

READING PLAN: ESTHER

Day One

Read Esther 2:10-18

I come from a healthy family. We like each other most days and enjoy similar activities. Many people aren't that blessed. It can be a lonely and uncertain place for lots of us teenagers today. To be valued and cared for would be an awesome experience for many of my friends. No one likes to feel like they have been forgotten.

Esther surely could have felt that way. She was a minority girl from a people who were slaves in the land she lived in. She had no real immediate family. She lost her mother and father and was being raised by her cousin. Now she had even been taken from the only family she had and thrown into a royal beauty pageant.

Esther must have been mixed with emotions as she entered the king's palace - honored to be noticed, but saddened that she was taken from the only family she knew. That, added to the nervousness for what the future might hold for her, was surely overwhelming! She was sure of one thing, however - her worth and true value came from God.

Questions:

1. What must it have felt like for Esther to be chosen to be the queen of the entire kingdom?
2. What does it feel like to know that God has chosen each one of us to have influence where he has placed us?
3. Just as Esther took time and hard work to prepare herself before she met the king, what can we do to get ready spiritually for when God may choose to increase our influence?

Day Two

Read Esther 2:1-18

For some people, being liked is a big deal. Call it insecurity or pride. It's very important to some people that others like them and want to be around them.

Some people work VERY hard at being liked. They change themselves to fit the crowd and throw their morals to the sidelines just to gain the approval of others. There are others who are likable, and it seems to be an effortless task. They are nice to people, sincere, compassionate, and genuinely care about those around them. They score high on the likability scale.

Esther was the latter.

She had a deep faith and it showed. Because of that faith, people were drawn to her. While it's true she was very beautiful, much of her beauty lay in her inner beauty. That's why the scripture points out that Esther "found favor" with people. Her beauty coach, Hegai, was pleased with Esther and accelerated her beauty treatments. Even the king chose her over hundreds of other women to be his next queen. Verse 17 tells us "She won more favor and approval from [the king] than did any of the other virgins."

How's your likability? Are you working hard and changing who you are to be liked or are you discovering people like you because of Jesus in you? That is a goal worth pursuing!

Questions:

1. How do you score on the likability scale? Do you work hard at being liked? Do you work hard at NOT being liked? Do people tend to like you because of Jesus?
2. How could you give glory to God through being a person people enjoy being with?
3. Can a person be likable and still maintain a good moral lifestyle? What does that look like?

Day Three

Read Esther 4:10-17

Isn't it cool when you happen to be in the right place at the right time? I can remember a time waiting to purchase tickets for a concert. Just then, a guy walked by and said, "Hey, I can't use these tickets anymore, do you want them?" You betcha! The tickets were expensive, so I absolutely said "yes!" People around me groaned at my good fortune - and their missed opportunity!

Esther had been through some pretty extreme life experiences. She went from orphaned Jew to Queen of Vashti in a matter of months. Talk about rising to fame! But, her fame was about to be fleeting. A deceptive plot was underway to have her entire nation wiped off the face of the earth.

She had some choices to make - keep her nationality quiet and save her own skin? Look for an out for herself and her family? Risk death by approaching the king and pleading for her people. It evidently wasn't an easy decision for her. It took some prodding from her cousin, Mordecai, to examine and think through these options.

His words to her have been a foundational part of many Christians who take on challenging roles and circumstances:

"Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this."

The weight of this statement was a turning point for Esther. It should give each of us some perspective in our own situations. Instead of looking at the details of the challenge before us, maybe we should step back and see that God may have us in this place at this time for a greater purpose. That should give us great encouragement to keep pressing on and let God use us.

Questions:

1. Think about a time you faced a difficult circumstance. What was the outcome? How did God use it to do something greater?
2. Do you think a person can miss out on greater blessings from God by rushing through hard times?
3. How can you press pause and see God doing something greater within the challenges you face right now?

Day Four

Read Esther 3-4

King Xerxes had chosen Esther to be the queen of his entire kingdom, her influence continued to grow. In the kingdom, there were others who were also clamored for increased influence and power. One of those influence-seeking people was Haman.

Haman, a member of the king's nobles, was appointed to one of the top positions in the king's court and he let it go to his head. Haman wanted the other nobles and people of the kingdom to bow down to him as he passed. He thought his position and influence with the king made him better than everyone else.

Mordecai, Esther's cousin, was sitting in his usual place at the palace gate waiting for news of how Esther was doing when Haman came by. All the people bowed to Haman except Mordecai. This really ticked Haman off - he wanted to kill not only Mordecai but all his people, the Jews. Haman persuaded the king to sign a decree that would mean death to all Jews.

Haman had no idea that Esther was a Jew, and neither did the king. As Mordecai heard the terrible news, he immediately sent word to Esther. The entire Jewish nation was in real danger. He asked Esther to intercede to the king to save her people.

Queen Esther had a choice to make. She knew that if she went to the king uninvited the punishment could be death. Waiting for the king to call for her could mean death for her people including her cousin, Mordecai. Esther, through prayer and the encouragement of Mordecai, decided to use the influence God gave her. She would take the risk and go to the king.

Many of us underestimate what we personally can do to influence others, Esther did, and it almost led to a terrible tragedy.

Questions:

1. What are some of the choices that face you as you decide how and when to use your influence?
2. Queen Esther had Mordecai help keep her head on straight, encourage her, and remind her of what she can do. Who in your life does that for you?

Day Five

Read Esther 5-8

Haman, a self-seeking, high-ranking official in the king's court, had duped the king into signing a decree that would bring death to the queen's cousin and all the Jewish people. Queen Esther had to do something. She was totally in a position to intercede. It was risky but possible.

She decided to go uninvited into the king's court to beg for her people's survival. Everyone knew that going into the king's court uninvited was against the law and punishable by death. She had decided that she would go and risk it all. Her courageous attitude: "If I perish, I perish."

Those words sound pretty strong and powerful coming from a young orphan girl. Now that she knew what she had to do, she still needed the courage to follow through on what she so strongly spoke.

The king was shocked and surprised by Esther's appearance in his court. But instead of death, Esther found favor with the king and he welcomed her presence. He asked Esther what was so important that she would risk her life to request. Esther explained the plot of Haman, and the king was furious with Haman's arrogance and vengeance. The king figured out a way to save his queen, Mordecai, and the Jewish people, but Haman didn't fare as well.

Queen Esther showed great courage in her attempt to save her family and obey God. She used her influence for the good of others and to honor God.

Questions

1. What must it have felt like for Esther as she prepared to go to the king? Have you ever had a time where you felt like Esther? What was it like for you?
2. What are some areas that you have dealt with or are dealing with now that is requiring a courageous faith to follow through?
3. How did Ester spend her time before she went to the King? How should that affect us when we face similar situations?