



HEROES OF THE FAITH
ESTHER: IF I PERISH
ESTHER 4:1-17

MAIN IDEA

We must recognize the opportunities around us to take courage and be part of God's great work.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Everyone has experienced a moment of being in the right place at the right time. Many people in our world like to chalk those moments up as a "cool coincident", but if you are a believer in Jesus Christ then you know that there are no coincidences in life. God has great plans for all of us and our responsibility is to see where He is working and find what we can do to get in on it.

- **When is a time when you were in the right place at the right time?**
 - **How do you respond when people try to claim specific instances are merely coincidences?**
 - **Why does it matter if you recognize God's hand at work in your circumstances or not?**
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UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read Esther 4:1-7.

- **What information, if any, do you know about Esther leading up to this situation?**

The Jewish people were under attack again and complete destruction was the goal. Mordecai knew how serious this decree was as well as the amount of money and power that was behind it. People in positions of power with agendas that are ungodly can manipulate leaders to help bring about their desired results.

That was exactly what happened at this time and Mordecai knew how serious the situation was. Once a law was decreed in Persia, it could not be changed or overturned. It was a grim time and Mordecai led the way in his expressions of heartbreak and grief.

While Jews in the area were mourning the coming destruction, Esther was isolated and insulated in the palace. She was not aware of what was happening but had been told about her relative's public spectacle. She sent word to find out what was going on to cause such distress. When God's people are under attack it is a big deal, and the Lord does not take it lightly, as we will see. Though mourning and grief were expressed differently during that time, the truth is that believers should care about what God cares about and our hearts should break for what breaks His heart as it did with Mordecai.

- **Why do we often keep our mourning and grief to ourselves?**

- **How can you relate to the anguish that Mordecai expressed?**
- **What is something that breaks your heart because it breaks God's heart?**

> Have someone in your group read Esther 4:8-12.

Mordecai responded to the inquiry from Esther with a copy of the decree. Once Esther found out about the danger to her people, she then faced a choice herself. Would she take up the challenge from Mordecai to speak on behalf of the Jews to the King or not?

No one was allowed to approach the king unless he called for them. Esther explained to her relative that she was not free to spend time with the king and that if she forced the issue, it would mean putting her own life at risk.

Imagine what would be going through Esther's mind. She was an orphan who had found favor to be chosen queen after the previous queen was banished and deposed for disagreeing with the king's drunken request. She knew her position was precarious. This was a huge moment for the young queen and her first response was an explanation of why it was not a good idea to stand up for her people in the face of imminent destruction.

- **How can you relate to the situation Esther was faced with?**
 - **What do you think was the hardest part of that moment for her?**
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- **What is a tough decision you have been faced with recently?**

- **Why do you think Esther first tried to explain that it was not a good idea for her to do anything?**

> Have someone in your group read Esther 4:13-17.

After receiving Esther's frosty response, Mordecai challenged her even harder and spoke words that showed his great faith. He strongly voiced his conviction that God was going to save the Jewish people in some way. The only question was if Esther was going to be part of it or not. He firmly believed that God would be faithful to His people and wanted Esther to not miss out on the opportunity to be used by God.

It was now time to find out if Esther had the courage and wisdom to fulfill the plans God had when He elevated her to a position of prominence and influence. The Lord is the One who allows us the positions and influence we enjoy on whatever level. When considering Esther's situation, we should also be asking if we have the courage and wisdom to stand for God and against what breaks His heart.

The second challenge from Mordecai compelled Esther to action. Her choice to ask other Jews to join her and prepare through fasting and praying was wise. Some big battles and spiritual moments require special preparation. Esther realized that her life was on the line regardless and was determined to take a bold stand although she knew it was not going to be easy. Bold determination and commitment to standing for the Lord will be strengthened by our preparation. Understanding that bold faith means letting go of controlling our lives makes it easier to trust the results to the Lord.

- **What does the strong statement of faith by Mordecai say to you?**
- **Why was it wise of Esther to fast and pray before going to the king?**
- **When was the last time you focused on spiritual preparation before an opportunity? What did you do to prepare?**
- **How has God given you opportunities to stand for Him in your position of power or influence?**
- **What is a moment before you now that you have the opportunity to do something “for such a time as this”?**

APPLICATION

- **Spend time praying that God would motivate you by the things that break His heart.**
- **Take a stand for God this week. Consider the unique influence he has given you and act as God leads you.**
- **What are some of your “for such a time as this” moments we need to be bold and trust God about.**

PRAY

Thank God for giving you influence opportunities. Confess when you have offered excuses instead of standing in faith. Commit to trusting God with all the details of your life.

ESTHER 4:1-17

4:1–3 Mordecai’s response to the king’s edict was typical for his culture. All who saw him recognized his grief, especially since he cried loudly and bitterly (lit “he cried out a great cry”). The term to cry out (Hb za‘aq) is often used in the OT to describe a heartbroken howl over injustice (Gn 18:20), personal tragedy (2Sm 13:19), or national tragedy (Ezk 9:8). While Mordecai would not get the king’s attention, he did get Esther’s (Est 4:4), which was crucial. A law prohibiting a mourner to come into the palace is not attested in the ancient sources, but in a similar vein, Nehemiah stated that he had “never been sad” in King Artaxerxes’s presence before, and when asked about it by Artaxerxes he “was overwhelmed with fear” (Neh 2:1–2). Mordecai was not alone in his grief. The Jewish people in every province wept and lamented and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. In many ways Mordecai epitomizes, or is representative of, the Jewish people.

Notes:

4:4–7 The phrase was overcome with fear is from a Hebrew verb (chil) often translated as “writhe, tremble,” occurring often in the context of childbirth. Here it is used to describe intense emotion, and it could be translated as “writhed in anguish” or “was agitated.” The name Hathach possibly means “courier.”

4:8–9 The courier was told to explain the decree. Either Esther was illiterate and the decree had to be read to her, or it was written in Persian and had to be translated into Aramaic. Mordecai was certainly aware of the danger he was putting Esther in by telling her to plead ... personally with the king, but their situation was desperate. It is interesting how he emphasized that the Jews were her people, the same people he had previously commanded her not to identify with (2:10).

4:10–12 Esther’s response to Mordecai through Hathach was to remind him that to come to the king unbidden was certain death. Such a law was understandable in the Persian Empire with its long history of political assassinations (in fact Ahasuerus was murdered in his own bed less than ten years later). The one exception to this rule was if the king allowed an uninvited person to approach him, signified by his extending the gold scepter. Some assume that Esther’s statement in v. 11 indicated that her absence from her husband was because she had fallen out of favor with him or that his passion for her had waned. Thus, the king might be less likely to respond to her unexpected presence and request. On the other hand, possibly her purpose was only to tell Mordecai that in the normal routine she did not see the king often, and this request would require her to make an unscheduled—and dangerous—visit.

Notes:

4:13–14 Mordecai’s reply to Esther was direct and to the point: Esther had no safe choices. Appearing unbidden before the king could mean death, but remaining silent, when so many servants and eunuchs knew of her connection to Mordecai the Jew, could likewise result in her death once the genocide was carried out.

Mordecai’s statement that help would come from another place if Esther remained quiet is intriguing. The most obvious interpretation is to understand the phrase “another place” (Hb *mimmaqom ’acher*) as a veiled reference to God, an interpretation supported by the Greek additions to Esther (Alpha Text 5:9), both Aramaic Targums, and Josephus. Others find it more likely that “another place” refers to a human source of deliverance, possibly Mordecai himself or another well-placed Jewish official similar to Nehemiah, who served Ahasuerus’s son (Artaxerxes) as cupbearer. Mordecai and Esther would regard relief and deliverance, whatever the source, as attributable ultimately to God’s

providential care for his people. This conclusion is supported by Mordecai's famous suggestion that Esther had come to your royal position for such a time as this. As Timothy Laniak notes, this meant God had a "destiny for Esther. Haven't all of the serendipitous events in the last four years put her in this position for this very moment?"

Notes:

4:15–16 Often in times of crisis God's people would fast and pray, seeking God's help and deliverance (Jdg 20:26; 1Kg 21:9; Jr 36:9). Fasting took on an even more prominent role in the postexilic community (Ezr 8:21–23; Neh 1:4; 9:1–2). But this fast was unusually long, highlighting the severity of the threat to the Jewish people. Esther's last comment to Mordecai in this chapter (If I perish, I perish) is not just resigned fatalism. As Michael Fox writes, this statement "does not suggest a person seeking an escape route, but one facing and coming to grips with a danger. The statement recognizes the possibility of failure, yet also expresses the hope—though not certainty—of success."

4:17 Verses 12–17 serve as the turning point in the development of Esther's character. In 2:20 we are told that she "obeyed Mordecai's orders, as she always had while he raised her." Now Mordecai went and did everything Esther had commanded him. "From a dependent orphan, completely submissive to her uncle's manipulations and the king's whims, she emerges at plot's end in control of her own life—and the life of a nation" (G. H. Johnston).