

Esther: God's Big Plans

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Introduction

As Esther grew up, the dreams she had for herself likely did not include becoming queen nor saving the entire Jewish race. However, God's dreams are often bigger than our own. Raised by her cousin Mordecai, it is obvious that Esther learned to seek God's voice above the many conflicting voices around her, including Mordecai's. When Esther is faced with a life or death situation, not just for her but also all of the Jews, she looked to her relationship with Mordecai and other trusted people around her, as well as to God to make her decision and gain strength to follow through. In this lesson, students will:

- Discuss the difficulty of getting older and becoming more independent while at the same time obeying and honoring authority figures in their lives.
- Learn from Esther's example for how to make tough decisions in their lives.
- Be reminded that God has big dreams for them and be encouraged to step up and live the dreams God has for them, the biggest of which is to be in relationship with Him.

Teacher's Prep

The story of Esther has many more details than could ever be summarized in one lesson. It may be helpful to read the entire story for your own reference before teaching. Parts of the story are summarized throughout the lesson, but obviously many parts, even including specific details about how the story ended, had to be left out for time considerations.

Feel free to print off this summary to send home with the students:

What Now?

Here are some ways to put what we've learned today into practice in our everyday lives:

- Learn more about Esther's story by reading the rest of the book and reflecting on what it teaches us about decision making relationships with people in authority.
- Memorize Isaiah 55:8-9.

Keep this list somewhere and pull it out when you have a big decision to make remembering Esther's example:

- Get the facts – Talk with parents, mentors, friends, etc. Try to find people who will give you different perspectives on the situation.
- Seek God – As you talk with others, make sure you constantly seek God in his Word and prayer to discern the opinions you hear.
- Invite others to seek God with you. – Ask others to join you in prayer as you make your decision.
- Commit and Rely – Make a decision and follow through. Be willing to accept whatever outcomes may happen. Trust that God will either bless your plan, or turn you around if he has other plans.

Getting Started

If possible, show a video clip of little kids sharing what they want to be when they grow up (Like this one from Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ciNtPp_Ttw_)

ASK:

- When you were in Kindergarten, what did you dream of being when you grow up?
- Has that dream changed? What's your ultimate dream job, now?
- Besides a career, what other dreams do you have for life?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

As you go through high school, the question you likely get asked more frequently than anything else is, "What are you going to do after high school?" or some variation of that question. "Where are you going to go to college?" "What do you want to do with your life?" etc. Even if you have an idea, there are many people around

you who also have ideas of what you should do... your teachers, your parents, your friends. It can be difficult to figure out what your own dreams are in the midst of all this, let alone what God might have dreamed up for your life.

Today, we're focusing on a woman from the Bible named Esther and will learn how her dreams for herself and God's dreams for her were quite different. We'll also explore how she related to some authority figures and other people in her life while trying to sort it all out.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND BEFORE WE DIG IN:

Summarize the story for the students before digging into Mordecai and Esther's relationship:

Esther was a Jewish girl who lived in the 5th Century B.C. A man named Xeres was the King of Persia at the time. This would basically have been the man who was in the highest place of power in the world at the time. The story took place years and years after the Jews had all be taken into exile by the Babylonians and Assyrians and the Jews were spread out all over the known world. They had the option to go back, but many, including Esther's family, remained where they were, in her case, Susa which also happened to be where King Xerxes reigned.

In the first chapter of Esther we hear the account of when the queen of the time, Queen Vashti, disobeyed the King's orders and to protect his integrity, the King got rid of her as queen. A while later the King decided to find a new queen. It's during this search that Esther and Mordecai come on the scene.

The Lesson

HAVE SOMEONE READ ESTHER 2:1-7. ASK:

- So what's going on here? Can someone restate those 8 verses in a couple sentences?
- What do we learn about Mordecai in these verses?
 - A Jew (vs 5)
 - A Jew in exile (vs 6)
 - He raised his orphan cousin as if she were his own daughter (vs 7)
- What do we learn about Esther in these verses?
 - Also named "Hadassah" (vs 7)
 - She was orphaned... both her parents had died. (vs 7)
 - She was beautiful (vs 7)
 - She was raised by her male cousin (vs 7) ... can you imagine?
- As an orphaned Jewish girl living in the Persian empire, what do you imagine Esther's dreams were?
 - Possibly grow up, marry a godly Jewish man and raise a beautiful Jewish family... the same as any other respectable Jewish woman.

READ ESTHER 2:8-11 and then ASK:

- What suddenly happened in Esther's life that might have changed her dreams?
- Do you imagine that Esther saw being summoned to the King's harem as a good thing, a bad thing, or some of both? Explain.
- What can we see or infer about Mordecai and Esther's relationship with each other based on what we've read so far?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Before we dig deeper into Mordecai and Esther's relationship, let's see how this story plays out. If you read the rest of the chapter, you find out that when it was Esther's time to go visit the king, she won his favor (and the favor of everyone who met her) and she ended up becoming queen. A while later Mordecai ended up uncovering an assassination plot for the King by telling Esther what he had heard. However, at this point no one knew their relation to each other. During this time a guy named Haman was rising in power under the King. Haman was basically the King's right-hand man and the King sought and trusted his advice. When Mordecai wouldn't bow down and pay him honor one day, Haman got very mad.

READ ESTHER 3:5-6.

Haman then deceived the King into signing an order to "destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—Young and old, women and little children—on a single day." Understandably, Mordecai and the other Jews were grieved by the news of their death sentence.

READ OR SUMMARIZE ESTHER 4:1-7. ASK:

- What do we learn about Esther as Queen from this passage? (She was at the center of the city, the center of KINGDOM and yet, as queen had no clue what was going on around her.)

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

If Esther's plan for her life hadn't shifted yet after becoming Queen, it definitely was about to. When Hathach went out to see Mordecai, Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the edict that said all the Jews were to be killed and told him to go urge Esther to beg for mercy from the King. But there was one big problem with this (besides the fact that no one knew Esther was a Jew).

READ ESTHER 4:10-11. ASK:

- What was the problem with Esther going to ask the King for help?
- What was the decision that was before Esther?
- While we've probably not been in LITERALLY a life or death situation like this, we've all had hard decisions to make. What's a decision that you have to make right now (or have made in the past) that was really hard, or seemed like there was no good way?
- What did you do and/or who did you talk to in order to help make that decision? Were people telling you opposite things? Explain.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

As you grow up and head towards graduation from high school, you're going to want and need to become more and more independent; however at the same time, we have a call from Scripture to honor our parents and authority figures. Whether it's what career you want to go into or what rules your parents may have for you despite you longing for independence, these next years in your life are going to be filled with a tension between honoring authority figures while still figuring out who you are as a person apart from others.

- Have you experienced that tension already between what you want and what others in your life (parents, teachers, friends, teammates, etc.) expect of you? Explain.

As we continue through Esther's story specifically looking at her relationship with Mordecai, we get an example of what a healthy relationship with authority might look like, especially when we have a big decision to make.

First, she sought to get all the facts.

ASK:

- Glance through Chapter 4 and list all the people or places she used to gather information and input for her big decision:
 - She talked with her maids and eunuchs (4:4-9)
 - She recalled the laws of the land (4:10-11)
 - She got details from Mordecai, her uncle (4:12-14)
 - She prayed (4:15-16)

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Sometimes we only want to see our side, but as we present our side to the people around us, maybe even to our parents (or in Esther's case her adoptive dad), she got helpful feedback. He said some things she probably didn't want to hear. For example, when Mordecai said, "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all Jews will escape." He called her out and reminded her where she came from. Sometimes, even if we don't like to hear it, seeking the input from other people, especially people like parents or mentors, can help us see things that we just don't want to see. As hard as it is, it's important for us to do this in order to get all the facts. However, when it came down to it, the choice of what to do is Esther's, and one day that will be the case for you as well. Right now, your parents still have authority to tell you what you can and cannot do. As you grow older and LEGALLY don't need their input, it is often wise to seek it. GET THE FACTS.

It's important though that we don't JUST look to other people for input.

- Who else did Esther seek input from in making the decision? (God)

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

When Esther was a little girl, she probably never even DREAMED of becoming the Queen, let alone being put in

a position where she might be able to save the entire Jewish race. As we began today thinking about the dreams we have for our lives and the dreams others may have for us, it's important not to forget the dreams GOD may have for us.

READ ESTHER 4:14.

WHO KNOWS when God may put you in a certain place at a certain time with a purpose greater than you can imagine. We must be open to his leading in order to not let that opportunity get buried underneath our dreams or our parents dreams.

A time when I saw this play out in my own life was...

SHARE A STORY ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU EXPERIENCED BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME FOR GOD'S PURPOSES.

ASK:

- Does anyone else have a story of when they feel that God placed them somewhere for a certain reason?

As we make decisions in life, both big or small, it's important to SEEK GOD.

READ ESTHER 4:15-16.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

As we said before, when it came down to it, the decision was solely in Esther's hands. She talked with Morecai and other authority figures in her life. She sought God, but she had to make the decision. The same is true when you find yourself in life decisions in the future. As you decide what college to go to or if you'll even go to college... as you figure out what your dreams are for your life, there are plenty of voices playing into that. Mordecai said what he had to say as her mentor/dad, but the choice was hers. But what she did with that choice was really neat, she invited others into the process and asked them to pray for her. She ASKED OTHERS TO SEEK GOD ON HER BEHALF.

ASK:

- As you think about the many decisions you have coming up in the next few years, who are some people in your life that you could ask to walk along side you and seek God with you?

So we see that Esther interacted with Mordecai and got his input along with the facts, she sought God and asked others to seek him as well, all that is left is to make a decision and go for it in trust, which is exactly what Esther did.

In this case, she was honoring what her parental authority (Mordecai) thought, but at the same time she was going against another authority, the ruling authority of the time. In every decision we make in life, there is a consequence. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad. The possible outcomes in Esther's decision were quite drastic.

- What were they?
 - She dies for approaching the king.
 - She saves the entire Jewish race.

Esther didn't ignore the consequences of going against what the rules said; she understood them fully when she said, "And if I perish, I perish." But she remembered another important fact... that following God's plan for our life is always the best way. So she made her decision and stepped out trusting that God would be present. One way to think of this is the phrase "COMMIT AND RELY."

There isn't time to go into all the details of how the story plays out (though I'd encourage you to read them in the following chapters of Esther on your own this week). The king does extend his scepter, but the way in which God saves his people through Esther still has many twists and turns that she couldn't have planned. The same is true for us.

Wrap Up

HAVE SOMEONE READ WHAT ISAIAH 55:8-9 HAS TO SAY ABOUT THAT.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

God's ways are so much higher than our ways. Thankfully, God's dreams for you are also so much bigger and better than your dreams for yourself. As you think about the life that is before you, trust that God is present guiding you and wants what's best for you. When you're in decisions that seem difficult and many voices are playing out around you telling you different things, remember to seek GOD'S plan for your life... in His Word, in prayer, and through the people he's placed in your life.

Above everything else, keep in mind God's BIGGEST dream for you... that you'd be in heaven with Him for eternity. This was a dream that HE would do whatever it would take to save us, His people out of the hands of evil. Unlike Esther, when Jesus said, "If I perish, I perish," that's exactly what happened. He died so we could live. He paid the price to restore our relationship with God. That's a pretty big dream!