



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES: Part Two

ESTHER: LESSON 4

Last week we met Haman, the evil man with the dreadful plan! This week we will see the second decree come to pass as Haman continues to lie to try to accomplish his selfish desire. As he presents his plot to King Ahasuerus, we see the puppet king make another impulsive, rash decision without checking his facts. No, king, no! Don't fall for it! But before Haman's edict to destroy the Jews was even a thought, God had put His players in place!

First Day

1. Read Esther 3:1-15. How did the king respond to Haman's request?
2. Any exceptions on who was to be killed?
3. Persia's *Pony Express* seemed to be very effective. How did the word of the decree get out to the people? Why did they move so fast on this?

Bad news always seems to travel fast, doesn't it? The decree gave permission to kill all Jews on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, twelve months later. This translates to March 7th, 473 B.C. This day was significant for the Jews, since it fell on the day before an important Jewish festival. On the fourteenth day of Adar, Jews began the celebration of Passover, the feast that commemorated their deliverance from Egypt. Nothing could change an official edict of the king; not even the king himself.

4. Why didn't the king do any investigation first?
5. Read verse 15. What strange contrast do you see?
6. What type of man can sit down to drink after signing a law that would cause so many deaths? How would you describe their hearts? (Xerxes and Haman)
7. Explain how you think the people of Shushan would have felt once they heard the decree? Do you think they were surprised?
8. Besides hatred, Haman's heart was puffed up with pride. Pride kills, distracts, and destroys. What does Proverbs 11:2, 16:18-19, and 29:23, say about pride?
9. Pride can creep in through every nook and cranny of our lives. If our hearts are left "unattended," we are open game. Pride was the first sin in the Garden, and, if truth be told, I bet it's the first sin that slithers into our hearts every morning! How do we guard against it?
10. I have to ask. Do you struggle with pride? In what area? Have you experienced some consequences due to pride getting the best of you?

11. A problem that seems relatively common is comparing ourselves to one another. How is pride the root of this? In what ways do we compare ourselves to each other?

I love chapter 4, which we'll study tomorrow. For now, pray and ask the Lord to reveal any areas of pride in your heart. Timothy Keller wrote, "The only flaws that can enslave you are the ones you are blind to." Ouch.

Memory Verse of the Week: "... and so I will go to the king, which is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." Esther 4:16b

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. Why is this such a significant verse?

1. Read Esther 4:1-17. Write your first thoughts. Also, are there any repeated words or phrases? Any new facts you see that you missed the first time you read the book through in Lesson One?
2. How did Mordecai and the Jews receive the news, according to verses 1-4?

Scholars estimate that there were about 15 million Jews scattered throughout the Persian Empire at that time. There were many different responses to the news. Haman and the king were shooting the breeze over dinner, the people of the city were perplexed and confused because the Persian policy had always been one of tolerating the Jews, and the Jews in the various provinces were weeping and fasting. This was a very scary time. For the Jews, the sky was falling.

3. How did Esther learn of the decree? (What do you think Hathach thought when he heard Esther was a Jew? Mordecai let that piece of info slip in verse 8.)

4. When Mordecai instructed Hathach to tell Esther to go before the king and plead for her people, what was her initial response? Why?

5. Mordecai responds with some very challenging words, asking Esther to rise to the occasion. What does he remind her of? (I wonder if he was thinking about the words of Joseph in Genesis 50:20.)

I love Mordecai's call to action: "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Mordecai seems to finally grasp the whole picture of why God put Esther on the throne. Honestly, that same challenge is for me and you. I don't know what He's called you to do, but you were put here, now, for such a time as this! Our world seems to be going crazy right now, but we are called to make a difference. We have been chosen to live during this time period. Not to run away or shrink back in fear, but for such a time as this. You live where you live ... for such a time as this. You work where you work ... for such a time as this. You've been given certain gifts and talents ... for such a time as this. You are valuable; you are important. You are here to fulfill God's purpose for His kingdom. We are called to "redeem the time" while we're here on earth (Ephesians 5:15-17). Are you?

6. How does that phrase inspire you? Challenge you? Encourage you? Maybe scare you?

Mordecai challenges her with three things: First, sooner or later if they find out you're a Jew, they'll kill you too. Second, the Jewish race will survive, for God's promise to His people is greater than your willingness to be involved, and if He has to, He will use someone else (Genesis 12:13). And third, this threat to God's people could explain the reason you were elevated to this high position.

7. Do you think Esther was giving an explanation or an excuse?

8. The New Testament wasn't written at that time, but if it was, I think Mordecai would have quoted James 4:17. What does it say?

9. How does Esther respond to his exhortation in vs 16? How does she enlist the help of all the Jews? How is fasting going to help the situation?

Once upon a time, Esther hid her true identity, but she seems to “wake up” as she grasps the reality of what’s happening. She chooses to trust God and obey the counsel of Mordecai. Honestly, it seems like everything was against her. The law was against her because no one was allowed to approach the king if he hadn’t called for them. (Weird rule, but it was supposedly for their protection!) The government was against her, since the decree would have applied to her, resulting in death. Her sex was against her, since being a woman wasn’t too popular. The officers would be against her, looking to please Haman. This didn’t look like a win-win situation. But Esther decides to go forward and trust that God has a plan. She knew that prayer and fasting was needed as she sought God for direction. Her statement, “If I perish, I perish,” was a statement of submission and surrender.

10. What did Esther have to lose by revealing her identity to the king? What did she have to gain?

11. What perspective does Romans 8:31 give us?

I love what Charles Swindoll wrote about Esther: “Notice how Esther’s entire outlook shifted in the space of this chapter. From faith to fear. From reluctance to resolve. From concern for her personal safety to the concern for the safety of her people. And from respect for Mordecai’s leadership to the emergence of her own.”

12. Is there a situation you’re facing that seems bigger than life? How does Esther’s response to Mordecai inspire you? Does your perspective need to “shift” like Esther’s?

Gosh, what an amazing chapter! I don't want to leave it! The significance of what they both said is simply astounding! Ladies, you are here, today, for such a time as this! Do what's right, always, and if we perish, we perish!!!

Third Day

Ponder your memory verse ...

I know I am continually pointing out evidences of God's providence in the story, but I don't want you to miss it. I read an illustration that A.W. Tozer used to explain his thoughts on the sovereignty and providence of God in relation to free will. He said, "God is never in a hurry, He knows the end from the beginning, and His decrees are always right and always on time. God's sovereign purposes are like an ocean liner, leaving for New York City, bound for Liverpool, England. The people on board are free to do as they please, but they aren't free to change the course of the ship. The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history. God moves undisturbed and unhindered toward the fulfillment of those eternal purposes which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began." (*The knowledge of the Holy*) Does that make sense?

Let's talk about fasting for a bit. Esther called a fast to hear from God. When you refrain from eating, you often become more aware and more sensitive to the things of the Spirit. Whenever you get a hunger pain, you pray. When you see food, you pray. "Fasting and praying are frequently found together in Scripture," Weirsbe wrote. "Fasting is a preparation for concentrated and humble prayer. If fasting is simply a ritual, it would accomplish no spiritual purpose." Many people fasted in Scripture, such as Moses, the Israelites, Samuel, David, Elijah, Nehemiah, Darius, Daniel, Anna, John's disciples, early believers, Paul, and most importantly, Jesus!

1. Read the following verses about fasting. After each verse, write what it warns against or what it says to do regarding fasting.
 - a. Psalm 69:10-13
 - b. Zechariah 7:5-6
 - c. Isaiah 58:1-14
 - d. Matthew 6:16-18

e. Psalm 35:13

f. Matthew 17:19-21

2. Has God ever put it on your heart to fast? Did you obey?

3. Do you think we can only fast from food, or are there other types of fasts?

4. After reading more about fasting, why was this such a wise decision from our friend Esther?

Often when we pray, we talk to God and forget to listen to Him. As we fast, hopefully our hearts are tuned in to listen better. Marilyn Willett Heavilin wrote, "Generally when we think of prayer, we think of talking to God because our prayers are often monologues rather than dialogues. We talk to God, but we seldom sit long enough for Him to respond. Prayer should be a two-way interaction."

5. Consider your prayer life. Do you think it's more of a monologue or a dialogue? Any changes need to be made?

6. Esther was willing to overcome her fear to be obedient to what God called her to do. Is there a "fear" that's hindering your obedience? Can you share it?

Carolyn Custus James wrote, “Until the crisis, Esther lived by the culture’s view of who she was and what gave her value. She had been warned, by Vashti’s tragic experience and by Mordecai’s solemn warnings, to remain quiet, stay out of trouble, and keep her convictions to herself. She learned from her surroundings and from the people in her life that what truly mattered about her was on the outside. No one looked beneath the surface. No one wondered what gifts God had entrusted to Esther, what vital contributions she was supposed to make. No one engaged her mind, challenged her to think, or counted on her wisdom, insights, and contributions. No one inspired her to look around for opportunities to build God’s kingdom. No one needed Esther, at least not for anything significant. But God wanted more from Esther. He put her in a position and compelled her to become a bold, courageous adventurer and do some rescuing of her own. Not only was no one there to take care of her, she had to defend a nation. God didn’t want her to simply be an ornament. Esther was created for this! This was her calling as a woman—to wage war against the enemies of God and fight for His kingdom and His people. God wasn’t simply finding her something to do; some task so she would feel useful and included, He gave her a vital job that no one else could do.”

7. Do you feel that your life has purpose? That God has given you a job no one else can do? If you embraced that thought, how would it change your attitude and perspective every day?

8. Esther prayed before coming up with her plan. How do you usually make decisions? Do you start with prayer?

I recently read an article by Elaine Hamilton about making good decisions. Hopefully it’s helpful for you! She wrote, “When you’re faced with a decision, here are some questions you can ask yourself to determine if the voice you hear is God speaking to you:

1. Is it consistent with Scripture?
2. Is it consistent with the character of God?
3. Does it lead to change or growth?
4. Does it lead to restoration of relationships?
5. Is there a sense of healing and a release from past sin or pain?
6. Is there a sense of peace, a lessening of anxiety, a feeling of contentment where there once was striving?
7. Does it lead to conviction or guilt?”

Are you in the process of making a decision? How about praying, fasting, and going through that list! See you tomorrow!

Fourth Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Let's begin today by reading Esther 5:1-8. The stakes were high ... Esther takes a chance and moves toward the palace's inner court, which was breaking the Persian law. She stops and stands where the king can see her in full view. He's a moody guy, he's impulsive. What must Esther have been feeling? What does the king do? Are the people's prayers answered?

Esther's hope was that the king would hold out his royal scepter. Xerxes was definitely attracted to Esther, and dressing in her royal robes probably enhanced her physical beauty. The scepter was symbolic of his authority. They were usually elaborately decorated with gold and precious stones. Shapes varied from wide, short maces to long, slender poles.

2. Many believe this to be symbolic of the privilege we have of coming before the throne of God. Read Hebrews 4:16. When are we allowed to come? Do you take advantage of that privilege?
3. The king seemed to be able to tell immediately that she had a petition. How did he know?
4. He promises her "half his kingdom" which is a figure of speech meaning "whatever you want," emphasizing his desire to meet her needs. What did Esther then propose? Why the hurry?

5. After the king and Haman came, why do you think she put off the confrontation for another day? Discuss some possible reasons for the delay.

6. Being invited to attend the banquet with the king and the queen surely was an honor for Haman. What do you think it did for his ego? Do you think this was part of Esther's plan? (Proverbs 28:26)

7. How hard do you think it must have been for Esther to restrain herself from blurting out the truth about Haman? What does this tell us about her character?

8. How well do you wait for God's timing in situations like this, when you know it's probably best to keep quiet? Is self-restraint difficult for you?

9. There were probably several servants in the throne room with the king. Do you think this would have been the appropriate place for her to make her request? Why would her own place be better?

10. Haman was very self-confident, wasn't he? What does Scripture say about that? In whom should our confidence be? (Read Psalm 118:8-9; Jeremiah 9:23-24; and Proverbs 16:18, and 3:5-6.)

We can learn many great lessons on what **NOT** to do or who **NOT** to be from Haman, can't we?
We'll talk more about that tomorrow. See ya then!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. From Esther 5:1-8, name the ways you see God providentially working.
2. From Esther we learn that our confidence has to be in the Lord. She could have perished, but she trusted God and His promise to His people. Right now, what is your confidence in? Your job? Your family? Your friends? Your abilities? Yourself? Or have you placed your confidence in the Lord? (I don't think there's a simple answer to that question. I think mine wavers from situation and circumstance ...)
3. From what you know so far about Haman, what lessons have you learned?

4. Is God calling you to speak up for something or someone, knowing that there may be consequences to face? What are some of the possible consequences?

5. Do you think it's possible for one person to make a difference? (Consider the examples of Mordecai and Esther.)

6. Write some general thoughts on the Book of Esther so far.

I love this part of the book of Esther. When Esther steps up to the plate to go to bat for her people, my heart soars! I can't imagine the fear that must have gone along with that decision. I picture Esther standing up a bit taller, walking with her head high. She had decided to honor God and His promise to her people. She was one of His, and it was time to be proud of that. Ladies, YOU are one of His! That truth should make you stand a little taller as well! You are one of the King's kids! Amen, Amen, and Amen!

