



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES: Part Two

ESTHER: LESSON 7

I'm sad to say that this week we'll be finishing our study of Esther. I've really grown to love this lady, haven't you? Our lesson will look a little different than usual as we do another type of "R&R," recap and remembering! We'll briefly look at chapter ten, then review some of the highlights of the story, as well as some of the lessons we learned from Esther herself. My prayer is that we take more time this week for self-reflection and soul-searching. There will be fewer questions, but hopefully, more prayer and listening to the Lord! (Not that you weren't listening to the Lord ... you know what I mean!)

In chapter 9, Mordecai writes the Jews instructions regarding the way to celebrate the victory. In the beginning, the Jews were united in their victory but divided in their celebration. The Jews in the provinces finished their fighting on the thirteenth day of Adar (March) and celebrated the following day. But since the Jews in Shushan were still defending themselves on that day, they didn't get to celebrate until the fifteenth. It really depended on where you lived. To unify them and keep peace, in 9:20-32, Mordecai, along with Esther, issued a decree that instructed all Jews to celebrate on both the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month, calling it the Feast of Purim. George Santayana said, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." So true.

First Day

1. Read Esther 10:1-3. How would you summarize this chapter?

2. What phrase describes the power and influence of the king?

3. What “reversals” do you see at this point, from the beginning to the end of the book? (Who was demoted, elevated, whose roles reversed, etc.)

4. We’ve discussed the importance of using your power and influence in a Godly way. In this chapter, can you see another example of how Mordecai used his? How was it so drastically different than how Haman used his? What can leaders today learn from the contrast of the two men?

5. What can we, as Christian women, learn from them as well?

The expression “distant shores” in verse 1 reflects how big the king’s empire really was. King Xerxes’ father, Darius 1, was responsible for the greatest expansion of the territory. The king was powerful enough to tax people throughout the entire empire. Mordecai worked for the good of his people, according to verse 3, whereas Haman used his power simply for personal gain. Mordecai contributed to the prosperity of the Persian Empire, even though he was a Jew. Under Haman, they would have lost millions in a bloodbath as they tried to destroy every single Jew.

6. I believe it is very significant that even the roles in the relationship between Esther and Mordecai were reversed. She once “followed his command,” but in 4:15-17, Mordecai now realizes that he needed her. The future of their people was now in Esther’s hands. He summoned her into action, refusing to accept her excuses, then steps aside and does what she asks. Why is this significant? What else does it tell us about Mordecai’s character?

In Charles Swindoll's commentary on Esther, he says that from this small chapter, three important principles emerge.

- a. When God wins, He often uses unexpected people.
 - b. When God wins, the qualities He upholds are usually unpretentious.
 - c. When God wins, the message He honors most often is universal.
7. We know that both Mordecai and Esther would be considered "unexpected people." Can you name some other examples in Scripture of God doing this?
 8. Can you think of a time where "you" were the unexpected person God chose to use in a situation? Can you share it?
 9. At the end of our book, the man at the center of the stage is Mordecai, who bore the mark of true humility, which God honored! How is he an example of the truth found in Philippians 2:3-4? Is lowliness of mind and true servanthood something that describes you?

Lastly, Swindoll said the "message God honors most often is universal," meaning that God honors those who have vision; who look beyond themselves to look out for others. Mordecai thought about the needs of his entire nation as well as the Persian Empire. I also think by doing this, he would be obeying the prophet Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 29:7, that says "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will have welfare." The word used in 10:3 is "shalom" which is used 237 times in the Old Testament. It can mean "absence of strife or war," but the following words more accurately encompass the meaning of the word: "completeness, wholeness, harmony, and fulfillment."

10. Is your "vision" self-centered or do you "look beyond" at the needs of your neighborhood, church, city, and world? Ask the Lord to really search your heart on this one!

That's it for today! A lot of questions for just three verses, right? See you tomorrow, ladies!

Memory Verse of the Week: Choose a verse, verses, or all eight, of **Psalm 121**. Be ready to share it with the group. This song is often called "God is our keeper," reminding us of the extent of God's providence in our lives!

Second Day

Work on your memory verse.

Today we'll be "recapping and remembering" bits and pieces of our story. Bear with me if they seem sort of random. One thought seems to lead me to another, then another getting older girls, what can I say? 😊

1. Esther lost her parents at a young age. If her sweet cousin, Mordecai, wouldn't have stepped up to assume responsibility for her care, Esther wouldn't have been in a position to save her people. Her adoption proved to be completely instrumental in God's redemption story of the Jews. How can we be a part of God's plan of redemption by caring for widows, orphans, and strangers as well? What thoughts do you have on this?

I love what Joni Eareckson Tada wrote about the Jews living in Persia. She said, "In many ways, their circumstances embody our own struggles as modern Christians. Though now we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to help us, we also find ourselves surrounded by a culture that fails to acknowledge God. The harsh realities of life can easily tempt us to despair. Yet we can take courage in the story of Esther, knowing that even when God's hand may not be visible, He is always at work in our lives and our world, fulfilling His promises and accomplishing His purposes."

2. Write your thoughts on the above paragraph. Looking at our world today, it's obvious our present-day world doesn't honor the same principles as Christians do, creating a struggle between those who desire to follow God's principles and those who don't. How can this story give you courage? Does it? Why or why not?

3. What qualities in a person does the world often honor that may be different from those God does?

4. What do you think our world today thinks should be our top priority? Do you think it would be consistent with Scripture?

5. Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Instead of the godless world being afraid of the church, the church is afraid of the world." Do you agree? What do you think he means?

6. If you're a mom, how diligently and faithfully are you teaching these principles to your children? How are you helping them process the differences between what our culture tells us and what the Lords tells us, if they are different? How do you help them deal with cultural "peer pressure"? How do YOU deal with it?

7. The story of Esther was recorded so that when future generations of Jews recalled their people's exiles and hardships, they would focus on the victory and relief rather than the hardships. Is there a story of God's faithfulness you'd like to pass on to future generations in your own family?

8. What are some of the significant religious holidays that Christians celebrate today? What acts of God do these holidays help us remember? Do the “traditions” of the holidays ever get in the way of why we’re celebrating? What’s the danger of that? How can we prevent it from happening?

I pray that we learn how to better celebrate all God has done for us, in us, and through us. His faithfulness, goodness, and provision are certainly worth remembering and celebrating!

Third Day

Work on your verse! Anyone doing all eight?

I want to start our lesson today with a thought that didn’t occur to me when we did chapter 3, but in review, it really stuck out. It’s not really about Esther, but King Xerxes.

1. Read Esther 3:7-11. What did the king’s response to Haman, “Do with the people as you please” reveal about his respect for the dignity of human life? How could he have ordered the annihilation of a race of people based on the accusation of one man?

2. Haman said these people were “different.” How can that stereotype become the beginning of persecution? How can that lead to the belief that they “deserve” a certain type of treatment?

3. I have to ask ... Who are the people in your life that you would consider “different”? Do you treat them “differently” because of those differences?

4. How do we guard against judging those who are “different” than us, whether they have different looks, beliefs, traditions, or customs?

5. Read Esther 5:14 which describes Haman’s mood as “pleased” or “delighted.” How sad that the result of jealousy and the desire for revenge could bring someone “delight.” I know this may seem like an odd question, but when someone you dislike, or you feel has wronged you, experiences a consequence, do you feel “pleased or delighted”? Why is this so dangerous? How does this story challenge you and help you look at it from another perspective?

6. Mordecai and Esther were given an opportunity to serve God in an incredible way. Our opportunities to serve, and the choices we make, may not affect an entire nation, but they will affect someone. In your life, who are specifically and obviously affected by the choices you make? Who also may be indirectly affected? Write your thoughts on this.

7. When Esther approached the king, knowing there was a possibility she could perish, she chose to be obedient at the possible expense of her life. It’s easy to allow the fear of consequences to dictate our obedience to the Lord. Is the fear of some consequence affecting your choice to obey the Lord in some area?

8. What are some examples from our story that show us how quickly our lives can change in a day? Our future here on earth may be unpredictable, but our eternity is not! Spiritually speaking, how does trust in God help us navigate life's crazy changes, both good and bad?

Esther and Mordecai could have chosen to crawl in a hole, cover their eyes, and look the other way regarding what was happening. They must have felt like the future seemed too dark, too scary, and too overwhelming. Have you ever felt like that? Maybe not as much as Esther, but I have! I love Philip Yancey's words in his book, Where is God When It Hurts, which I would highly recommend! He wrote, "God has allied Himself with the poor and suffering, establishing a kingdom tilted in their favor, which the rich and powerful often shun. He has promised supernatural strength to nourish our spirit, even if our physical suffering goes unrelieved. He has joined us. He has hurt and bled and cried and suffered. He has dignified for all time those who suffer by sharing their pain. He is with us now, ministering to us through His Spirit and through members of His body who are commissioned to bear us up and relieve our suffering for the sake of the head. He is waiting, gathering the armies of good. One day He will unleash them. The world will see one last explosion of pain before the full victory is ushered in. Then He will create for us a new, incredible world. And pain shall be no more."

9. Write your thoughts on the paragraph above, especially in light of a circumstance you may be facing or pain you may be suffering through.

10. If God is not sovereign over BOTH good and evil, He is not sovereign at all. How does God use evil to accomplish His purposes?

Fourth and Fifth Days

Write out your verse from memory!

1. For the remainder of our time, we'll be reflecting on our friend Esther. First question, in what ways is Esther a role model for women today?
2. What lessons from Esther's life significantly impacted you? Look back at your previous lessons if you're having trouble remembering.
3. How do you plan to implement those lessons and practically apply them?
4. I love the phrase "for such a time as this" because it reminds me of the purpose God has for me. God places us in unique positions to be used to make a difference at the right time; His time. Whatever is going on in our life, God is sovereign and looking for women (and men) with courage and integrity to say, along with Isaiah, "Here I am. Send me." (Isaiah 6:8) Reflect on this phrase and apply it to yourself, right now, right here, today. How does it speak to you? Challenge you? Make you nervous? Ask the Holy Spirit to really speak to you on this.

5. Swindoll asks two questions that I loved. Based on Esther's and Mordecai's examples, what kind of person is God looking for in our generation, "for such a time as this"? And then ... What can you do today to become that type of person?

6. Do you see a shadow of Christ in this story? How?

7. It's been said that "The church is always one generation short of extinction." What does that mean? Do you agree?

8. Both Esther's and Mordecai's lives "proved" they were committed to God. Do your actions, or your lifestyle, or your choices, "prove" or show the world that you are also committed to Him?

9. To end, if you could say one thing to Esther, what would it be?

