

A Practical Study of ESTHER

Study Number Two – Esther 2:1-23

We're in study #2 in the book of Esther.

I'd like to do something a little different as we start. I want to read a prayer from Ruth Myers' book *Christ/Life* because I think it's going to set the stage. This is one of those studies that's ugly. It's one of those studies that's hard to teach but it's so real to life. And I trust that God will really minister to us to realize the treasure we have if we're fighting against this culture and living the kind of lives that please Him.

(Christ/Life by Ruth Myers)

My heart rejoices in You, Lord, for the amazing privilege of being chosen by You in eternity past and being called by You with a holy calling. How wonderful to know that I never need to fear that You will reject me.

I celebrate the fact that I've been called according to Your purpose, and that Your purpose includes both intimate relationship with You and effective service for You. I'm part of Your chosen family—set apart to be Your treasured possession!

And thank You for making Your son my Good Shepherd who calls me by name.

And Lord, I count on You to guide and empower me to lead a life worthy of my holy calling.

Thank You again that I'm a chosen one—called to love and obey the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Supreme Ruler of all things.

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John Wooden was a famous coach with UCLA for years and years and years and he wanted to leave in his legacy something for his son. He left his 7-point creed to his son:

(The Essential Wooden: A Lifetime of Lessons on Leaders and Leadership by John Wooden & Steve Jamison)

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Help others.
3. Make each day your masterpiece.
4. Drink deeply from good books, especially the Good Book.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build a shelter for a rainy day.
7. Pray for guidance, and count and give thanks for your blessings each day.

p. 13

Last week we were at 483 B.C. Xerxes was on the throne and he had wife troubles and he divorced Vashti.

Since last week's study—that was 483 B.C. and we are at 479 B.C.. —Four years have happened. It's a real sad time.

Xerxes actually went and fought the Greeks during this four year period. He won some initial battles but he made some stupid military decisions and he lost the war. So after four years he's coming home to a magnificent empty palace in Susa.

When a guy's had a tough time and he's been on the road for that long and he gets his tail whipped in what he was trying to accomplish, he hopes for some warm, loving arms. Emotionally he's thinking of Vashti as the scene of this study opens. What an idiot he was to listen to his council and to allow them to come up with a Persian proposal that meant she would never see him again and she would be replaced as queen of the land.

So you can't help but have a feeling in your heart for him in the midst of all of this loneliness and the hurt from it. As we launch into the study, we need to remember that when you are not in your right mind and you're not rested, you're going to make some pretty dumb decisions. I think he's probably feeling a little bit like that.

v. 1 Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.

“Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.”

When you’re drinking wine and your emotions are pretty high, you’re going to make some dumb decisions. And he certainly has done that.

I put Hosea 4:11 there from the *New Living Translation*:

Hosea 4:11

Alcohol and prostitution have robbed my people of their brains.

It’s certainly pretty graphic as far as what Xerxes is doing in this situation.

You’ll notice you can sense the defeat, you can sense the loneliness because as he reflects there are **TWO KEY WORDS** in his reflection:

1. First of all, “what she had done” and
2. secondly, “what he had decreed.”

When you put those together, “the anger...had subsided” so he’s forgetting what she has done and he’s feeling sorry about “what he had decreed about her” in this situation.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about marriage from the biblical point of view because you’re going to see so much of the contrary to that in the rest of the study.

So many couples wait until it’s too late to save their marriages simply because they don’t process on a daily basis the things they disagree about or the misunderstandings they’ve had. They sort of just duck their heads and avoid dealing with those issues. And it’s not those issues necessarily that create all the lack of romance and the havoc, it’s the anger that flows from that because of unresolved issues.

Gary Smalley has written a book called *From Anger to Intimacy* and he says this:

(From Anger to Intimacy: How Forgiveness Can Transform Your Marriage by Gary Smalley & Ted Cunningham)

Couples often ask me, “Where have we gone wrong?” “Why don’t we feel romantic toward each other?” “Why do we argue so much?” These problems are not primarily attributable to incompatibility, sexual problems, financial pressure or any other surface issues. They are a direct result of *accumulated offenses*. If a husband and wife can understand how to maintain harmony by immediately working to clear up every hurtful offense between them, they can climb out of such

common problems and every marriage's deepest pit: divorce.
p. 52

Nancy Leigh DeMoss has written several books and we use her in counseling. Her classic work is a trilogy—*Brokenness, Surrender* and *Holiness*. She wrote another book called *Forgiveness* and it's a treasure. She really deals with this issue head on and this is what she says:

(Choosing Forgiveness: Your Journey to Freedom by Nancy Leigh DeMoss)

When we shut the door on forgiveness, we open it for Satan to have an inroad into our life, giving him just the weapon he needs to get an advantage...

p. 72

“To be a Christian,” C. S. Lewis said, “means to forgive the inexcusable, because God had forgiven the inexcusable in us.” When it comes to forgiveness, our Lord would not command us to do something that He would not enable us to do. Or that He hasn't done Himself.

p. 92

And then she quotes from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

(Choosing Forgiveness: Your Journey to Freedom by Nancy Leigh DeMoss)

I SAY TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN UTTER HUMILITY

THAT WHENEVER I SEE MYSELF BEFORE GOD
AND REALIZE EVEN SOMETHING OF
WHAT MY BLESSED LORD HAS DONE FOR ME,
I AM READY TO FORGIVE ANYBODY ANYTHING.
—*D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

p. 102

It is a critical issue.

Tony Dungy is retired from the sidelines with the Indianapolis Colts. His book called *Uncommon* makes this statement about forgiveness and I love it:

(Uncommon: Finding Your Path to Significance by Tony Dungy with Nathan Whitaker)

Or perhaps it would help to go even further back to an even more miraculous moment. The first time I read John 3:16 with Lauren in mind, [that's his wife] the realization of its meaning hit me right between the eyes.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only [begotten] Son . . .”

Read it again:

“For God so loved Lauren that He gave His one and only [begotten] Son . . . “

The implications of this verse should move you, as it has

moved me, to pray for forgiveness. Forgiveness for all the moments I missed enjoying the uniqueness of her creation. Forgiveness for all the times I missed out on her laughter, tenderness, acceptance—missed as a result of my [own] self-centeredness.

p. 47

No wonder God is blessing the guy so much. He's so honest. He's so transparent. And he's accepting responsibility in relationship.

Why is it so hard, especially for us men, to verbalize forgiveness? We just want it to go away. We want everybody to heal without addressing it.

Gary Chapman has written a great book. He's the one that wrote *The Five Love Languages* but he also wrote another one called *The Five Languages of Apology* and it's worth the price of the book to have him record the kind of statement that you need to make when you need forgiveness. Here's three samples:

(The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships by Gary Chapman & Jennifer Thomas)

STATEMENTS REQUESTING FORGIVENESS

♥ *I'm sorry for the way I spoke to you. I know it was loud and harsh. You didn't deserve that. It was very wrong of me, and*

I want to ask you to forgive me.

♥ *I know that what I did hurt you very deeply. You have every right never to speak to me again, but I am truly sorry for what I did. And I hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive me.*

♥ *I didn't intend to hurt you but obviously I have. I realize that now, and I see that my actions were wrong even though I was just trying to have fun. It's never right to have fun if someone gets hurt. I promise you I will try to never do that again. And I want to ask you if you will please forgive me.*

p. 102

That's a process that leads to closeness. When you address it, you deal with it and you put it behind you.

Another marriage book by a guy by the name of Gary Thomas called *Sacred Marriage* does a great job showing the spiritual side of the marriage relationship.

(Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More than to Make Us Happy? by Gary Thomas)

If there is one thing young engaged couples need to hear, it's that *a good marriage is not something you find, it's something you work for.*

p. 133

I say Amen. I say in every marriage, "You came in here with a

four letter word—L.O.V.E.—and you’re going out of here with another one—W.O.R.K.

Thank you, thank you Gary Thomas for hitting it.

(Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More than to Make Us Happy? by Gary Thomas)

It takes struggle. You must crucify your selfishness. You must at times confront, and at other times confess. The practice of forgiveness is essential.

p. 133

You say, “Anderson I didn’t come here to be lectured about marriage. And in fact I’m not married and here you are wasting my time.”

You’re going to understand that when the study’s over I have a hard time respecting Xerxes for what he’s going to do—a hard time to really orient to what’s happened to Mordecai and Esther in this particular study.

v. 2 Then the king’s personal attendants proposed, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king.”

“Then the king’s personal attendants proposed, ‘Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king.’”

Here’s that lousy cabinet that made that proposal last week

for Vashti to be history. They see the king is depressed and he's discouraged so here comes the proposal. It's going to be a FIVE-POINT PROPOSAL. You can just use your little word "Let" and Memucan, remember, did it all last time? It had to be the guys on this one. The names aren't even mentioned.

Point number 1:

"Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king."

This is not a Miss America pageant or a Miss Persia. A lot of people forget that if they are taken as candidates, they spend the rest of their lives in the entourage that never has the king call upon them unless he calls on them by name.

They are destined to widowhood for the rest of their. So I bet you that there are a lot of mommas and daddies who find out about this in the 127 provinces that hide their little ladies or help them get married to somebody to avoid having to go through this. This is not something that would be an honor for them at all.

v. 3 Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them.

Point number 2:

“Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa.”

Point number 3:

“Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and”

Point number 4:

“let beauty treatments be given to them.”

v. 4 Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.” This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

And then number 5 in verse 4.

Point number 5:

“Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.’ This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.”

Why are they so involved? Or if he has feelings toward Vashti and he’s going to try to reverse that, they’re all toast. Vashti would see to it that because of what they did in the last edict that she would see to it that they lose their lives in the

process. So there's a lot of stuff going on.

I think there was a lot of unseen and unsaid stuff that went on between them about decisions and government activities and all of that.

But what do you have? The response of the king.

“This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.”

He is so quick to make a selfish decision in a situation like this. Not even thinking about all of the women that he is going to ruin in the 127 provinces—those who are apprehended and brought for this occasion.

There's a wonderful book by Ravi Zacharias called *Cries of the Heart*. I love the book because he quotes Malcolm Muggeridge

Malcolm Muggeridge was a British. He said some very important things. A lot of people wondered if he was even a Christian because of his stance on issues. But he got into a big rowel at Edinburgh with a lot of the upper echelon because he took a real stand on pre-marital sex and drugs. This is in his farewell address. This is the last statement he made before he returned to private life and to death.

(Cries Of The Heart: Bringing God Near When He Feels So Far by Ravi Zacharias)

So, dear Edinburgh students, this may well be the

last time I address you, and this is what I want to say—and I don't really care whether it means anything to you or not, whether you think there is anything in it or not. I want you to believe that this row I have had with your elected officers has nothing to do with any puritanical attitudes on my part. I have no belief in abstinence for abstinence's own sake, no wish under any circumstances to check any fulfillment or your life or being. But I have to say to you this: that whatever life is or is not about, it is not to be expressed in terms of drug stupefaction and casual sexual relations. However we may venture into the unknown it is not I assure you on the plastic wings of *Playboy* magazine or psychedelic fancies.¹

1. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Vintage Muggeridge: Religion and Society*, ed. Geoffrey Barlow (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eermans, 1985), 21.

p. 124

Wow! What a way to go out. They needed to hear it and he did a great job.

This one came across my desk and this one shocked me.

In counseling when you're dealing with couples, if there is unfaithfulness or it's a triangle you're dealing with, we've always been able to trace the cell phone and also the computer for pornographic websites. A lot of times that can be the turning point in making somebody come to reality instead of living in denial, which they do on both of those cases.

Now they have created a website where you can have a relationship with someone without anybody knowing about it and they've also provided a certain cell phone so that you can communicate.

Do you think it's popular in the United States of America? Are you ready for this one?

Popular Website Facilities Extramarital Affairs

Have you heard about the personals website designed to facilitate extramarital affairs? Log on and you have immediate access to thousands of men and women willing to kick their vows to the curb for a no-strings-attached sexual tryst. And should you want to use the site to have an affair, the designers behind the site have worked hard so that no one will ever know about your misdeeds. For example, they just released cell phone versions so you won't leave a trail of virtual evidence behind on your home or work computers.

So far the site has been a through-the-roof success. In June of 2009—just one month—679,000 men and women used the site to have an affair, and since 2008, site membership has doubled to 4 million people. It sees its largest traffic just after Father's Day (when men feel most unappreciated) and Valentine's Day (when women feel most unappreciated). According to the personal profiles of those who use the site, 92 percent of the males and 60 percent of the females are, in fact, married.

Brian Lowery, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; source: Jeremy Caplan, "Adultery 2.0," Time magazine (7-20-09), p. 59

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The CEO of the site, was really challenged by the journalist that was covering this about the criticism of it. He said it's no big deal. But the journalist was so smart. He said, "What if your own wife used the website?"

"Oh I'd be devastated!"

Yeah, you can come to reality when it becomes something so personal.

I love Dungy's statement:

(Uncommon: Finding Your Path to Significance by Tony Dungy with Nathan Whitaker)

At the end of the day, I'm sure of one thing: accumulating stuff and women and titles and money are wrong keys. Fitting in, following the crowd, and being common are not what we're supposed to do. There's more in store for us.

p. xix

So, what you need to do now is have the introduction of two more characters. These are critical players in it.

v. 5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,

“Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,”

All of those names are biblical names aren't they?

SHIMEI was the guy that threw rocks, remember, when David was escaping Absalom, taking over the kingdom? He was the one that yelled and cursed at David and threw.

KISH was the father of King Saul.

We have a problem here. If we say that these folks went in the second wave, then he would be 115 years old. Actually Kish is probably his great-grandfather.

In the Hebrew they don't talk about great-grandfathers and grandfathers and fathers. They just use a term, father. Time is not oftentimes figured in to the relationship and the age.

So when you get to verse 6, you see this significant citizen in Susa:

v. 6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.

“who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.”

When Nebuchadnezzar wiped out Judah, he did it in three waves.

In 605 B.C. he took Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and several thousand others, along with a lot of temple articles. That was the first wave.

The second one came in 597 B.C., 8 years later, and that’s when Jehoiachin went, Ezekiel the prophet also went in that group, and obviously Kish. His great-grandfather was taken to Babylon when Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah fell. That gets Mordecai before you.

v. 7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

“Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah,”—which means MYRTLE. That’s her Jewish name.

“whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther,”—which

means STAR in Persia—“was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.”

One of the most beautiful things about this study is the relationship between Mordecai and Esther.

It’s like you’re sitting here as parents savoring that you could have a child like Esther in the relationship between the two of them. It is one of the most beautiful parts of the study.

When you put all that together and you actually have Mordecai and Esther in Susa has to be a God-thing. They didn’t choose to go back because Esther wasn’t even born when Zerubbabel went with the first group back. And it’s still future for Ezra to go back as the priest with the second wave. And still future for Nehemiah to go back with the third wave to build the walls.

So I’m saying they are here at this place for such a time as this. They’re here to fit into God’s program and plan in the same way that God chose for Daniel to serve for 75 years in the Babylonian and Persian empires. He never did return to the land after 605 B.C. when he was taken over to Babylon.

Let’s not be hard on Mordecai and Esther. There are other ways that you’re going to feel awkward toward her, especially after she gets out of bed with Xerxes. This is hard for us to accept the fact that this woman would be involved in this situation. Of course she had no choice.

v. 8 When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.

“When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa”

The word “brought” indicates the fact that it was unwilling. The Hebrew is Niphal tense, which is a passive.

“and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.”

“brought,”

“taken,”

“entrusted.”

She had no choice in all of that.

Justice James, a lady who's written a great book on women of the Bible, says this:

(Lost Women of the Bible: Finding Strength & Significance Through Their Stories by Carolyn Custis James)

This segment of the story is appalling. These were young teenage girls. One can easily imagine parents desperately trying to hide their young daughters from the harem scouts. Esther and the other young girls who got caught in Xerxes' net had no say in the matter, but were helpless as slaves. Once brought to the palace, their sole mission in life was to give pleasure to the king—to please his eye, to satisfy him in bed, and to expand his impressive collection of possessions for others to admire.

pp. 145-6

It's so similar to Solomon, with over a thousand women in his entourage—something so selfish, something so ego-satisfying to him.

Peterson who wrote *The Message* has a great book for meeting with Jesus on a daily basis. This is a short little statement from the gospel of John:

(A Year With Jesus: Daily Readings and Meditations by Eugene H. Peterson)

Make me indifferent, God, to the world's approval, but sensitive to yours. How easy it is to get enlisted in the piety parade! Keep me from pretense, from poses, from posturings. For Jesus's sake. Amen

p. 54

Help me be genuine. Help me be honest. Help me to be

upright. What a prayer.

Now verse 9 tells you the rest of the proposal.

v. 9 The girl pleased him and won his favor.

Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

“The girl pleased him and won his favor.”—this is Hegai, the guy in charge of the ladies.

“Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the [penthouse].”

Actually look at all the things that he does.

The approval of Hegai has to be very significant because he knows what Xerxes likes and what he doesn't like. To be so impressed with her and do these special things for her, he obviously feels like she has the inside track right from the word “Go.”

She “pleased him” and she “won his favor.”

But then, you notice there are **FOUR SPECIAL THINGS:**

1. “Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments.”
2. Then he provided her with a special diet with “special food.”
3. “He assigned her seven maids selected from the king’s palace.”
4. Then he “moved her into the best place in the harem.”

Hegai must have discerned that she had qualities that were going to make a good fit in this situation.

v. 10 Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

“Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.”

Don’t you love that? He said, “Now honey, whatever you do don’t tell him you’re a Jew.”

Anti-Semitism caused Mordecai to be very fearful of her life in this situation. So he’s going to repeat this twice. When we get further along in the story you’re going to realize the wisdom of the old boy in doing what he does.

“Don’t tell people you’re nationality.”

Now how does she respond? SUBMISSION and OBEDIENCE Bam! Bam! As quick as he says it, she entrusts her future into his wisdom and does exactly what he says.

Do you think they had a good relationship? Look at verse 11. They didn’t have text messaging and cell phones and emails.

v. 11 Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

“Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.”

He was dying to know information about her.

(Lost Women of the Bible: Finding Strength & Significance Through Their Stories by Carolyn Custis James)

Once Esther was taken, Mordecai’s body language reflected his torment over her plight. Like a frantic parent whose young daughter is out well past curfew, he placed outside the harem courtyard day after day, distressed and desperate to hear word of Esther.

p. 146

So now you understand a little bit of the relationship.

Now the description and the sad part.

v. 12 Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics.

“Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics.”

Six months of each treatment.

v. 13 And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

“And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.”

All that means is clothing, jewelry, the presentation of herself—what she should take, she had the right for her appointment to be able to do that.

v. 14 In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in

charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

“In the evening she would go there and in the morning”—this is the sad part—“return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.”

For the rest of her life she’s part of that group of ladies.

You have a full-blown description and it’s two-fold:

1. “[if] he was pleased with her”
2. then he “summoned her by name.”

But if not, then she was part of the concubines.

v. 15 When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.

“When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail)—Esther would be like a cousin—“to go to the king, she asked for nothing other

than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested.”

Do you see what I mean? The eunuch is the one guy on earth that would know Xerxes and what he would like. Esther goes to him rather than just deciding what she wants to do. She seeks his counsel and advice before she goes.

“And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.”

Not only because of her beauty—her natural beauty—but because of her temperament and her sweet, submissive, obedient heart.

v. 16 She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

“She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.”

What is the “seventh year of his reign”? It is 479 B.C., because he started ruling in 486 B.C. and he will die of course 21 years later from assassination. So he has 14 years left when this takes place.

The month that we're talking about here on the Persian calendar is December/January. It is the time that she goes in to be with him.

v. 17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

“Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So”—he’s quick to move isn’t he?—“he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”

The interesting thing is now that this is consummated and the wedding is done, think of all the people who are Vashti fans who are going to be very upset. We have to be prepared to realize these people are very human for the fact that now Vashti is history and the empire is moving on and Esther is in the center of things. It’s certainly going to be an awkward situation.

Lutzer in his book *10 Lies About God* says:

(10 Lies About God: And The Truths That Shatter Deception by Erwin W. Lutzer)

John Stott wrote, “For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man.”⁴

4. John R. Stott, *Romans: God's Great News for the World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 160.

p. 65

The picture of Xerxes is he is a pagan, selfish man, using his power, authority and his privileges for his own selfish indulgence.

v. 18 And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

“And the king gave a great banquet,”—can you believe this?

I went back and checked and there's at least six or seven banquets before we get through with this. We had three in the last study. She had one and then he had one and then they had the 7-day banquet between the two of them. So there's at least three. You have four more coming and here's another big one.

He gave a banquet:

“Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.”

He did FIVE THINGS:

1. he set the crown on her head,
2. he “made her queen instead of Vashti,”
3. “gave a great banquet” for her and all the “nobles and officials,”
4. “proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces,”
5. he “distributed gifts with royal liberality.”

When you get to verse 19 there are differences of opinion on this and I’ll just tell you what I think.

v. 19 When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate.

“When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate.”

The virgins assembling a second time. You have two choices.

It could be that they want these virgins that didn’t win to be on display to show how beautiful Esther is and set her off in all of her beauty in comparison to the ones that didn’t make the finals.

The other possibility is that he has those scouts out looking for young ladies and he is going to let them keep on going. And he’s going to build his entourage selfishly just like Solomon

did.

I prefer the latter because of what I see him doing and how he's conducting himself. But the other could be a possibility.

Now why is Mordecai sitting at the gate? I think that Mordecai has a job in Homeland Security. He has never told anyone he's a Jew and he's been hired. He has to have a job.

Every time you see him now in the rest of the study he's going to be at the gate. He has to be under employment there. Of course he's going to get a big promotion as soon as Esther takes hold with her leadership and you'll read all about that in the future episode.

If he is involved in this, then it explains how he was there at the gate at a critical time.

v. 20 But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

Verse 20 tells you again what was said by Mordecai about not saying anything about being a Jew. Now that she's queen, she still hasn't told Xerxes that she's a Jew. In fact, she's not going to tell him until a critical time.

“But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she

continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up."

"It doesn't make any difference my dear father, if I'm queen of the land or if I'm just your baby daughter, nothing ever changes. I'll always do what you think's best."

You know what a commitment. What a sense of loyalty and love and dedication you have between the two of them. So she continued, even though she couldn't consult with him anymore as the queen. She would carry out exactly what he had to say.

McManus has written a great book called *Chasing Daylight* and Julea our youngest daughter recommended it to us. Pearl and I both have read it.

(Chasing Daylight: Seize the Power of Every Moment by Erwin Raphael McManus)

I am convinced that God longs to put His fingerprint in our lives, to act on our behalf and surprise us with His magnificence. I am equally convinced that most of the time we do not give God a context in which to do this.

p. 82

Oh, don't we know it? And don't we see it all about us?

Oswald Chambers says:

(My Utmost For His Highest by Oswald Chambers)

The only thing that truly provides protection is the redemption of Jesus Christ. If I will simply hand myself over to Him, I will never have to experience the terrible possibilities that lie within my heart. Purity is something far too deep for me to arrive at naturally. But when the Holy Spirit comes into me, He brings into the center of my personal life the very Spirit that was exhibited in the life of Jesus Christ, namely, the *Holy* Spirit, which is absolute unblemished purity.

(July 26)

You have to trust God that what's getting ready to happen is part of the big plan.

v. 21 During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

“During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate,”

He has to be working because you're going to see he's a man that moves quickly and does a lot.

“Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway,”—see they're all in Homeland Security—“became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.”

I think those guys were checking briefcases and computers.

They were checking shoes and carrying bags and backpacks with metal detectors and all the stuff we have in security today because of the tension of the kingdom. He knew there are those in the kingdom that hate Xerxes so he had these men stationed at the door to his private quarters.

Mordecai is stationed out at the gate. I get the idea that these two guys went to lunch at the same time as Mordecai and he overheard their conversation about their hatred and their anger and their displeasure with all that was going on.

v. 22 But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.

“But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.”

v. 23 And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

“And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.”

No recognition. Don't you know you have to have your nose out of joint when you save somebody's life and he's the king of

the land and they don't say anything to you. You don't get a note on White House stationary—nothing! And here he is. You can imagine how he feels over the report that he gave to Esther and Esther gave to the king and they took the justice at hand because it was true.

Remember God is never late. And there is a time and a place for everything to happen.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3—remember Joseph and the cupbearer? He interpreted those two dreams—the baker and the cupbearer.

He gave a good message to the cupbearer. The last thing he said to him was, “You're going to be restored in three days to your original position. But would you when you give Pharaoh his drink, remind him of a Hebrew slave down here in prison who doesn't deserve to be here because I haven't done anything wrong.”

So the next morning he's hoping that Pharaoh is going to call and let him be released. It goes for a week. It goes for a month. It goes for two solid years! Why? Because God's perfect timing was not Joseph's perfect timing.

And God's perfect timing and His providential working all of these things together is not to have them be identified as Jews, number one. And number two, to leave this happening in the books for another more strategic and important time when it will come back and you'll say, “God, You knew what

You were doing and You're right on time.”

God is never late. If it seems like He is, it's because He has a greater plan so trust Him. Allow Him to have His own perfect timing in it.

I want to just read a few short pieces.

This is a letter from John Newton, the man who wrote “Amazing Grace”:

(Letters of John Newton by Josiah Bull)

The purpose of God in showing believers the evil of their own hearts is to make them prize more highly the grace and all-sufficiency of Jesus.

pp. xii-xiii

Can you do that? Because of the ugliness you've seen of the human heart?

(Letters of John Newton by Josiah Bull)

In this way they go through life ‘sorrowful, yet always rejoicing’.

pp. xii-xiii

The Lord has promised to direct, moderate, sanctify, and relieve every trial of every kind. I long to have a more entire submission to his will, and a more steadfast confidence in his

word, to trust him and wait on him, to see his hand and praise his name in every circumstance of life great and small. The more of this spirit, the more heaven is begun upon earth. And why should we not trust him at all times? Which part of our past experience can charge him with unfaithfulness? Has He not done all things well? And is He not the same yesterday, today, and for ever? O my soul, wait thou only upon him.
p. 63

And then from *Chasing Daylight* this final statement:

(Chasing Daylight: Seize the Power of Every Moment by Erwin Raphael McManus)

When we come in Him, he translates us into an entirely new realm of living. His promise is that in Him we will find the life that our hearts have always longed for. Jesus was crucified as a criminal, but what His accusers didn't know was that He was planning and fulfilling history's most extraordinary prison break.

When we open our lives to Him, we can live our lives wide open. We are translated from one reality into another. We are now forever in relationship with the One who is the source of love, life, and freedom.
p. 6

Father, thank You for helping us understand this difficult passage. Thank You for helping us realize that sometimes in life we're victims of circumstances and certainly Esther was that. Father I thank You too for Mordecai, that he is so stable

and strong that he can be a refuge to her during these difficult days. Father I pray that the lessons that come out of this study will be meaningful, instructive and helpful. And that You'll prepare our hearts again for our next study as we continue to pursue the biography of Esther. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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A Practical Study of ESTHER

STUDY NUMBER TWO – ESTHER 2:1-23

NOTES

v. 1 Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.

v. 2 Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king.

v. 3 Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them.

v. 4 Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

v. 5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,

v. 6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.

v. 7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

v. 8 When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.

v. 9 The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

v. 10 Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

v. 11 Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

v. 12 Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics.

v. 13 And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

v. 14 In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

NOTES

v. 15 When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.

v. 16 She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

v. 17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

v. 18 And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

v. 19 When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.

v. 20 But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

v. 21 During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

v. 22 But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.

v. 23 And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Esther 2:1-23 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. After reading verses 1 & 2, see if you can write down some words that describe the emotions of King Xerxes at this time.

3. Summarize the proposal of the king's men in verses 3 & 4.

4. Summarize in your own words how Mordecai and Esther fit into this whole picture, according to verses 5-7.

5. What happened to Esther, according to verse 8?

6. Describe all the preparations necessary for these candidates to enter the presence of King Xerxes, according to verses 12 & 13.

7. Describe what happened to Esther as a result of her time with the king, according to verse 17.

8. What did Esther do, according to verse 20? Why?

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: When wine and emotions are involved, you are vulnerable to make some pretty dumb decisions.

LESSON #2: “Alcohol and prostitution have robbed my people of their brains” (Hosea 4:11 NLT).

LESSON #3: “This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20 NASB).

LESSON #4: The five-point proposal of the king’s personal attendants appealed to the king and he followed it.

LESSON #5: The providence of God throughout this chapter is so obvious in the way things are beginning to work out. People are being put in place for what the Lord wants to accomplish.

Larson & Dahlen have these principles and applications to the passage:

LESSON #6: God uses the ungodly to accomplish his purposes.

LESSON #7: Submission to authority is valued by God.

LESSON #8: God is always present and at work, even when circumstances seem discouraging or confusing.

LESSON #9: God’s primary concern and hardest work focus on transforming the inner nature of people.

LESSON #10: Our times are in God hands.

They apply the truth of these lessons in the following way:

APPLICATIONS

- Focus your energy and attention on your inner nature so that you grow in godliness.
- Place your confidence in God's revelation of his love, grace, mercy, justice, and care.
- Make God's glory your daily goal. Then, no matter what happens, you will be at peace, resting in his sovereignty.
- Everyone is under someone's authority. Learn to submit yourself to those over you.

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