

## WOMEN'S SUMMER BOOST WEEK 4

### 1.4. Esther

Starting chapter 2 in the book of Esther, we see an amazing story unfold. Against all odds, God comes through for His people every time. The plot has every enemy plan exposed, and Esther and her father-in-law Mordecai in their place of authority.

But let's zoom in a little on this woman Esther. There are some things we know because of her.

Firstly: she knows she's adopted. We know that death was a part of her life. She had lost both of her parents.

*Esther 2:7* Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

Her story could have looked very differently. An orphan without a relative taking up God mandated care, was left to die.

Orphans that are left for a period of time, have permanently damaged brains in the areas of social skills, mainly trust and identity are affected. They are often desperate to fill these voids at all costs. The orphan in Ezekiel 16's parable is an example to that.

*Ezekiel 16:4* On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. <sup>5</sup> No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.

The baby in Ezekiel's story is Jerusalem. She was rescued and loved, and married, but turned around and with her heart of stone, turned to idolatry and prostitution.

The hero in the Esther story from the get-go is Mordecai. As a well educated man, he was carried into exile and served at the king's court. He adopted the girl, as was expected of him by God. It is remarkable that she was very beautiful. Apparently, her beauty did not intimidate him, he was comfortable with it, wanting the best for her. So much for laying low. That is not what he taught her. He taught her the real deal of strength as a godly woman.

Esther could rest assured that she was safe, well cared for, disciplined and raised into a life of strength and wisdom,... In short, she belonged.

Secondly: she was humble. We know that she was teachable.

*Esther 2:20* But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

Her humble attitude caused her to stand out and have special favour with Heggai, the man in charge of the King's harem:

*Esther 2:8* When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. <sup>9</sup> She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

He advises her and makes all things readily available to her: he sets her up for favour with the King:

*Esther 2:15* When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, **she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested.** And **Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.** <sup>16</sup> She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

<sup>17</sup> **Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins.** So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

And so she becomes the new queen. This will be a test to her. As opposed to many of the other women mentioned, this woman was now well resourced.

Then Haman's terrible plan to annihilate the Jews reaches Mordecai. Mordecai risks his life being seen in mourning clothes to get Esther's attention. She sends Hathak to take a message, and the news of the plan to annihilate the Jews reaches the palace:

*Esther 4:8* 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.

<sup>9</sup> Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said.

Esther might have thought she could save herself (and her loved ones?), but we see for sure that she is hesitant for a more risky scenario:

*Esther 4:11* "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."*

In other words: "This will cost me my head and may not get us anywhere on top of it! The King of whom you think his favour still rests on me as before, has not called for me in a whole month!"

Of this king, we know that even after marrying Esther, he calls virgins together a second time! His love is not pure, it is unpredictable. She is put to the test.

Mordecai sternly warns her:

*Esther 4:13b* "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. <sup>14</sup> 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?"

These are words from an adult to an adult. She is not treated as a child, she is told the sobering truth. At these words, Esther makes the choice to trust and obey. These are attitudes that flow forth from her knowing she belongs and her being teachable. She will spend the upcoming days at His feet, and the Jews are fasting alongside her, Mordecai will make sure of that. She asked him to do his part, and he agreed. Adult to adult. That does not stand in the way of submission, as our submission is to the Truth, to God and to each other.

Now we get to the best part. The amazing part. The part that is fully dependent on God, and reveals the power of trust, obedience and 3 days spent at His feet, fasting:

She goes to the King.

But how!

*Esther 5:1* 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. <sup>2</sup> *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.*

If she is going to disobey, she is going to do so in the most respectful way she can think of. No pitiful appearance, but royal robes.

No rushing in, but standing still in the inner court. Why? She has come this far, and it means the chances of losing her head are already there. Why not approach the King further? She has already trespassed! I believe the only reason she pauses mid- inner court, is to communicate **respect**. God comes through with giving the king favour towards her.

She does not overwhelm him with her request, which shows the wisdom she found in that secret place with God. At the second banquet, which was apparently a

weakness of the King, when the King has urged many times to find out what she wants, she eventually reveals him everything.

Haman gets killed, and we see a very different approach from Esther, who now has nothing left to lose:

*Esther 8:3 Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. <sup>4</sup> Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.*

*<sup>5</sup> "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. <sup>6</sup> For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"*

And so, a genocide gets avoided. A plot gets turned around. Haman ends up losing, as well as all the enemies of the Jews. An era of peace for the Jews instead of their annihilation.

#### Word of encouragement:

Esther went through very different seasons. She was a child with two parents just like any other, then became an orphan. Then she was adopted into the family of a man of courage, wisdom, standing, and mature love who raised her well. Then she was kidnapped. Then she became queen and had everyone's favour on her. Then, her husband called in other virgins, and she was left doubting what not being called for a month, meant. In that moment, she was asked to risk her life. Then, she freed her people and got her foster father in the palace in a position of authority.

That is a highly intense life!

But she has a choice. She can be like the orphan Jerusalem in Ezekiel's passage, seeking protection in what cannot protect, or lean upon God in complete trust and obedience. It will require submission. She made her choice. I'm glad she did, because it helps us get a grasp on submission. It is not ugly or narcissistic, it seeks our wellbeing for the long run above all else.

A life with God will bring out the best in us. Esther knows by now that Mordecai wants nothing but the best for her, which is why she keeps listening to his advice and obeying him even when in the palace. How much more can we trust God! Nothing says it better than Hebrews 12:

*Hebrews 12:5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,*

<sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

<sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!

<sup>10</sup> They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

We can expect to be interrupted in our walk with God, and corrected or led through difficult times on the way. That is how He loves us into wholeness, into growth in Him. He is preparing us for something that is so joyful, beautiful, holy, and so above what we could ever reach or be worthy of in our own strength.

Paul compares our choice to two mountains, that are similar to an orphan thinking or an adopted child understanding. We can approach God as fearful orphans, not trusting Him and being afraid of the things He asks of us, or we can approach Him as a good and trustworthy Father. When the difficult request comes in, it feels no different. The difference lies in whether we draw close to Him when we're overwhelmed, or whether we run to the wrong "mountain". The second mountain is such an encouragement that it helps put all our moments of anxiety and discipline in a wonderful eternal perspective!

*Hebrews 12:18* You have **not** come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; <sup>19</sup> to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, <sup>20</sup> because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." <sup>21</sup> The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion, **to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, <sup>23</sup> to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.**

In the story of Esther, there is very little space between Mordecai asking Esther to risk her life, and Mordecai getting to work submitting to Esther's request:

*Esther 4:15* Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: <sup>16</sup> "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.”*

*<sup>17</sup>So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.*

This is a glimpse in Biblical, unpolluted submission. We will need many of these to heal the wounded hearts of women in the Church, but for now, let this warm your heart and know that we can always submit to God, who loves us into something we could never be on our own.

Prayer pause

What do you want to retain from this passage on Esther?

What caught your attention to chew on more? Take time to do so.

Pray about what spoke to you.