

The Book of Esther

Heart of Mary Women's
Fellowship



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The Book of Esther starts off with a dream. God is known to speak to people in dreams, throughout Scripture and even to this day. I'm a very active dreamer - a night doesn't go by without one, and I've definitely woken up from a few that I just knew were of God. I can still vividly remember every detail, and their meanings continue to be unveiled as I go through different chapters of my life. So what's in this dream?

Mordecai, a Jew in Babylonian exile, dreams of darkness and distress. All of the nations are preparing for war against the *"righteous nation,"* the Jewish people, who cry out to God in the face of their impending doom. As they cried out in prayer, "as though from a tiny spring, there came a great river, with abundant water" to save them. (Esther 1:9)

Did you notice that? The abundant water comes forth from a tiny spring.

You will see in later chapters who the water symbolizes for this particular story, yet God's dreams always have deeper layers and meanings. This water can be for any of

us, this powerful river of His grace. Christ constantly takes the not enough and turns it into overflowing abundance. He constantly takes the small, humble soul and uses Him for His glory. This is the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, constantly played out in our lives.

His grace starts off as a little spring in our souls, and we are completely in control of allowing it to turn into a great flood of water. The key is asking for it, like a valve switch - the people cried out to God. And waited. And remained open. And trusted. So wade into this spring, sisters, and watch as the water begins to rise and rush forth all around you.

This river of grace is in direct opposition to the luxurious banquet of King Ahasuerus, a 3-month banquet to show off the riches of his kingdom to his peers. Glasses of gold and silver were filled with *"abundant sweet wine, such as the king himself drank."* (Esther 1:7) In this place where the wine flowed and material graces abounded, the soul was left inside like a dried up spring. This abundant wine was not a torrent of grace, not the sweet life-giving Blood we receive at the banquet of the Mass, but a false quenching of material thirst. An empty abundance.

It's no wonder then, that this empty wine leads to such a worldly attitude towards women. The drunken King Ahasuerus did not call Queen Vashti in to admire her beauty in a grateful and God-honoring sense, but as his prized possession. Instead of viewing her as the crown of creation, he wanted to show her off as his best jewel. Yet she refuses.

I have to wonder, why did Vashti say no? She is so vilified by the men that they didn't even stop to ask the question, and Scripture remains silent on the matter. Was she fed up with being on display? Was she yearning for that river flood of grace? Or was she simply tired from entertaining, after having thrown a banquet for all the women? Whatever the case, I admire her for her courage.

However, the humiliated king and his men worry that *“the queen’s conduct will be made known to all the women, and they will look with disdain upon their husbands.”* (Esther 1:17) In order to protect his public image and that of husbands throughout his kingdom, they decide to dispose Queen Vashti. This was motivated out of fear and power, not out of love and respect for their wives. It is a God-given honor that the man is the head of the household, but it is never something that should be taken by force or greed. The men were not secure in their call by God to lead the household in virtue and sacrificial love. Instead, they tried to dominate and suppress the women in their lives to feel in control. This is the opposite of grace, opposite of the mission of love God gave in the garden where the abundant life-giving water flowed. —*Emily*

Reflect: Men know women talk, otherwise the king’s men would not have acted as they did. Are you a positive or negative force with your talking/gossip amongst the other women in your life? How can you build up the people around you with your words instead of tear them down?

Act: If you’re married or in a relationship, think of 5 things about your spouse/partner that you’re thankful for and either tell him or write him a note (and have him do the same!). And whether you’re single or married, look at yourself in the mirror with the dignity that Queen Vashti stood up for and ask for the river of grace to flood over you. Believe you are worth it!



I grew up in a house of girls. I have two sisters on Earth, one in Heaven and a very involved mother. I gained another amazing sister and mother through marriage and have seen four nieces join our family in the past eight years. I myself have given birth to three beautiful daughters and right now girls outnumber boys in my house 4-1. To say the least, I know a thing or two about all things girly.

Thanks in part to being raised in the presence of so many strong-willed women, I knew that with that with the beauty of being a woman, also came great power. I also knew once I had my first daughter, that that power was something that must be taught, and taught early on. I had to somehow explain to my three daughters that though they might not be as physically strong, or tall, or loud as a man, their power, their ability to lead, their ability to think for themselves all lies within.

In Chapter 2 of the book of Esther we see the rise of a Queen, and not just any queen, but one of the most powerful Queens of the Bible. We see a woman who was chosen for her role, a role that would go on to play a huge part in the lives of many people. Esther showed bravery, fearlessness and the ability to lead, but in Chapter 2, we find her hiding. Esther 2:7 tells us that Esther was *"beautifully formed and lovely to behold"* yet she was commanded by Mordecai to hide her nationality and family.

She had to hide who she was before the judgement and decision was made by the king. Ultimately when the decision was made, the king chose Esther to be the Queen, and she would go on to become one of the greatest heroines the Bible has to offer. How often do we hide ourselves? How often do we put on a protective layer before going into a situation that we may not be able to control? Do we shield ourselves from God in fear that the thoughts in our heads, or the feelings in our hearts might not live up to what we feel like He is asking of us?

In Esther there was an act of hiding, literal hiding, but how often are we guilty of hiding our own talents, ideas and desires with others. Do we fear that opening up, sharing with one another might only lead to an opportunity to be ridiculed and judged? Do we shy away from forming true and lasting friendships and relationships because those relationship may lead to the breaking down of some of the defenses we have set up in our own hearts to avoid ever feeling vulnerable?

When I said I grew up loving all things girly, I meant it. One of those things was the love of makeup. I love experimenting with different makeup and trends. It's something that I see as harmless and a way for me to express myself when I don't always feel like changing my style or my complete wardrobe. Recently I watched a YouTube video where a woman did a makeup tutorial about how with makeup you can "*change your face.*"

The video went on to show step by step how, with using hundreds of dollars of makeup, you can transform your "*subpar*" face into something "*beautiful.*" At the end of the video I thought for awhile about what message we send to our young people, especially our young girls when it comes to things like clothing and makeup.

Are we preaching albeit silently, to them that they way God made them is meant to be covered up, or meant to be heavily exposed by immodest dress? As a society have we engrained in them that in order to be beautiful they must be hidden?

One of my favorite parts of wearing makeup is removing it before I go to bed. There's something oddly satisfying about removing the makeup, watching it disappear and seeing my natural face in the mirror.



Esther 3:8-9

'Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus: "Dispersed among the nations throughout the provinces of your kingdom, is a certain people living apart. Their laws differ from those of every other people and they do not obey the laws of the king; so it is not proper for the king to tolerate them. If it please the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them..."'

Haman was a prideful man. He did not tolerate losing the battle of the bride to Mordecai because in his mind it meant he was losing power. Haman created a scenario worthy of the king's attention in an attempt to sway his opinion of the Jews and took it to the inhumane extreme of extermination. By ordering the pur, King Ahasuerus adds his name to the list of attempted assassins of the Jews. In today's study let's peek into the examination of consciousness in regards to the same situation, the laws of the king. for three characters: Haman, King Ahasuerus, and Mordecai. Our heroine, Esther, represents God's will, however we have to wait until tomorrow's study to further discuss her.

As previously stated, Haman was a prideful man. For arguments sake, he did believe he was doing the right thing, he just went about it in all the wrong ways...good

intention, bad judgement. Haman was trying to set a standard for others to know that kneeling to the king and he was expected, and regardless of religious beliefs, the king's orders remained priority. Think of the current battles that exist between believers and the government? Haman very much was interested in only the government's power over its' citizens; gratefully we live in places which allow open discourse of such matters. Extermination of the citizens...we are not so far removed from the atrocities of the past to think this completely unfathomable? Haman arguably was inclined to ensure every member followed the laws of the kingdom, and his boss...

King Ahasuerus entrusted few advisors to relay information between himself and his jurisdictions. And as king, Ahasuerus was privy to certain honors reserved for royalty: i.e. people were expected to kneel in front of him and his advisors. Think of your small inner circle...if one of those forcefully told you of the harm another was doing, would you be inclined to believe it? At a time before Jesus introduced a kinder more forgiving God, the Persians, as well as most societies, were inclined to meet any rebellion with force, and King Ahasuerus was informed by his most inner circle that the Jewish people were rebelling. Without Esther stepping in and educating the ill-informed Ahasuerus, one could arguably say he was not in the wrong...again good intention, bad judgement.

This leads us to Mordecai, his rebellion of the laws of the land and adherence to the laws of God. Jesus taught us to give Caesar his due, however, again, Esther is before that time. As a Christian, I think if push came to shove, I would side with my faith over society and I think that therein lies some of the purpose to the story of Esther. Mordecai was breaking the civil law, but in the boundaries of his examination of conscience, he was following the laws of his religion. By Mordecai not kneeling to the government, Ahasuerus was willing to exterminate an entire race and society.

—Michelle

Reflect: Think about a current situation in your life in which you bounce between what society expects and what the Church teaches. Is it possible to keep a separation of church and state in our day to day lives? What ways do you side with society over what Church dogma states?



As I write this, the Women’s March just took place in Washington, D.C. and around the country. My sister, mother and I inadvertently found ourselves in the midst of the one in Boston, on a visit to the city. While I’m ALL about standing up for the dignity of women, I couldn’t help but be saddened at what we saw. Many women were holding graphic posters, proudly calling themselves by the exact crude names that they were protesting against. Instead of rallying behind the goodness of our common bond as women, they seemed to draw their strength from such a false and divisive version of feminism. As a Catholic woman, I felt I had to hide my identity amongst the wolves, as Esther did. I felt defeated, worried of what speaking out might bring upon me.

Esther felt this same way when Mordecai begged her to intercede for her people. She knew that by saying yes there was a good chance she would face death. Mordecai wisely encourages her,

“Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews... Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” (Esther 4:13-14)

Perhaps we, too, have been born for just such a time as this. We are called to band together as women and witness to true beauty and goodness, to point to the Light, when it feels like the entire world is against us. But what does true feminism look like?

"Then Queen Esther, seized with deadly anxiety, fled to the Lord." (Esther 14:1)
Esther went straight to prayer. Not just fluffy, half-hearted prayer, but deep gut-wrenching prayer. The Prayer of Esther is so beautiful, I encourage you to go back and read it slowly. Esther first humbled herself in prayer, by physically taking off her royal gowns and then by reaffirming her complete dependence on God. She then offered praise and thanksgiving to God, by recalling His wondrous deeds to the Jewish people. It's only after this humbling of herself and praise of God that she prays intercessory prayers, even still with God's glory in mind. And she ends in trust, that God will keep His promises, and asks for strength to carry out His will. This is the perfect formula for intercessory prayer, one we can follow in our own lives.

Then the torrents of grace came, which started from a spring of fear.

A woman who prays like this is a mighty sight to behold, especially when she is fighting for the truth, for the good, or to protect the vulnerable. There have been many of them throughout Scripture, whose voices of prayer rise and flow together like a tidal wave of grace, culminating with Mary our Queen Mother.

Queen Esther is a prototype of Mary, a foreshadowing of what is to come. Just as Esther interceded on behalf of her people, Mary was at the foot of the Cross and is now at the foot of God's throne in Heaven interceding on our behalf. She only wore royal garments after she had worn the sackcloth and ashes of Calvary. Her prayers save God's people not just from death of the body, but also death of the soul. We need the confidence to ask for her powerful intercession, as Mordecai knew to ask Esther.

And in turn, how can we, as women, intercede on the behalf of others? Do others know to turn to us as strong prayer warriors? We may feel weak, anxious, or laden down with discouragement. But not even Esther went in to face the king alone - *“after invoking the aid of the all-seeing God and Savior, she took two maids with her; on one she leaned gently for support, while the other followed, carrying her train.”* (Esther 15:2-4)

Do we ask our fellow sisters to bear us up, to help us in our intercession, when we may be too weak ourselves to plead before the King? When this happens, our prayers aren't always answered in the way we want them to, but the miracle is that our souls are made steady and comforted by the fact that our sisters are holding us.

This is the true strength of a woman, the power of our hearts, the ability to bring about change and withstand the hardest of trials. It's found when we connect ourselves to God, when we use the feminine genius that He has created us with to fight for the good. It's working with men in this mission, wanting to be equal but still unique co-partners. When this dynamic works the right way, it can save nations. So sisters, let us pray, let us hold each other up in true dignity. We have been born for such a time as this. — *Emily*

Reflect: What qualities do you think are found in true feminism? Can you see any of them in Esther throughout this chapter? Have you ever felt the strength of a group of women who pray together?

Act: Who in your life could you intercede for today? It could be someone in your family, a stranger, or even a country. If you're married, try interceding for your spouse. Use the formula of Queen Esther - humble yourself before God, thank and praise Him for His goodness, pray intercessory prayers, and end in trust. Ask Mary, Queen of Heaven, to aid in your intercession.



What's the most suspenseful movie that you've ever watched? I'm not asking you to think of a movie that scared the pants off you, but a movie that kept you waiting in agony, filled with tension and anxiety. We've all seen at least one. According to Alfred Hitchcock, suspense relies on giving the audience a bit of information that the characters in the story don't know. Suspense in a movie is an important element that keeps the audience engaged.

So you can imagine the suspense that begins as soon as Esther walks into the throne room. We, as the audience, know that Esther is risking her life by showing up uninvited. There's a sigh of relief when the king allows her into his presence, but we also know that Esther has vital information that she needs to tell her husband as soon as possible. She asks the king to invite Haman for dinner, but when the dinner actually happens, she invites the King and Haman for another dinner the following night.

If this story was a movie, you can almost hear the audience screaming *"Tell him, Esther, tell him! Why can't you tell him?"*

When I read this chapter, I had to ponder over it. I knew that it took a lot of courage for Esther to show up to the King's throne room uninvited, but why didn't she tell him about what was going on then and there? And why, after inviting the King and Haman to dinner, did she just ask to have another dinner the next night? Isn't Esther supposed to be courageous? Is she too scared to just spit it out?

The interesting thing about courage is that being courageous doesn't consist of rushing into things head-on all the time. It's actually a middle road between cowardice and foolhardiness. Courage, like any other virtue, is something that is constant, hard to change. So keep in mind that even in waiting, Esther is being courageous.

Esther's decision to wait worked out in the long run anyway, because Haman left with his ego completely inflated. Now it might seem like a bad thing that his pride has swelled to such a degree, especially since the chapter ends with him plotting to hang Mordecai. However, what he doesn't realize is that he's setting up his own downfall.

I used to study a lot of literature in college. In many of the stories I read, the villain would always have a moment where they experience a false victory. This would be the pinnacle of the play, or the highest point in the story, just before the villain experiences his inevitable defeat. In *Return of the King*, for example, the Witch-King of Angmar boasted that no man could kill him. However, Merry (a Hobbit) succeeds in stabbing the Witch-King in the back and Eowyn (a woman) removes her helmet and declares "*I am no man*" before stabbing the Witch-King in his face.

Esther is a lot like Eowyn in this chapter because she's probably (and rightfully) scared out of her mind. However, she chooses to wait for the right moment before she makes her move and will eventually be rewarded for her patience. Haman only gets a moment of swelled ego.



Although I would like to think that I am not as selfish and sinful as Haman, I do know what it is like to experience the kind of humility that he endured in chapter six of the book of Esther. I would like to think that probably everyone in this life has experienced some form of humility and let me tell you, it is not a particularly pleasant thing to have to experience, but it is necessary. It is necessary that we as humans be shown our weakness and brokenness because in those moments are when we are called to cling to our Lord.

In our moments of weakness we can gain strength and surety from the Lord. We need to decrease in order for God to increase. In this chapter, the king becomes aware of the good deeds that Mordecai has done and plans on praising and honoring him. At this exact moment, Haman goes to the king hoping to convince him to kill Mordecai and knows nothing about the king's plans to praise him.

The king asks Haman what should be done for the one whom the king wishes to reward. This is obviously a little confusing to Haman because he thinks he is the one who is going to be rewarded! Haman starts to list off all of the worldly things that should be given to the rewarded one and in a twist of fate; the rewards are given to Mordecai!



The Lord wishes to reward each and every one of us. How has He rewarded you today?

Every story, whether it be a novel, a play, a movie, or a TV show, has a *“moment of truth,”* the part of the story where the character has a make-or-break decision. Does Luke Skywalker kill Darth Vader or show mercy to the villain? Will Frodo throw the ring into Mount Doom or keep the ring for himself?

Queen Esther faces her moment of truth when she has the king and Haman over for dinner a second time. At this point, she has seen evidence that the king has honored Mordecai, so she knows that there’s a chance that the king might listen to her, but Haman was still the king’s Prime Minister and had the king’s trust.

When she finally told the king about her plight and revealed Haman’s plot, there was a moment where the King left as the guards seized Haman. Then the king returned to see Haman throwing himself onto Esther, begging for his life. The king refuses to let Esther be violated, and so Haman was finally taken out of the room and was later sentenced to die in the very gallows that he created for Mordecai.

This was a moment of truth for both Esther and her husband. Esther had to be courageous enough to tell the truth and the King had to prove his loyalty to his wife.



James 4:10

“Then Esther spoke again to the king; she fell at his feet and besought him with tears...”

Do you ever feel like you just can't - maybe even shouldn't - ask God for one more thing? Like you've been such a pest all day or week or month and maybe it's time you've learned already how to do something without God? Or maybe, you just feel that he's tired of you asking? That you should be proficient at this - whatever "this" might be for you - by now?

I know that I do feel like that sometimes. But here we should take heart, and learn from Esther. Consider, here she is having just pointed out that she is about to die - her and all her people - and the king is enraged and has her would-be killer hanged. And still Esther throws herself at her king's feet, beseeches him with tears, even, to save her life. Her, an orphaned Jewess, begging the king to reverse his edict and to save the Jews from destruction. As if he hadn't already done enough by saving the life of Esther and Mordecai and by executing the man who sought to kill them.



Esther 9:25-26

“Yet, when the plot became known to the king, the king ordered in writing that the wicked plan Haman had devised against the Jews should instead be turned against Haman and that he and his sons should be impaled on stakes. And so these days have been named Purim after the word Pur.”

I asked a Jewish friend to describe Purim and he said, like most Jewish holidays, it was there to celebrate the Jews not dying...again. Throughout history God has repeatedly saved the chosen ones from annihilation leading me to reflect on the constant threat bestowed on the Jewish people. As I write this study, the discussion of where to place the U.S. Embassy within Israel has again erupted causing many to wonder if and how the relations between Israel and Palestine will ever be resolved. Will the Jewish people, and now state, ever feel fully safe and protected? Political discourse is not appropriate for this forum, thus I wish to draw our attention to the punishment of Haman and why a holiday, such as Purim, is celebrated.

In the quote read at the beginning, the Bible tells us the order dictated that 'he and his sons should be impaled on stakes.' Although it doesn't state whether this actually happened or not to Haman, it does show an example of the mindset of King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther and the sentences ordered down on criminals and traitors. He was a bad man no doubt; Haman created a plan to exterminate an entire race of people! In the synagogue on Purim, the Jewish grumble and yell at the name of Haman during the annual reading of the book of Esther. My hope as a human race though is we soon move past the age old response of government sponsored death and choose to respect all life, including horrible criminals.

Chapter nine states

"Thus were established, for their appointed time, these days of Purim which Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had designated for the Jews, just as they had previously enjoined upon themselves and upon their descendants the duty of fasting and supplication." Esther 9:31

One statement to look at is 'previously enjoined.' Purim is noted as being one of the smaller holidays for the Jewish, and their other holidays are dependent on God's continued protection at potential annihilating situations (like Passover). I think it also important to realize the value of pop-culture and its' impact on societal norms, i.e. Esther is a story meant to influence the Jewish people at the time (and possibly to today) into adherence of religious laws over government demands. And to be honest, who doesn't want to be thought of as a strong, independent, faithful woman? Esther is a perfect example of a woman we should look to as a role-model, minus her liking of corporal punishment... - *Michelle*

Reflect: What women in literature or movies have inspired you or influenced your behaviors? Is there a certain vice or weakness you have worked on because of the choices of that character?



Did you know you can search the Internet for ways to “be cool?” Advice like this is particularly available the younger crowd, those school aged kids still full of angst and not sure exactly which way to roll their jeans and tuck their shirt to avoid ridicule.

But the internet is full of advice for us older ladies, too. Older being relative, for you can find directions on how to be well liked in college or at the office. You can find out how to be liked by other singles, other moms, or by guys. The internet even holds the secrets on what the difference is between being well liked and being popular.

How Mordecai ever became so famous then, must be a true mystery. The internet wasn’t around to give him the step by step on how to become powerful, or how to be “popular with his many kindred.”

Actually, Mordecai had something better than the internet, if you can believe it. He had, as the writer of Hebrews says it, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” God had granted him a dream - a tiny spring which became a river, and there was light and the sun an abundant water - these things he did not see, and yet hoped for in God.

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