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“I WILL GO”

Esther's is a story with both tragedy and victory in it. Talk about a life that is re-formed more than once, without any choice on her own part! This young woman, a faithful Jewish girl in exile in the land of Babylon, loses all chance to marry a man of her people for love when she is chosen along with many other young women (none of whom have any say in the matter) to go and become a part of King Ahasuerus' harem. She loses the only family she has left, her older cousin Mordecai, who adopted and raised her after her parents died. She even loses her own name, Hadassah, which means “myrtle tree,” for the Babylonian Esther, meaning “star.”

For a year she lives with only the other virgins and is trained and kept under a beautifying regimen. She may see Mordecai occasionally, or she may not see him directly. We are told he hangs around the court to learn news of her, but she may only have been able to send and receive messages through servants, as seen in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5.

At the end of the year, all the virgins in turn go to the king. Read or have read Esther 2:12-14. What house did each girl go to after her night with the king? What was she now? What does verse 14 imply about her future fate? How would you feel if this were you? Would you be tempted to think God couldn't work in an ungodly system like this?

Read verses 16-18. In many ways, this is a blessing, since Esther now has privileges she didn't have before and wouldn't have had in the house of the concubines. But remember she still has had no choice in all of this. Perhaps she grows to love the king. Perhaps not.

Esther can't even share her faith, since Mordecai told her not to let anyone know she is a Jew. This seems to go against what we are learning about having a passion for God, His truth, and His people, but in the end, Esther is in just the right place to stand up for her people, even at the risk of her own life.

We all know about Haman's plot to kill all the Jews. As a reminder, read 3:1-6. What one small thing happened that angered Haman? What does the fact that he then wants to kill an entire race tell you about his character? In verse 8-11, does it look as though the king knows or even cares which people Haman

is out to get? In 4:1-5 it becomes clear that even the queen has no idea of the edict and what it means. Mordecai has to send her a copy of the edict and ask Hathach to explain it to her (v. 8).

What did Esther first reply? What did she do in the end, and what was the result? We will go into these matters in more detail in the skit. The lesson for us is, how willing are we to openly stand up, even against earthly authorities, for what is right? Will we, like Esther, say, "I will go"?

DEVOTION

Read or have read Ephesians 6:12. What does it saying we are fighting against? Since the passage clearly states “not against flesh and blood,” we must keep in mind that these are demonic powers of darkness that God’s armor fortifies us for.

Yet, given the way power and authority work on this earth, standing for right against power usually means dealing with one or more humans, just as Esther and Mordecai had to deal with Ahasuerus and Haman and the Me-do-Persian system. What safeguards do you think will help us deal wisely with humans in authority, still loving them, yet being serious in our stand against wrong?

The life of Paul gives some examples. Keeping your finger in Ephesians 6, let’s take a quick look at Acts 17:16. How does Paul feel about the many idols he sees in Athens? Now read verses 22-24. How does he actually address the people? Notice how respectful he is, and that he begins with something positive.

Now look at chapter 24:10. When Paul was taken before Governor Felix, how did he address him?

The thing to keep always in mind is that Jesus loves each and every person you will ever meet, no matter what they have done. He is the only one who can cause reformation in their lives, and all too often, Christians get in the way of that and cause more harm than good. These people were all innocent babies once upon a time, and though they are now responsible for their own choices, only God can know what influences have helped to form them the way they are. It is the evil designs of Satan we are fighting, not flesh and blood. And for that, we need armor that only God can give. Go back to Ephesians 6 now.

Paul uses the imagery of military armor in this passage, but he is talking about real, powerful protections only God can provide. Let’s name them. (You may wish to have a scribe record these.)

1. The first two are in verse 14. What are they? (Truth and righteousness.)
2. What is in verse 15? (Gospel of peace.)
3. Verse 16? (Faith.)

There are two again in verse 17; what are they? (Salvation and the Word of God.)

And finally, in verse 18, what is our constant defense? (Prayer and the Holy Spirit.)

Take a few minutes to discuss: Where is the one and only place we can get this armor? What happens when we try to go up against the devil without any one piece of it? What do you think fortified Esther for her battle? In conclusion, read Esther 4:16.

How might the story be different if Esther and Mordecai had not fasted and prayed before confronting the king?

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

1. Look at the headlines in a local newspaper and determine a local issue that would be helped by having dedicated Christians speak the truth to power.
2. Role play ways to do this, with some people playing the part of local leaders.
3. If possible come up with a real action that your group can do to make your community better.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body + heart + mind = one living soul.

We can't really divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY ONE: Esther, a young girl from a time and place where women were kept silent and in the background, was somehow courageous and strong enough to confront a king who had the power of life and death not only her but over her remaining family and her whole nation. We all want to be like that. Make a sketch of the various pieces of armor listed in Ephesians 6:14-18. This week we will ponder how these work to transform our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls. Each day, have the passage open before you. You will be surprised about new thoughts that will arise as you ponder each individual piece of God's armor. You may think of other Bible verses you want to look up, too.

DAY TWO: *Heart:* Choose which piece or pieces of the armor you think are most connected with your feelings and emotions. Write as clearly as you can why you think this. Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY THREE: *Mind:* Choose which piece or pieces of the armor you think are most connected with your mind and intellect. Again, write about it. How does God want to work in your mind this week?

DAY FOUR: *Strength/body:* Choose which piece or pieces of the armor you think are most connected with your strength. Does it really matter how strong and healthy you are to be able to use this armor? Why or why not? What are the ways God wants to strengthen your body this week?

DAY FIVE: *Soul/spirit:* As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, look again at your diagram. Which parts of your whole self do you feel are strongest, and how can you use them? Which parts are weak and what can you do to strengthen them?

DAY SIX: Are there ways you can think of that you can help your family, community, and church to depend on the armor that God offers? One interesting group action would be to compare notes with the rest of your youth group. Did everyone choose the same armor pieces to go with heart, mind, body, and spirit?

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned.

- Write a poem or song or story.
- Create a poster.
- Write a letter.
- Paint or draw a picture.
- Make a sign.
- Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings.
- Build something.
- Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s).
- Make food and give it to someone in need.

Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something.

Share the love!

a short skit

"I WILL GO"

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A LONGER SKIT (ABOUT 20 MINUTES)

Cut scenes as you wish—could even reduce as far as just doing Acts 1 and 5

Even after Esther made the decision to go to the king, she didn't act as directly as she might have. In this skit, we will explore her choices and their results. We will have five acts this time, but they are fairly short. (There is more to this story. If you wanted to, you could create and rehearse an entire play of the book of Esther and present it to your church for a special event.)

CHARACTERS

1. Esther
2. Some girls as her maids
3. Mordecai
4. King Ahasuerus
5. Haman
6. Zeresh
7. Hathach
8. Harbona
9. A few other servants and guards
10. A few friends for Haman (these last can be the same people if you are short of players)

PROPS

1. Something to represent the scepter
2. Two crowns for Esther and Ahasuerus—could be as simple as chains or even bands of paper
3. A rolled scroll to represent the message passed between Esther and Mordecai

4. Choose a place that represents inside the palace and a place that represents outside. In the inside, on one side you need a fancy chair (drape a regular chair with red cloth, or something) for a throne, and a table and chairs for the banquet. Food can be real or pretend. The other side of the inside is Esther's room.

It would be nice to have something that represents the wall between the palace and the outside; use your imagination.

ACT 1

Scene: **Mordecai** is sitting on the ground outside the palace, his head bowed, looking very distressed. He could be rocking back and forth, rubbing his hands on his head, or even moaning. At least a couple of other people are out there, too, just standing around, maybe pretending to talk.

Esther and her **maids** are inside the palace, also looking worried. **Hathach** is with them, a message in his hand.

Esther: Well, did you ask him?

Hathach: My lady, he wouldn't take the clothes. He's still in sackcloth. He gave me this. (Hands her the message, which she unrolls and reads.)

Esther: Kill all the Jews? What?? What is the meaning of this?

Hathach: Mordecai told me to explain; it's a decree from the king—well, everybody knows it's really from Haman—that all the Jews are to be killed.

Hathach: We know how tiring traveling can be. We came all the way from Rome recently.

Esther: (Horrificed.) All of them?!

Hathach: Yes, my lady. Haman has offered to pay a very large sum of money into the king's treasury in return for this. Also...(he hesitates)...well, my lady, Mordecai wants you to go to the king and intercede with him.

Esther: (Even more shocked—backs away fearfully) Me? But I can't—the king wouldn't—(she stops) I'll write a reply. (While "writing" on the scroll she says) He doesn't understand. Tell him no one can just go before the king. We can only go if we're summoned, and he hasn't summoned me in a month! I'll be killed on the spot!

Hathach: (Goes out to Mordecai) The queen sent this, sir. (Hands him scroll.)

Mordecai: (Stands and takes it, unrolls, reads, shakes his head. Then "writes" while saying...) Tell her "Don't think you'll be safe just because you're in the palace. If you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Hands Hathach the scroll and sits back down. Hathach goes back to queen, gives her scroll and waits while she reads.)

Esther: (Turns away from Hathach and stands silently for a moment. Squares her shoulders, turns back.) Tell him to gather all the Jews he can find in Susa and fast and pray for three days. My maids and I will do the same. Then...I will go, even though it's against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

Act II

Scene: **King** is on his throne, a couple of servants beside him. One or two guards stand where the door is represented. Esther's maids are putting finishing touches on her. She is wearing her crown if you have one.

A maid: You look beautiful, my lady. God go with you!.

Esther: (To maids.) Pray for me. (Maids are in attitudes of prayer during rest of scene. Esther takes a deep breath and goes to the "door" of the throne room. The guards look shocked, but let her in.)

King: (Looks up, angry at first. Guard acts as if he will grab her. Then king's face relaxes and he smiles and holds out his scepter. Esther moves forward and touches tip of scepter.) Esther! My queen, it's been a long time! What is it you want? Ask me anything, even half of my kingdom!

Esther: (Bows.) If it please you, your majesty, will you and Haman come to a banquet I've prepared for you?

King: Certainly! (To servant.) Go get Haman right away!

(Haman comes, and they sit at table. Servants, including Harbona, serve them and they pretend to eat and talk. Haman acts very proud.)

King: Now, Esther, what is it? What do you really want? I'll give you up to half my kingdom!.

Esther: If I have pleased you, lord, please
come to another banquet tomorrow.

King: Of course, my queen!

*(As they leave, Haman goes out of gate and the
others there bow to him, but Mordecai doesn't even
stand up. Haman looks angrily at him then strides
away. Everyone leaves the stage area.)*

Act III

Scene: Now the table becomes Haman's house. Haman and his friends are eating, and his wife Zeresh is serving them.

Haman: (Boastfully) I am so great in this kingdom! I have ten sons, and a high office, and I'm getting richer and richer. The king has promoted me several times, even giving me my way on the matter of destroying those disrespectful Jews. Why only today, even Queen Esther honored me! She gave a special banquet just for me and the king, and tomorrow I'm to go again! (Others exclaim admiringly. Haman frowns) But it's no good to me as long as that Mordecai sits there at the gate and won't even bow!

Zeresh: Well, why don't you get rid of him before the rest of the Jews? Just have a gallows built, and get the king to let you hang him. You can do it today and then tomorrow you'll be able to go to the queen's banquet with a light heart.

Haman: (Brightening) That's what I'll do! I'll have the gallows built immediately!

(All leave.)

Act IV

Scene: **King** on his throne, servants beside him, Haman outside his "door."

King: (To his servants) Last night I couldn't sleep, and I had the records read to me. I was reminded that a while back, Mordecai the Jew saved me from an assassination plot and I've never rewarded him. (Guard comes forward, and king turns to him.) What is it?

King: Oh, good. Let him in.

Haman: (Comes in and bows.) My lord, there was something—

King: (Interrupts him) Haman! Just the person I was hoping to see! What do you think I should do for someone I want to honor?

Haman: (Turns aside and says quietly, as if to himself) That has to be me! This is even better than I hoped! (Turns back to King.) Well, my lord, let me see, I think you should have one of the princes put some of your own royal robes on him and put him on one of your own horses, and parade him through town, shouting, "Here is a man the king delights to honor!"

King: Perfect! And who is a more noble prince than you, Haman? You can be the one to do these things to Mordecai the Jew!

Haman: (Horrified) I—but—yes, my lord! (Bows and leaves.)

(Take only a minute for this part: as Haman turns away from king, his face shows his fury. Outside gate, he gets Mordecai, pretends to array him and put him on horse, then walks before him shouting,) "Here is a man the king delights to honor!" (Whole room should cheer, except for Zeresh and Haman's friends, who gather at one side, all upset. When he has led Mordecai back to the gate, Haman goes to them and Zeresh says,) "Your rise is over, Haman. You won't prevail against that man or the Jews."

Act 5

(Scene: Esther, King, Haman, and Servants including Harbona gather at table again. Haman is trying to put on a calm face, but he is very upset. They pretend to eat and drink and have conversation.)

King: Now, listen, Esther, you wouldn't keep inviting me to banquets unless something was on your mind. What is it? Tell me.

Esther: I only want my life, my lord.

King: What?! (During Esther's answer, he gets more and more angry.)

Esther: My people and I are sold, my king. We are to be destroyed. Annihilated. If we were only going to be sold as slaves, I wouldn't complain, but to be killed! All of us! This will only be a loss to you and your kingdom, my lord.

King: (Shouting) Who dares to do such a thing?

Esther: A foe and an enemy! This wicked Haman! (Points to Haman, who recoils in terror)

King: (Jumps up and turns away from table, pacing back and forth. To himself--) Haman! How could he? I must get hold of myself!

(Meanwhile, Haman cowers before the queen. He rises from his place and goes to hers, falling to his knees and clutching at her.) Mercy! Oh, my queen, I beg you, I didn't know!

(Esther tries to pull away; servants run forward.)

King: (Turns back to scene as servants reach to grab Haman) What?! Will you even assault the queen in my very presence?

Harbona: (Clears his throat) Uh...my king?

King: Yes? What is it?

Harbona: My lord, Haman built a gallows yesterday on which he planned to kill Mordecai.

King: (Glares at Haman) Mordecai! Well, hang him on it!

Servants drag Haman away. Hanan is protesting and begging for mercy.

King: (Goes to **Esther's** side) My queen, I have been foolish, trusting that man. I can't change the law now, but I can make a new one telling the Jews to arm and defend themselves. When everyone hears that, and hears about the downfall of Haman, there will probably be far fewer who rise up to kill the Jews anyway. It's the best I can do. I'm sorry.

Esther: (Bows) Thank you, my lord. Our God has saved us.