

Day 6 – Read Esther 6

Have you ever been asked a trick question – only you didn't know it was a trick? That was the plight of Haman when King Xerxes asked: "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" (Esther 6:6). In this case neither the king nor his subject knew it was a trick. Haman thought the king was talking about him. Haman thought that the king recognized him as a trusted and loyal servant; he even thought he was better than a servant.

Haman did not know that King Xerxes had been reading the record of his reign. In that chronicle, he discovered that Mordecai, Esther's cousin and Haman's enemy, had done him a great service and had never been recognized or honored. So, Haman answered the king – a royal robe, a beautiful horse, and public acclamation! The king had Haman present these gifts to Mordecai.

How the mighty has fallen. Haman could see his downfall. Like all of us, Haman wanted to be recognized, but he wanted it so much that he was willing to annihilate a specific enemy as well as an entire group of people he had decided he hated. Haman's hatred, discontent, and rage were his downfall. He chose his hateful arrogant attitude and because of this he turned his back on all the positive that could have been his. We choose our attitude, and we choose what we say. Let's take some time to pray and fast like Esther's people so we can choose wisely.

-Diane Dyk

Day 7 – Read Esther 7

"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." Esther 7:1 (NIV)

Can you imagine – gold, jewels, homes, and a place of honor! It boggles the mind! All kinds of greedy thoughts whirl around in my head. What would I ask for? What is the thing I most want? What would you ask for? Would it be things?

Queen Esther asked to be allowed to live, and for her people to be allowed to live. Then she had to wait and pray that this volatile man, a king who needs only to speak a word and his wish is carried out, really did want to grant her wish.

Our God gives us permission to speak all of the time. He treats us as his beloved children. He gives us the answers to our prayers. He saved us, and continues to save us every day of our lives. Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai teach us that when we pray, it is way better to pray for the things that are not things. It is best if we dig deep into our hearts, overcome our fears, and ask God for what we really need to live a good and faithful life.

-Diane Dyk

Day 8 – Read Esther 8

"For the Jews it was a day of light, happiness, joy, and honor." Esther 8:16 (CEB)

Struggles. It seems life is a constant series of struggles: family, stress, work, schedules, illnesses, financial troubles, the newest disaster on the news, cancer, a death in the family. There really does seem to be an endless list of difficulties that we must overcome, and at times the burden of those stresses seems unbearable.

That must be how the Jews living under the rule of King Xerxes felt when "The order commanded people to wipe out, kill, and destroy all the Jews, both young and old, even women and little children" (Esther 3:13). Esther, though, kept her faith and worked according to God's plan. She was able to persuade King Xerxes to reverse his previous law, now making the Jews the favored people that could defend themselves from the attackers, and to wipe out, kill, and destroy their attackers, and keep anything their attackers owned.

That might be a little more drama than we go through on a regular basis, but the struggles of modern life can still wear on the soul, and sometimes it is hard to see an end in sight. But this story shows us that no matter how tough the circumstances are, there will be an end to the struggle. If we continue to work according to God's plan, there will be a day of light, happiness, joy, and honor.

Celebrate those days when they come. Celebrate the bright, joyful days in life. Better yet, celebrate the bright moments, even in the dark days.

I'm a huge fan of a photographer named Dewitt Jones. In fact, I subscribe to an email list of his. The entire goal of his emails is to help you remember to stop and see the beauty in the world. Once a week, I receive an email from him with an amazing photograph and an uplifting caption or quotation. The best part though is the reminder on the bottom of the page. "Celebrate what's right with the world!" I love that concept – celebrating all the things that are right in our world, rather than focusing on the things that are wrong (as hard as that is to do).

Although we all have troubles, we must temper them with the good things in life. Some days are hard. Some days are very hard. But some days are amazing. And if you look close enough, you will find the good that God puts in the world. Whether it is a graduation, a family member going home from the hospital, a raise at work, the birth of a new baby, a nice day to relax in the back yard, or the joy imparted by the smile from a friend (or even a stranger), the bright days will always outshine the dark ones.

Find the bright moments in life. Be the bright moment in someone else's life.

-Aaron Van Ningen

Day 9 – Read Esther 9

The story of Esther and her people takes a dramatic turn in Chapter Nine. Tables have turned for the enemies of the Jews! On the very day that Haman meant to overpower the Jewish people, a swift and decisive victory came to the Jews. In fact, "no one could stand against them, for everyone was afraid of them" (vs. 2, NLT).

What are the battles you face today? Take courage! "We who have fled to him [God] for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls" (Hebrews 6:18-19). As we encounter the enemies of our lives, let's model the strategy of Queen Esther by remaining faithful to God amid impossible situations, steadfastly seeking Him while surrounded by unfaithful people.

Heavenly Father, in the challenges I face today help me to draw strength from the knowledge that You are the Victorious One who has overcome this world. I trust You even when uncertainty and chaos surround me and praise You in advance for how You will work.

-Amanda Rue

Day 10 – Read Esther 10

The book of Esther is one of only two books in the Bible that does not mention God by name. The author's silence, however, does not imply His absence.

God is present when Queen Vashti is deposed and replaced by Esther. His hand is at work when Mordecai overhears and prevents the murder of King Xerxes. His timing is perfect when Xerxes learns of these events, turns the tables on the tyrannical Haman, and elevates Mordecai to a place of high esteem in his court. By strategically placing Queen Esther in a position of influence God mightily uses this courageous woman to orchestrate the deliverance of His people. No, God's name is not mentioned, but His presence is infused throughout every aspect of the Queen Esther narrative.

Lord, I believe You are with me each and every day, as my Emmanuel. You are a trustworthy Lord, Savior, Heavenly Father and Friend. You faithfully guide me through the victorious days of blessing which I experience; days I imagine Your providential hand has guided my every step. But You are also right beside me through my darkest days; times I wade through fear, confusion, and uncertainty. Though You may be still, Your word promises that I can trust in Your unfailing love and rejoice because You rescued me. You are my God and Your Spirit's presence is my stronghold. Amen.

-Amanda Rue