

ESTHER'S COURAGE



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First and Last Name: _____

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The intersection of Gospel and culture is a place of friction and opportunity.
In many cases, obedience will require courage.

- What's the bravest thing you've ever done?

WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT

The word "culture" gets thrown around a lot, but what does it really mean? In short, it's the common desire, attitude, and value of a group of people. Teams, schools, friend-groups, tribes, clans, churches, cities, and countries can all have their own cultures.

The world also has a culture. It's constantly changing—what's cool today will change—but its message is consistent: people or things are more valuable than God. The culture of God's Kingdom is the opposite; God's people value Him more than everything else. Standing at the collision of these two cultures can be scary—there's a lot of friction between them. Sometimes it's easier to disobey God and protect yourself—like Peter denying Jesus the night of his arrest [Luke 22:54–57]—than to endure the friction. There are other examples, like Esther, who show us how to face the fear and friction with courageous obedience.

Esther was an Israelite living in a foreign culture. As an orphan, she was raised by her cousin, Mordecai. When the king held a beauty pageant to find a suitable queen, Esther won. She became immensely popular with everyone in the palace, especially the king. But because of Mordecai's advice, she kept her Israelite heritage a secret the entire time.

While Esther grew in favor in the king's court, Mordecai deeply offended the king's right-hand-man, Haman, by refusing to bow before him as he passed by. Infuriated, Haman asked the king to issue a decree that would destroy Mordecai and all the Israelites in the kingdom. After hearing that Mordecai was in trouble, Esther sent her attendant, Hathach, to find out what was wrong. Up until this point, Esther had not told anyone in the palace she was an Israelite. With her life and others' lives on the line, that was all about to change.

Read Esther 4:6–5:3

⁶ So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

⁹ Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

¹² When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Esther's Request to the King

⁵ On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. ² When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.



³ Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

THE BIBLE IN YOUR LIFE

Esther, a young Jewish woman, suddenly became the queen of Persia. Because God's people were being held in captivity, Esther hid her Jewish identity. When the king's top advisor, Haman, planned to exterminate the Jewish people, Esther's uncle Mordecai challenged her to act. Esther risked her life, revealed her identity to the king, stood up for her people against Haman, and prevented the genocide.

Read Esther 4:6–5:3, then answer the following questions.

Discuss:

- What did Mordecai ask Esther to do?

- What do you think Esther stood to lose?

- What things would you say that our world's culture values?
 - Which of these things seem opposed to what God wants?
 - What would it cost you to take an unpopular stand for God?

Conscientious Objector

Desmond Doss loved his country but never more than he loved God. As a young man, he thought he'd have to choose one or the other. He was drafted into the United States Army, but he also took the Bible's command, "Thou shalt not kill," seriously. Desmond courageously stood for his faith as a conscientious objector. His solution seemed simple to him: he would gladly serve his country, but he would refuse to touch a weapon. Instead, he became an Army medic.



Unfortunately, even medics carried guns in World War II, meaning his creative solution didn't quite work. Sticking out like a sore thumb, he faced ridicule from other soldiers and even had one officer think he was mentally ill. Nevertheless, he stood his ground. Desmond Doss entered World War II without a gun.

In the battle for Okinawa, Private Doss's battalion suffered a Japanese counterattack that pinned many wounded at the top of a 400-foot ridge. There was no escape. Rather than taking cover, Doss ran through gunfire to rescue at least 50 men—by himself—and used a rope to lower the wounded soldiers down the ridge to safety one at a time. He never fired a shot, but he served his country and his fellow soldiers admirably. Doss earned the Medal of Honor for his heroic efforts. The movie about his service, *Hacksaw Ridge*, was nominated for an Academy Award in 2017.

Maybe your conflict with culture isn't nearly as intense as his was, but you can still learn from Desmond Doss. He found a way to obey God with unwavering commitment, and God ultimately used him to save the lives of the very people who ridiculed him for his beliefs.

Questions:

- Besides not carrying a weapon, how did Desmond Doss live out his faith?
- What fears do you think Desmond Doss had to face?
- What scares you about going against culture to follow God?
- What would it take for you to push past those fears?
 - Tell about a time when you felt alone in your beliefs.

APPLY IT

God didn't design us to stand up to culture alone; he's given us his people so we can establish his Kingdom-culture together. Reach out to a fellow Christ-follower and share one way in which you need to go against the grain culturally. Make a plan for how you will pray for each other and take risks together.

THE TAKEAWAY

God will empower us with the faith and courage required to stand for his Kingdom.

A QUOTE TO THINK ABOUT

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.' You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” – Eleanor Roosevelt

