



## LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES: Part Two

### ESTHER: LESSON 5

Good Morning, ladies! I hope you're ready to delve deeper into our drama as we learn more about Haman's evil plot to kill Mordecai. The plot thickens as Esther continues to lure the king from banquet to banquet. We really have to hand it to Esther, she is a wise woman. This Sleeping Beauty has come alive!

#### First Day

1. In last week's lesson we read that Esther was asked to do something that seemed extremely challenging. She had a choice about how she would respond to Mordecai's call to action. How do you think you would've responded to an exhortation like that? If you were asked to basically risk your life, your reputation, or even sacrifice your free time, what would you do? Have you ever been asked by the Lord to do that? How does 1 John 3:16 play into this?
2. Esther was asked to fight for God's mercy for His people who didn't even deserve it. Have you ever been asked to show mercy to someone you felt was undeserving of it? Have you ever been the one asking for the undeserved mercy?

3. Max Lucado notes that in many ways, Esther's predicament was much like Jonah's. Read Jonah 1:1-17. In what ways are God's call to Jonah and His call to Esther similar? In what ways are they different?

Jonah didn't want to warn the Ninevites because he didn't think they deserved God's mercy (Jonah 4:2). He basically disagreed with God. But God had a better plan. According to Jonah 3, the people responded to Jonah's message, even when he didn't want them to. What a great example of how God will use us to fulfill His purposes in spite of us and what we want.

4. How was Esther's response different than Jonah's? (Jonah 1:3)
5. Read Esther 5:1-14 again, focusing on verses 9-14. We meet another woman character in our story. What's her name? What do we know about her?
6. Haman left the party happy and joyful. What happened that immediately and drastically changed his mood?
7. Haman invited his wife and friends to a "boast-fest" in verses 11-12. What did he boast about? What seemed to be the most important thing to Haman?

David Shepherd wrote, "Haman's hatred of Mordecai had grown so intense that it destroyed any satisfaction Haman could have found in his own activities. Hatred grows into bitterness with disastrous changes in the person who hates. Heed well the warning of Hebrews: 'See to it ... that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.'" (Hebrews 12:15)

8. Haman seemed to be the kind of person who was never satisfied, never having "enough." He just couldn't take Mordecai's rejection of him. Are you a person who is satisfied with what the Lord has given you, or are you continually looking for more in order to be satisfied? How does cultivating a grateful heart help with this issue?
  
9. What advice did his lovely wife and friends give him? Did it help feed his pride? How did he like the advice?
  
10. We know that Haman was a very proud man. What's the difference between being proud of someone or something and arrogance?

I'd love to share some thoughts written by Thomas a Kempis from *The Imitation of Christ*. He wrote, "Do not be ashamed to serve others because of your love for Jesus Christ, or to appear poor in the world's eyes. Do not count on your own strength; trust God. DO what you can and God will supply the difference. Take glory neither in money, if you have some, nor in influential friends, but in God who gives you everything and above all wants to give you Himself. Avoid boasting about the size or beauty of your body; which a little illness can disfigure or destroy. Have no pride in your native wit and talent; that would displease God who gave you every good thing that you naturally possess. Reject the thought that you are better than anyone else. If you think such haughty thoughts, God (who knows what's in you) has His own ideas regarding what is good and He does not always agree with us. If there is anything good about you, believe better things of others. This will keep you humble. It will not hurt you at all to consider yourself less righteous than others, but it will be disastrous for you to consider yourself better than even one person. The humble are always at peace; the proud are often envious and angry."

11. Any thoughts on the paragraph above?

**Memory Verse of the Week:** “In God we boast all day long and praise Your name forever.”

Psalm 44:8

**Second Day**

**Ponder and meditate on your memory verse.**

1. Read Esther 6:1-9. It’s important to remember that the Jews are probably unaware of Esther’s plan, and definitely, unaware of God’s plan! Imagine how horrible it would be to watch these seven-story gallows be built. Word must have been spreading about Mordecai and his “disrespect” for Haman. I’m sure Mordecai heard it too! What do you think they all must have been feeling as they watched this happening?
2. Describe the king’s restless night. List all the evidences of God’s providence in the first 5 verses.
3. How would things have been different if Mordecai was honored 5 years earlier when the incident actually happened?
4. Read Psalm 121:3-4. While Mordecai and Esther slept, God was at work. How do these verses bring you comfort?



This situation must have been soooo humiliating! It should have humbled him and forced him to look at his evil heart, but it didn't. Things would have turned out much differently for him if he had.

8. Have you ever experienced a humiliating situation due to a misunderstanding or a deliberate and intentional act? Did it create more bitterness, or did it drive you to repentance? (You don't have to share about this one ... )

As he and his friends were talking, the eunuchs came to take him to the banquet. Haman has absolutely no idea what he was walking into. He's just about to become the main course!

**Swindoll shares five lessons from this chapter to remind us that things are not always as they seem.**

- a. When all seems lost, it isn't.
  - b. When no one seems to notice, God does.
  - c. When everything seems great for our enemies, it's not.
  - d. When nothing seems just, it is.
  - e. When God seems absent, He's not.
9. Which of the above speaks to your heart the most, and why?

**See you tomorrow, ladies!**

### **Third Day**

**What's your memory verse?**

Haman hurries home with his head covered which was the practice of people mourning over some great tragedy. He was now spinning out of control, probably scared to death that the king might find out about his plans and see the gallows he had built. He didn't have much time to come up with a new plan, though, since they had to hurry to the banquet.

1. Friends and family should be the ones who hold us accountable, give wise counsel, and steer us in the right direction. Contrast Esther's advisor with Haman's. How were they different?
2. Are you a good advisor, counselor, or friend to others? Do you encourage right thinking, right living, and right actions? Do you try to help others follow God's plan for their lives, give them your own "opinion," or do you feel like it's none of your business? From our story, can you see how influential we can be in helping others to follow the Lord and make good decisions?
3. Have you ever helped contribute to someone's downfall or bad decision by unwise advice? What was the consequence? Is it something you can help to fix?

I wonder what Esther was feeling when she woke up that day. Was she nervous? Afraid? I'd love to peek inside her heart and see what thoughts were swirling around in her mind. Oh, what a day this would turn out to be.

4. Let's read Esther 7:1-8. Oh, my heavens! The king asks Esther again what favor she wants. Explain how Esther approaches the king. (Go, Esther, go!) What did she appeal to?
5. At this point, do you think Haman is squirming? Does it appear obvious to you that Esther has the advantage over Haman? How?

6. How did the king respond? Did he know that Esther was Jewish?
  
7. Haman was sitting right there. How did he first respond, in verse 6? Then what did he do? How did the king respond when he walked back in? (Do you think Esther could have even saved Haman at that point?)

Dave Shepherd wrote, "Banquets and feasts were prominent in sealing friendships, celebrating victories, and sharing joyous occasions. In oriental societies, banqueters assumed positions unfamiliar to westerners. Those who dined reclined on bedlike seats and lay at right angles to the table. When Haman begged Queen Esther for his life at the banquet, he approached the dining couch where she was reclining for the meal."

8. The king realized he had been tricked. Do you think he felt any guilt for the decree? After all, his impulsive decision put both his queen and the man who saved his life in danger. Read verses 9-10. How did the king deal with Haman? I wonder what he did when he stepped out? (Lucado said he stepped out the door to take a Prozac! Ha! Also, assaulting the Queen was a capital crime, worthy of death, by the way!)
  
9. Do you think Haman thought he was safe because no one had caught on to his plan? Did he mistake God's longsuffering for "getting away with it"? How do Ecc. 8:11, 2 Peter 3:9, and Thess. 5:3 relate to this?
  
10. Do you ever do the same? When it appears that God hasn't "acted" in a situation or showed any judgement or discipline, do you assume that the person has gotten away with it? When we adopt that perspective, how and why does discouragement set in?



11. What about you, personally? Have you ever felt like you got away with something because you haven't seen any fallout or consequences, so God must have thought it was "ok" even if it was against Scripture? (Galatians 6:7-8, Romans 14:12, Matthew 12:36)

I hope this story reminds you that God sees everything, is in control of everything, and uses everything for His purposes. God is a God of justice, and in the end, everything will be made right. We can count on it.

#### **Fourth Day**

**Work on your verse. Is the Lord usually the subject of your boasting?**

God seemed to want more from Esther than just sitting on the throne. She would become a rescuer and a defender. She protected the king from going through with the evil counsel from his advisor, Haman. She protected Mordecai and her people by obtaining a royal authority to counteract the decree, which we'll read about later. She did a lot more than just implore the king to stop the annihilation of her people. She exposed Haman, and her accusation led to his execution. She used her position as the queen to gain advantage for Mordecai, for when she revealed her family relationship to the king, he promptly promoted him. A lot more will happen in the following chapters, but God's timing is just simply amazing! To be honest, let's take it all the way back before our story began. What if Mordecai hadn't taken in Esther when her parents died? What if he had ignored God's command to take care of widows and orphans? But he obeyed God faithfully and set the stage for this miracle.

1. Did God "need" Mordecai and Esther to accomplish His plan? (Read 4:14) What if they had both said "no"?

God, through His mercy, invites us to join His work, like He did Esther. He doesn't "need" us since God "needs" nothing and no one! But when He does ask us to execute His plans, He supplies the help, support, wisdom, and power to accomplish it!

2. Has God invited you to join Him in some work for His kingdom and you're still hesitant? What kind of participation do you think He's asking for? What kind of opportunities is He giving you right now? What would you miss out on if you say no?
  
3. Esther came to a place where she had to focus on the "bigger picture" than just her own life. There's always a "bigger picture." Can you stop, pray, and ask the Lord to show you that picture regarding a situation you're currently going through?
  
4. Just as the king was willing to grant Esther's request, our King doesn't turn us away. He wants to hear our petitions, our requests, and our hurts. We can ask Him for mercy, for grace, for forgiveness, for provision, for strength, for wisdom, for patience, for power, and for HOPE. What do you need to ask for today? Do you trust His answer? Will you trust Him if you don't see or experience immediate results or answers?

I love that we, like Esther, have been given a place in the palace when we accept the salvation that is offered to us through Jesus Christ. We have been given new robes. Once we were dressed in dirty rags, now we are clothed in righteousness. We have a purpose on earth, as Esther, for such a time as this. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10.) We get to be seated with Him at His right hand in the Heavenly places! (Ephesians 1:20)

5. Can you end today by writing a prayer, thanking the Lord for your salvation, for your place in His kingdom now and forever, for the gifts and talents He's given you, for the blessings He's bestowed on you today and will bless you with in Heaven, and on and on and on.

### **Fifth Day**

**Write out your verse by memory.**

1. I'd like to address a few more interesting thoughts from our story so far. Before Esther could overcome her fears of perishing and everything else she may have been afraid of, the biggest obstacle to overcome was most likely herself. Getting over "ourselves" is usually our first battle. What do you think I mean by that?
2. How do we actually "overcome" our self? Take a few minutes to discuss that. (For a hint, read 1 John 5:4 and Rev. 21:7.) How is our "Self" a huge obstacle?
3. Are you struggling to overcome yourself before you can obey something God has put on your heart?

4. It appears that God softened the king's heart, especially toward Esther. God can soften any heart as well as break down any wall that seems immovable. He brought down the walls of Jericho, right? There is no wall He can't tear down; no heart He can't change. How does this truth give you comfort?
  
5. Sometimes we can see the walls, while other walls are invisible. The wall of a critical spirit, the wall of a stubborn will, the wall of an offended family member or friend, or even the wall of unforgiveness. What "wall" is set before you that seems impossible to conquer? Is there a heart that seems unchangeable? Can you trust the Lord with it? How does the story of Esther reveal the "bigness" of God? (Is that a word?) What does Psalm 18:29-30 tell us about this?

Sometimes it's so hard to wait for God to bring that wall down. The Israelites had to wait for God to move, and then do the funny march around the wall seven times. It takes patience as well as believing God's way is right, even when it doesn't make sense. (Like marching!) Mordecai and Esther had done a lot of waiting. Sometimes we feel we need to do more than "wait," but in reality, waiting is not passive, but active. To wait is to "intentionally" believe and trust.

6. Read Psalm 27:14 and Lamentations 3:26. Is there something you're waiting for right now? Waiting for answers? Waiting for direction? Waiting for a heart to change? A situation to change? Waiting is rough, but God is strong! Ask Him to give you the grace to continue to wait on Him.

That's all for now, ladies! Looking forward to reading how Mordecai and Esther come up with a new plan to help remedy the situation and save their people. Have a great day, great weekend, and a great time studying His Word!



