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia?*

*3 Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.*



## CONSIDER:

At the start of this journey, we were introduced to a young orphan hiding her faith as an exile in a foreign land. Yet, Hadassah becomes Queen Esther of Persia. Her cousin, Mordecai, was a lowly scribe hated by the one closest to the king. Yet, he became second-in-command after the king executed his enemy.

Esther and Mordecai became two of the most influential people in the kingdom and both gave God the glory by using it to promote his kingdom and attain justice for his people.

Neither of them sought profile and influence, yet God gave it to them and used their faith, obedience and humility, to impact at a national level.

Platform and influence isn't something we should strive for, yet we should be ready to use it if God graciously gives it to us. Like we see through Esther's story, God equips the called, we too can have faith that God will use us as he will, and equip us to do the work he has for us. We can play our part by being diligent, having good character, listening to his prompting and walking in obedience and humility.



Even today, as we face this global pandemic, there are rifts of injustice and wells of deep need and poverty. How might God be calling his people to step into these gaps to affect change for him? How might he be positioning you, in your sphere and time, to make a difference in his name?

Like the Jews in Persia, we face uncertain and tumultuous times. And throughout history, we see great testimonies erupting through times just like these. As we discover that God is always good and his purposes will always prevail, our faith is stirred and developed.



### **PRAYER:**

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [2 Timothy 3:14-15]*

Pray that God would deepen your faith and awareness of him and his work. Pray that he would reveal works prepared for your hands for such a time as this. Pray that he would use you to advance his kingdom and become salt and light in these difficult times.

# JESUS THE TRUE AND



*1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

*5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

*8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*(Philippians 2:1-11)*



## CONSIDER:

All through this devotion we have seen the hints of how Esther's story foreshadows when the true Saviour would come to rescue and redeem the whole world.

When the time came for Esther to represent the Jewish nation to the Persian royal king – she was the best placed person in the nation to do so. She was both fully Jewish and fully Persian, by virtue that she was their crowned queen. So too, Jesus was the perfect mediator between mankind and God because he was fully man and fully God.

Where we depart from Esther's story to what Jesus actually did on the cross is to understand that we are Haman in the story. When Xerxes condemned Haman to execution for his great sins against Esther and her people, if Esther had taken the payment of Haman's sins herself and died in his place, we would have seen a closer representation of what Jesus did for us. Esther risked her life to stand in the gap for her people, Jesus gave his life as he stood in the gap for all mankind. Jesus took every sin we had committed against him that condemned us to an eternal death, and voluntarily paid the price for our rebellion by his death in our place. Where Haman showed God's people no grace and endured wrath, Jesus endured wrath for all people and gives to us only grace. As God's people were spared death because Esther identified with them, so God's people are spared eternal death because Jesus Christ identifies with us.



### **PRAYER:**

Consider all that Jesus won for you on the cross and give him thanks. If you have never placed your faith and life in Jesus and his authority, why not pray the following prayer now:

*Lord Jesus, you created me and are rightfully Lord over all. I have sinned against you and have chosen to live my life apart from you. I believe you are the Son of God. I believe you died for my sins and rose again. Please forgive my sins and save me. Give me your gift of eternal life and make me yours. I choose to turn away from everything that I know displeases you. Give me deeper faith in you and help me walk on your path. In your name, Jesus, I pray these things. Amen*