This is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

1 Peter 2:19

The same story has been told over and over for generations. A charming prince discovers a poor, young woman with hidden beauty and big dreams. He whisks her off to become his bride.

At first glance, the book of Esther resembles that story. Esther is chosen by a king to undergo extensive beauty treatments, receive new luxuries, and live in the palace. What could be better?

A closer look at Esther eliminates any romantic notions one brings to it. Esther is placed in a harem and given very little freedom. She is required to spend the night with the king in what is basically a sexual audition. Once she becomes queen, she understands that the king will continue to spend the night with other young women from the harem. She finds herself married to a controlling, hot-tempered man who is prone to drunkenness and rash decisions. She cannot even talk with her husband unless he calls for her.

This does not sound like “happily ever after.”

Despite all this, the book of Esther does give us hope. Even though her personal circumstances do not change very much, the story does have a happy ending.

Perhaps your story is not turning out quite like you expected. Your husband is not the Prince Charming you thought he was. Your children do not always behave. What you thought was the perfect job has become a source of stress and frustration. As you seek the Lord in these matters, He may dramatically change your situation. It could also be that, like Esther, He wants you to remain in your difficult circumstance as part of a bigger, beautiful plan.

“God’s will is exactly what I would choose if I knew what God knows.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

1. Have you had high hopes for any of these areas of your life, only to be disappointed?

   - Marriage
   - Career Education
   - Childrearing
   - Housing
   - Friendships

2. Ask God to show you His glory and power in these circumstances, either by eliminating the frustrations or by giving you the grace to endure them. He may be doing something far greater than you can imagine.

As we have seen, Queen Esther's marriage and living situation were far from ideal. Bleak as they were, these were not her biggest problems. The biggest issue plaguing Esther and her people was that they had been exiled from their homeland.

God had made a promise to Esther's ancestor, Abraham, that if his descendants remained faithful to God, they would receive a land of their own. Esther would have known the stories of how God kept that promise. She also would have been aware of Israel's continual sin and rebellion, leading to their exile in Babylon, and then Persia.

Esther became queen in this context of punishment. Her people were longing for a restoration of their land, and more importantly, a relationship with God. Esther's new clothes, luxuries, attention, and power could not truly satisfy her.

If you are in a relationship with Jesus, you have the hope of an eternal home far better than any kingdom this world can offer. Jesus has made freedom from exile possible. As you wait for His return, you are like Esther: a stranger and alien in a foreign land.

Perhaps you have been treated like royalty in certain areas and have enjoyed career success, social status, or material wealth. Are any of these things taking your focus off your eternal home? John gives a warning to those of us living in exile, saying, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

“This world is not my home, I’m just a ‘passing through, My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”
Taken from “This World Is Not My Home”

1. What temporary things are most likely to distract you from investing in eternity? Here are a few examples.

   - Fashion
   - Furniture
   - Cell Phones
   - Cars
   - Exercise
   - House
   - Food
   - MP3 Players

   There is nothing inherently wrong with these things, but an excessive focus on them could cause you to lose anticipation for what is to come.

2. Spend some time thinking about the wonder of living in a beautiful world unmarrried by sin and death. Thank God for the hope He has provided by His grace.

DAY 4

Showing Off

Let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

If King Ahasuerus ruled today, magazines and TV programs would want to feature his opulent home décor. Since there was no mass media in his day, the king chose to show off his wealth by hosting a six-month party.

Esther chapter one describes the impressive display of wealth: “There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones” (v. 6).

While there is nothing necessarily sinful about owning nice things, we are told that the king was motivated by a desire to impress. Verse four says “he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days.”

Ahasuerus was not simply having a friendly get-together. Many historians believe that this feast was designed to build support for his planned war against the Greeks. He was displaying his possessions and wealth so others would think of him as powerful and capable.

The same sort of thing happens today. A woman may carry the most up-to-date MP3 player or cell phone on her waist like a child showing off a new toy. A mom enters the carpool line at her daughter’s private school hoping to impress with a new luxury SUV. A woman comes to church in the latest fashions hoping to attract attention.

There is nothing wrong with owning a phone, car, or new clothes. The issue is in the heart. Are we flaunting material things to promote ourselves and build our own flimsy kingdoms, or are we viewing them as gifts from God to be used for His glory?

You boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil . . . Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

James 4:16; 5:1

MAKING IT PERSONAL

1. Have you displayed your home, clothes, or gadgets in order to bring glory to yourself? Confess it to God.

2. Thank God for providing everything you have. Offer everything back to Him to use however He desires.

DAY 5

The Party’s Over

When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

Proverbs 23:1-3

If you turn on the TV, drive down a highway, or walk through a store, you’ll be bombarded with messages inviting you to feast: All You Can Eat . . . Indulge Yourself . . . Have it Your Way.

Our culture has a lot in common with the ancient Persians, who loved eating and drinking. One of their feasts lasted six months! Esther chapter one gives us some characteristics of this marathon party, hosted by King Ahasuerus.

1. As we have seen, he was motivated by a desire to show off his wealth.

He gave a feast for all his officials . . . while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness (vv. 3-4).

2. He and the people were drunk and could not think clearly.

The royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king (v. 7).

3. He used it as an opportunity to indulge in lust and impropriety.

He commanded . . . Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at (vv. 10-11).

4. He ended the feast by dissolving his marriage.

Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus (v. 19).

Instead of providing satisfaction, this feasting led to anger, pain, and regret. We experience the same thing: eating or drinking to forget our problems, dull our pain, or fit into a social circle.

This type of feasting will never satisfy, but a relationship with Jesus will. He is “the bread of life.” Whoever comes to Him won’t hunger, and whoever believes in Him won’t thirst (John 6:35).

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

C. S. Lewis

MAKING IT PERSONAL

1. Do you have any unhealthy eating or drinking behaviors?

2. Are you looking to the Bread of Life for ultimate satisfaction and purpose for your soul?

When King Ahasuerus commanded the queen to appear at a feast, do you know who delivered the message? Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas.

The names of seven eunuchs in Esther 1:10 may appear to be nothing more than Bible trivia—a detail that seems unimportant compared to the life-and-death story of the main characters. You cannot help wondering, though, why the writer of Esther provides so much detail about eunuchs serving in the Persian court.

Besides the seven mentioned above, we also meet Hegai and Shaashgaz, eunuchs who help manage the king’s multiple wives. We encounter Bigthan and Teresh, two eunuchs who conspire against the king. Finally, we are told about Hathach, a servant of Esther who brings news from outside the palace.

The fact that these minor characters are mentioned by name should give hope to anyone who feels small and unimportant. Perhaps it seems like interesting things only happen to those who are beautiful, rich, and powerful. The book of Esther tells us that God sees those who remain behind the scenes.

The story of Esther is primarily about the survival of the Jewish people. By preserving Israel during this time, God was making the way for the Messiah. Jesus did not focus on “important people” such as kings and queens. He had a special place in His heart for those who took the role of a servant. An Ethiopian eunuch would discover this, when Philip “told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

No matter how little attention you normally receive, God knows you by name. He has given you good news. He has sent His Son to rescue you from the exile of sin and join His kingdom forever.

*He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.*

Luke 1:52

### MAKING IT PERSONAL

Spend some time thanking God for providing salvation for all people who repent and believe, including those who are normally forgotten or left out.
**No Rewind**

Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

Ecclesiastes 5:6

Do you ever wish you could hit “rewind” on your conversation? We have all said things that were embarrassing or offensive, only to wish we could go back and edit ourselves.

King Ahasuerus wielded great power with his words. As the autocratic ruler of a world empire, his commands were quickly obeyed. Although his power seemed absolute, he had a problem. Once a decree was made, he was unable to take his words back.

Esther chapter one tells us King Ahasuerus made a rash decree. He deposed Queen Vashti and declared that she could never come into his presence again.

He soon regretted his decree, but the king could not strike his statement from the record. Verse 19 describes the way his words were handled: “. . . let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed.” Once a law was in place, nothing could change it.

Perhaps no one is entering your words into a law book, but there is still a sense in which your words cannot be repealed. While God can graciously forgive sins of the tongue, it is impossible to undo all the damage that words cause, whether in the form of casual gossip or an angry tirade.

*Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

James 1:19

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

1. Ask God to convict you of any rash words that you need to confess.
2. Do you need to ask forgiveness from anyone who has been hurt by the things you have said?
3. Ask God for His power to speak words of life today.

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**Day 9**

**Master or Servant?**

Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way.

1 Peter 3:7

Imagine hearing the news that Congress had passed a strange law, commanding every man to rule his home like a dictator. Those in the Persian Empire experienced this when King Ahasuerus “sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household” (Esther 1:22).

If a husband were to fulfill this law by following King Ahasuerus’ example, he might have:

- Demanded that his wife come when called and stay away from him at all other times.
- Valued his wife's beauty mainly for the status it gave him.
- Requested his wife to do something inappropriate and immodest.
- Refused to get input from her leading up to and after a conflict.
- Responded to conflict by divorcing her.

In contrast, Ephesians 5 says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. Let each one of you love his wife as himself” (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33).

If King Ahasuerus were to follow these principles, he would have:

- Valued his wife's input and respected her ideas.
- Protected his wife from being looked at inappropriately.
- Solved conflict by first listening and understanding.
- Remained committed to his marriage no matter what.

To be a leader in a household, a husband should avoid the example of a dictator like Ahasuerus and instead emulate Jesus.

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:6-8

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

If you are married, pray that God will help your husband’s attitudes and actions to reflect the second list.
DAY 10
Submission and Refusal

Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command.
Esther 1:12

If King Ahasuerus is an example of how a husband is not to act, can the same be said of Queen Vashti's example to wives? It is not as easy to say.

Our portrait of the king as a selfish, boastful, disrespectful tyrant is pretty clear. Our picture of Vashti is more vague. She refused to be displayed like a doll in front of a group of drunken men. To come would have been a breach of etiquette, since the men and women did not normally feast together. It may have been provocative to the men there.

The lack of detail makes it difficult to evaluate Vashti's actions in light of a New Testament passage like Ephesians 5. We have already seen what this chapter has to say to husbands. The chapter also gives instruction to wives:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.
Ephesians 5:22-24

Ephesians gives us a balanced view of marriage in which a husband loves his wife sacrificially and she submits to his godly leadership. The words of 1 Peter 3:1-2 may be more applicable to Vashti's situation:

Wives, be submissive to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct.
1 Peter 3:1-2

MAKING IT PERSONAL

In the previous devotional, perhaps you read the list of King Ahasuerus' actions and thought, "That sounds like my husband." Ask God to help you respond with respectful and pure conduct, trusting and believing God to sanctify your husband "without a word" from you.

DAY 11
Lamech’s Legacy

In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines.
Esther 2:14

Genesis 4 records several “firsts.”

- The first shepherd was Jabal.
- The first musician was Jubal.
- The first iron-worker was Tubal-cain.
- The first polygamist was Lamech.

Genesis 4:19 says, “Lamech took two wives.” This fact is reported without commentary, but we can infer that it was not a positive situation. Throughout the Old Testament, polygamous marriages are shown to be filled with strife and trouble.

Lamech’s legacy reached ridiculous proportions in Ahasuerus’ government. Women of the empire were treated like a natural resource to be used. Esther 2:3 describes officers gathering young virgins into the king's harem. The king would spend one night with each before moving on to another. A second such evil sweep of the land took place after Esther had become queen, as mentioned in Esther 2:19.

Thankfully, most of us live in a culture in which the specific actions of Ahasuerus would be rejected. We do, however, live in a culture that encourages a heart attitude like his. Online pornography can give people the impression that they have access to a harem. Relaxed divorce laws make it possible to have multiple husbands or wives over the course of a lifetime. It is common for men and women to have relationships that last no more than one night.

There is the potential in all of us to approach relationships like a spoiled dictator, and we need to remember the model provided by Lamech's great great great great grandparents. God set one man and one woman in the Garden of Eden to live as husband and wife committed exclusively to one another forever.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
Genesis 2:24

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Have you committed to be faithful to your spouse not only in body, but also with your emotions, mind, eyes, and heart? Ask God to give you the power to say no to temptation today.
A Small Part of History

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James 1:27

Throughout the Bible, we read about the dire condition women and children faced in ancient cultures. Lacking education or property, marriage was often less about romantic love and more about financial security. This backdrop explains why orphans and widows hold such a special place in God’s heart. Consider a few examples:

“You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.”

Exodus 22:22-24

“He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.”

Deuteronomy 10:18

“You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge.”

Deuteronomy 24:17

“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.”

Psalm 68:5

As a Jew, Mordecai may have known about God’s command to care for the fatherless, and he showed the heart of God in adopting his orphaned cousin Esther. We see that he raised her to be refined and mature, and she continued to rely on his wise guidance even after becoming queen. By obeying God’s command, Mordecai prepared Esther to be the kind of woman who could save an entire nation and alter history.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Today, there are thousands of opportunities to be a Mordecai. Orphans are suffering all over the world. In what ways are you responding to God’s call to care for the fatherless and the widow? Ask God how you can reflect His heart for one or more orphans.
DAY 14

Inner Beauty

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
Proverbs 31:30

A woman recently received a free sample of a popular fashion magazine. Almost immediately after opening it, she threw it away and then took the trash bag to the trash barrel outside the house.

“It was depressing,” she explained. “I’m sure some of the models could have been naturally pretty, but they were all given so much gaudy makeup and bizarre costumes that they actually looked ugly. One was even made to look like a corpse. It was just trash.”

Instead of appreciating God-given, true beauty, our world tends to set up unrealistic expectations for women. In our day, magazine editors spend thousands of dollars and computer technology to give models an idealized look. In Esther’s day, members of the royal harem spent a full year undergoing beauty treatments in preparation for one night with the king.

Esther was required to undergo these treatments, even though she had “a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at” (Esther 2:7). The young woman possessed natural, God-given beauty that had nothing to do with the oil and spices she received while in the harem.

If Esther had focused only on maintaining physical beauty, we probably would never have heard of her. But because she cultivated inward qualities of submission, wisdom, and courage, she is remembered today.

The apostle Peter reminds us how important those inward characteristics are, saying, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment . . . Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Peter 3:3-4, NIV)

“Esther had inner beauty, poise, character worthy of admiration, and a winsome spirit. She didn’t gain favor with the king and others by being a whining, moody, pouting, controlling, self-centered, shrewish woman!”
Nancy Leigh DeMoss

MAKING IT PERSONAL

1. Do you spend more time, attention, and energy on outward beauty or on inward character?

2. Do the magazines you read and the television programs you watch give you an accurate picture of beauty? Do you need to make any changes to help you focus on inward qualities?

DAY 15

No Thanks

Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.
Proverbs 13:21

A woman held the store door open for a shopper. After waiting in vain for some words of gratitude, she sarcastically shouted after the shopper, “You’re welcome!”

The truth is, she did not have a welcoming attitude, and only held the door open in order to receive thanks in return. It can be difficult to serve without any recognition.

Mordecai did something far more heroic than holding a door open. He discovered a plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus and informed Queen Esther. She warned the king about the danger he was in and the plot was averted.

An official record was made of the event, but Mordecai did not receive any thanks for his quick action. As frustrating as it is for an important deed to go unrecognized, Mordecai did not get angry or resentful. He did not sarcastically shout, “You’re welcome!” He continued to faithfully serve where he had been placed.

Perhaps you have gone above and beyond the call of duty without any credit. Perhaps you serve daily in obscurity, making lunch for children who do not appreciate the effort, or caring for an elderly parent.

The best way to maintain an attitude like Mordecai’s is to seek the glory of the One who sees every act done in His name. Colossians 3:23-24 instructs us, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.”

The apostle Peter reminds us how important those inward characteristics are, saying, “He that does good for God’s sake seeks neither praise nor reward; he is sure of both in the end.”
William Penn

MAKING IT PERSONAL

What major tasks will you face in the next 24 hours? Ask God to give you the strength to tackle them through His power and for His glory. Do these things not for earthly recognition, but as worship unto God.
A Cruel Promotion

Ahasuerus promoted Haman...

Esther 3:1

“My feet had almost stumbled.”

This is the way doubt is described in Psalm 73. The writer is tempted to question God’s goodness when he sees the wicked prosper. “Their bodies are fat and sleek,” he notes. “They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind” (vv. 4-5).

You have probably wondered the same thing as this Psalmist. Walk into any grocery store and notice that those who are built up as celebrities tend to be unfaithful and profane. Greedy, boastful business leaders are promoted as “successful.” You may know firsthand what it is like to watch an unscrupulous employee get promoted ahead of you.

Mordecai knew what this was like. He saved the king’s life, but instead of being thanked, he watched as the ambitious, boastful Haman was promoted to second-in-command.

The words of the Psalmist could have expressed the emotion Mordecai was probably tempted to feel: “All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence” (v. 13).

When the Psalmist finally gets alone with God, he realizes that the story is not over. God will one day judge the wicked. The Psalmist says, “Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin” (v. 18).

For many years, Mordecai served faithfully while watching an evil man prosper. Unlike us, Mordecai could not skip to the final chapters of Esther and read about the outcome. You cannot skip to the final chapters of your story either. You can, however, pray with the Psalmist, “You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God” (Psalm 73:27-28).

“So what do you do now? You trust the One who’s writing the script. In fact, He’s already written the script. We just haven’t read the end of it.

You wait for the final chapter, and you wait for the Lord.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Bad Leadership 101

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Proverbs 31:4-5

Thanks to an extensive public campaign, the term “designated driver” has entered the national vocabulary. The word describes someone who remains sober and vigilant on behalf of others.

Proverbs 31 records the wise words of a mother to her son who will one day become king. She tells him to avoid wine and to be sober-minded while leading others.

It appears that Ahasuerus never received such advice. As king of the Persian Empire, he acted as if his role was to be the chief drinker. When Haman presented a cruel plan to annihilate the Jewish people and plunder their goods, the king should have protected his people from the ridiculous plot. Instead, he gave Haman freedom to do what he wished and sat down to party.

Esther 3:15 says, “The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.” The king was oblivious to the people’s need for direction, thinking of his own desires while those under his care floundered.

What responsibilities has God given you? Are you approaching them in a sober-minded way? For example:

• It is so easy to sit in front of the TV while bills go unpaid.
• It is so easy to spend hours on frivolous emails while employees lack direction.
• It is so easy to get wrapped up in a hobby instead of praying and reading the Bible with children at bedtime.

It is irresponsible for a parent, spouse, or employer to be drunk while they are supposed to be providing for others. It is likewise dangerous to be intoxicated with entertainment, workaholism, or any selfish pursuit that inhibits our ability to provide leadership to those who need it.

Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herd; for riches do not last forever; and does a crown endure to all generations?

Proverbs 27:23-24

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Have you been shirking any of these responsibilities? Have any of these responsibilities been lacking your attention? Do you need to give any activity up so you can better serve in these areas?

• Marriage • Parenting • Service in the church • Business
• Finances • Friendships • Maintenance of home or car

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Who comes to mind when you think of an evil person being promoted? Instead of hoping for a quick fall, pray that they would come to know Christ, surrender all they have to Him and repent of their sins.
Private and Connected

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.
Ecclesiastes 3:4

A pastor once spoke about an unusual covenant he had made. He vowed to go ahead and cry whenever tears welled up in his eyes, even if he was in public and his natural instinct would be to hold tears back.

Because tears are a sign of weakness and vulnerability, we tend to hold them in. There are, however, times when it is appropriate to cry. Mordecai understood this. In a city known for its parties, his loud, public weeping was a bold statement.

He had heard about Haman's plan to wipe out the Jewish race, and he responded appropriately. We read in Esther 4:1, “Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.”

The Jewish people’s brokenness stands in contrast to the picture of the opulent feasting that opens this story. Esther 4:3 says, “In every province, wherever the king’s command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.”

The Jewish people would soon experience true feasting, more joyful than the Persians had seen. However, this was a time for fasting and tears. They displayed the type of humility appropriate for a group that had been exiled because of their sin.

“Who is the last time these people had mourned and wept and fasted?
God used pressure and the threat of persecution to help them see the wickedness of the culture they’d gotten used to. God wants to purify His people.
God wants to remind them that they don’t fit in this culture.
God wants to bring His people to repentance.”
Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Making It Personal

Have you been feasting while allowing any sin to remain unconfessed in your life? Cry out to God in brokenness, asking for His forgiveness.

Communications technology makes two competing claims. It promises to help one hide from people. At the same time, it promises to instantly connect one with others around the world. In order to get anything done, we need uninterrupted time. Technology promises to help us organize our time and cut down on distractions with palm pilots, voice mail, and scheduling software.

In order to get anything done, we also need access to information. We need our questions answered. This stands opposed to our desire for uninterrupted time, yet technology promises help here as well, offering e-mail, instant messaging, and cell phones.

These competing desires for privacy and connectedness have been around for a long time. King Ahasuerus developed a barbaric system to achieve these two goals. When he called someone, he expected an immediate response. When someone came without being called, he reserved the right to kill them.

In Esther chapter one, the king was enraged when Queen Vashti refused to come when called. Chapter four tells us of the danger Queen Esther faced in making an unscheduled visit. When he called someone, he expected an immediate response. When someone came without being called, he reserved the right to kill them.

In Esther chapter one, the king was enraged when Queen Vashti refused to come when called. Chapter four tells us of the danger Queen Esther faced in making an unscheduled visit. In each of these cases, the king displayed an attitude that can tempt us while trying to get organized. It’s an assumption that, “My time is more valuable than yours.”

We need to maintain a balance between helping people with their needs and getting our work done. No matter which we are focused on at any moment, we need to treat people with kindness, honor, and respect.

Jesus models this for us in Mark 1:38. When the disciples interrupt His quiet time, He does not get angry. Instead, He uses the opportunity to invite them into His work, saying, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”

1. You would never kill someone for spontaneously dropping by, but do you reserve the right to get angry when someone appears to waste your time? Consider these examples:

   • You are trying to finish yard work before the sun goes down and a lonely neighbor appears, ready to talk.
   • You are trying to cook dinner while a toddler clings to your leg and asks an unending string of questions.
   • A co-worker needs help just as you gain momentum on another project.

2. Ask God to help you value people over your schedule today. Some distractions may be opportunities sent from Him.
DAY 20

If You Keep Silent

If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Luke 19:40

The man's sign was familiar: “Will work for food.”

The internal struggle was equally familiar: “Maybe I should turn the car around and buy him a hamburger. But then again, I’m late. Besides, there are so many cars passing him that someone is bound to stop and help.”

Then came one of the most convincing reasons to turn the car around. “Why should I let someone else stop and help? Showing that man God’s love isn’t a burden. It’s an opportunity.”

Queen Esther was given an opportunity that was far more challenging than buying lunch for a hungry man. Her cousin Mordecai challenged her to risk her life and make a request before an unpredictable dictator.

To the casual observer, Mordecai, wearing sackcloth and ashes, may have appeared to be grieving without hope. He spoke words of great trust, though, when he said to Esther, “If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish” (Esther 4:14).

Mordecai understood that God did not need him or Esther in order to save the Jewish people. He also understood that obeying God during this crisis was a great opportunity to bring God glory.

God’s purposes can be accomplished without you. For instance:

• If you fail to teach your children about God’s Word, He could use the teachers at church instead . . .
• If you show no friendship to your neighbor, God could bring another believer into her life . . .
• If you do not give to an urgent need, God could provide some other way . . .

But in all these cases, you would be missing out on the joy that comes from cooperating with God as He fulfills His plan.

“If we waste and squander those opportunities, those who come behind us, I think, will hold us in dishonor. In some way we will reap consequences, even though the people of God will be delivered.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Ask God to help you recognize opportunities you have to bring Him glory, and ask Him for the courage to take advantage of these opportunities.

DAY 21

Take My Life

Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Esther 4:14

A man was nearing retirement after a successful career as a defense contractor. His wife's artistic quilts were highly prized and she had the chance to more fully pursue the hobby she loved. As empty-nesters who had just paid off the mortgage on their home, this couple was in a position to live a life of ease.

Instead, they chose to follow God’s call into full-time ministry, offering to use their abilities any way God saw fit. They currently play an important role in strengthening marriages across the country. Although engineering and quilt-making had no obvious connection to family ministry, God had truly prepared them for their current roles.

Esther felt inadequate for the job she was asked to tackle. Yet her position, relationships, and possessions as Queen had all been given to her in preparation for her role as an intercessor.

Think about all you have been given. Perhaps your list includes some of these:

• Salvation
• A Bible of your own
• Access to solid teaching
• A position in a company
• Experience
• Every power as Thou shalt choose, Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Frances Havergal

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Make a list of the opportunities and possessions God has provided. Pray and devote these things to His service. Ask Him to help you know His will “for such a time as this.”
DAY 22

Hold a Fast

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
Matthew 4:1

The way Jesus prepared for His earthly ministry is amazing. “After fasting forty
days and forty nights, he was hungry” (Matthew 4:2). It is remarkable that the
Creator of all food, who had every resource at His disposal, would choose to go
without for such a long time. This fasting was important, though, in preparing
for the temptations of the devil and ultimately for the cross.

John Piper gives this insight:

Here is Jesus standing on the threshold of the most important public
ministry in the history of the world. None will escape damnation without
this ministry of obedient suffering and death and resurrection. And God
wills that, at the very outset, the ministry be threatened with destruction—
namely, the temptations of Satan to abandon the path of lowliness and
suffering and obedience. And of all the hundreds of things Jesus might
have done to fight off this tremendous threat to salvation, he is led to fast.
To fast!

When Esther faced her most difficult and dangerous assignment, she could have
leaned on human activities. She could have undergone additional beauty treatments
or brushed up on protocol. Instead, we are told that she asked for divine help. “Go,
gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not
eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as
you do. Then I will go to the king” (Esther 4:16).

What is your first reaction when facing an overwhelming task? Is it to muster up
your own courage and resources? Like Esther, we need to ask for God’s favor before
tackling the impossible.

“If Satan had succeeded in deterring Jesus from the path of humble,
suffering obedience there would be no salvation. We would still be in our sins
and without hope. Therefore we owe our salvation to the faithful fasting of Jesus.”
John Piper

MAKING IT PERSONAL

What major tasks or decisions face you in the next six months? Have you asked for
God’s help for these issues? Consider fasting as these events approach.

DAY 23

Restraint

A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, and a wise man will appease it.
Proverbs 16:14

On the television series “I Love Lucy,” one plot was repeated from season to season
in which Lucy tried to join her husband’s entertainment act. Here’s an example
from Season Four:

Lucy: About the television show, I have a question for you.
Ricky: Well I’m pretty sure what it is, and I have an answer for you.
Lucy: I’m pretty sure what your answer is, but let me ask it anyway.
Ricky: All right.
Lucy: Can I be on the show?
Ricky: No.
Lucy: Ten seconds. That’s the fastest we’ve ever done it.

Lucy’s lack of restraint is funny to us because we see this quality in ourselves. She
blurs out whatever is on her mind the way we sometimes do.

Considering this helps us realize how remarkable Esther’s restraint was. An audience
with the king was so valuable that Esther risked her life to secure it. Once she had
the king’s attention, there would be a great temptation to talk quickly and fit in as
much detail as possible. Esther resisted this temptation and simply invited the king
to a feast. Her speech was subtle and persuasive to someone who rarely turned
down a chance to eat and drink.

When communicating, Esther took these factors into account:

• Personality King Ahasuerus was volatile and did not handle surprises well.
  Esther diffused his potential anger by intriguing him with her
  feast and by appealing to his interests.

• Setting Esther prepared a feast only for the king and Haman, who was
  put off guard by the exclusive invitation. Getting the king alone
  with Haman led to a quick punishment once Esther revealed
  her true need.

• Timing At the feast, the busy king would be able to focus on Esther’s
  request without distractions. Beforehand, anticipation could be
  building.

“Here is Esther in a crisis. This is an enormous emergency situation. But she
doesn’t blurt out what’s on her mind. God has helped her to know that it’s not the
right time, it’s not the right place, it’s not the right setting. So she’s patient.”
Nancy Leigh DeMoss

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Think about the conversations you have had over the last few days. Have you
spoken unthinkingly, or with restraint? Ask God to help you communicate wisely.
Insecurity

When you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, “Friend, move up higher.” Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at [the] table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 14:10-11

A friend recently had the chance to become the manager of his department. He turned the job down. He claimed to love his work and did not want to be bogged down with managerial duties. What most people do not know is that at one time, this man’s whole life was focused on climbing the corporate ladder. He almost sacrificed his relationship with his wife and children while pursuing business success. Turning down a promotion demonstrated real maturity on his part.

Haman was a man who never learned that lesson. After being promoted to second-in-command to the king, Haman was given authority over his co-workers (Esther 3:2). He called his wife and friends together and “recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king” (Esther 5:11).

Because he was focused on the wrong goal, Haman was continually frustrated. Consider these examples:

• He could not get everyone in the kingdom to bow to him (3:2).
• He was forced to show great honor to his enemy (6:11).
• His plan to kill all the Israelites was foiled (9:2).
• Finally, he was publicly executed (7:10).

Mordecai was Haman’s opposite. He served in quiet humility, yet received great honor and promotion. Mordecai was focused on God’s glory, and received earthly recognition as well. In contrast, Haman was focused on his own glory and lost everything. His “ladder of success” only led to the gallows from which he was hanged.

“Haman is a picture of those who are insecure. They get their identity in being promoted, in making a good salary, in driving the right kind of car, in living in the right kind of house, in wearing the right kind of clothes, and in having their kids in the right kind of school. That’s how they get their identity: that’s insecurity.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

MAKING IT PERSONAL

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Nancy Leigh DeMoss

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Whether it is at the office, at church, or with a group of home-schooling moms, the temptation to impress others is always strong. What is one way you can take the lowest seat instead of the highest?
Making the Case

Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Colossians 4:5-6

Marriage experts often advise young couples, “Make ‘I’ statements instead of ‘you’ statements.” For instance, a person could say, “When dinner’s getting cold and I haven’t heard from you, I start to feel very worried.” This is better than the accusing statement, “You’re always late!”

Even in a crisis, Esther knew how to speak in a way that would engage her husband rather than offend him. She did not say, “You are such a rotten ruler! How could you sign a law that would lead to the death of your own wife?”

When Esther finally made her case (Esther 7:3-4), she remained:

• Humble
  “If I have found favor in your sight . . .”

• Respectful
  “. . . O king, and if it please the king . . .”

• Non-threatening
  “. . . let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated.”

• Listener-focused
  “If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not be compared with the loss to the king.”

Rather than retreating to a defensive posture, the king was on the edge of his seat. Instead of attacking her accuser, Esther let the king ask the obvious question, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” (v. 5).

After several days of restraint, Esther delivers her news: “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” (v. 6). Esther never attacked her listener, but instead, delivered her sober news in a way that would help him hear and understand it.

“I think sometimes the way we approach people in leadership explains why they do not respond in positive ways. We do not give them a chance to breathe. We do not give them a chance to think.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

MAKING IT PERSONAL

1. Which of these does your speech need to be?
   • Humble
   • Non-threatening
   • Respectful
   • Listener-focused

2. Ask God to help you develop these qualities as you interact with others.

On the Gallows

They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

Esther 7:10

Generations of people are familiar with a series of cartoons depicting a coyote’s ongoing quest to catch a roadrunner. In each episode, the predator employs a new gadget to catch his prey, but ends up falling victim to his own elaborate schemes. The coyote’s frustration hints at an idea found in Scripture. Those who plan to harm others will eventually suffer harm themselves.

In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.

Psalm 10:2

Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit.

Proverbs 28:10

These verses could have warned Haman against building a twenty-foot gallows in his backyard. He erected the structure in hopes of killing Mordecai the Jew, but would be surprised at its eventual use.

The book of Esther tells us what happened when Haman’s plan to destroy Mordecai and the rest of the Jews was revealed.

Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai . . . is standing at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.”

Esther 7:9-10

It’s unlikely that anyone has reserved a place for you on a literal gallows, but perhaps you do know what it’s like to suffer because of some wicked plans. Your trial could have been caused by office politics, malicious gossip, identity theft, or some other crime. When someone plans to get ahead at your expense, remember: God will judge. He will not allow evil to go on forever.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1 Peter 3:9

MAKING IT PERSONAL

1. Can you identify a time when someone purposefully tried to harm you? Do you think of this instance with bitterness, or with a spirit of forgiveness?

2. Are there any situations in which you are repaying evil for evil? Ask God for the grace to bless those who curse you.

3. Do you need to ask forgiveness from another person for the way you’ve responded to their sin?
**DAY 28**

Intercession

Then Esther spoke again to the king.

Esther 8:3

Handwritten notes regarding the book of Esther lie scattered on the table. These ideas are waiting to be developed into something coherent. It is much easier to scribble down notes than it is to sit and write something that someone else can understand. You have probably experienced the same thing: it is much easier to start a project than to see it through to the end.

After she appealed to the king, many good things happened to Esther. Haman was punished, the queen received new property, and Mordecai was promoted. These things could have pacified Esther, lulling her into thinking that everything was better. These things could also have distracted her. For instance, she could have started thinking about how to decorate her new house, rather than about her people.

Although the queen's personal situation seemed better, the Jews were still in danger. Esther had to make a difficult and dangerous visit to the king a second time. She had to follow through with persistence.

Esther 8:3 tells us that Esther “fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews.” Even though her personal crisis appeared to be over, Esther continued to intercede for her threatened people.

Esther's persistence gives us a picture of the way we should come before God. When things are generally going well for us, it is easy to lose intensity in prayer. The truth is, family members, friends, and co-workers (not to speak of nations of the world) are in danger of eternal judgment and need our intercession. Have you let property or promotions distract you from persistent prayer?

“When you bend your knee in prayer to God, limit not your petition to the narrow circle of your own life, tried though it be, but send out your longing prayers for the church's prosperity.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

When is the last time you prayed earnestly for those who do not know Christ? Spend some time interceding for them now. Ask God to give you a burden to continue interceding for them.

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**DAY 29**

A Day of Feasting

[The Jews] rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness.

Esther 9:18

When a couple recently moved to a new town, some friends spontaneously invited them into their home. They had not done any special cleaning or decorating. The menu consisted of leftovers from the previous night's dinner.

Despite what appeared to be meager accommodations, the time was full of laughter and spiritual connection. It was far more fulfilling than a fancy party designed to show off wealth and extravagance.

Esther 9 records how that type of warmth and friendship was an important component of the feasting. Despite the empty celebration described in its first chapter, the book of Esther does not discourage feasting. In fact, the purpose of the book is to record the origins of the Feast of Purim. The descriptions of this Jewish celebration stand in marked contrast to King Ahasuerus' contentious party.

### The Persian Feast

1. Displayed human power and achievement (1:4)
2. Emphasized temporal wealth (1:6)
3. Had a guest list full of VIPs (1:3)
4. Promoted widespread drunkenness (1:7, 1:10)
5. Caused disharmony in families (1:19-20)
6. Ended in anger (1:12)

### The Jewish Feast

1. Recognized God’s power and protection (9:22)
2. Emphasized sharing with others (9:19)
3. Honored the poor (9:22)
4. Included no recorded use of alcohol
5. Reminded people of their responsibility to future generations (9:27-28)
6. Was full of gladness (9:17-19, 22)

Maybe you can think back to unfulfilling parties. You can also probably remember times when a friend offered you unassuming food in an unassuming setting, but overwhelmed you with a sense of warmth and hospitality. The gladness described in Esther 9 has more to do with personal, genuine care than with impeccable decorations or perfectly executed meals.

“The king started out in feasting and ended in sorrow. In the last chapters of the book, the Jews started in sorrow, but ended in feasting.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

1. When others come into your home, are you more concerned about making a good impression or with showing them genuine care? Ask God to convict you of any desire to impress.

2. Do you have a lifestyle of including those who are usually forgotten and of giving to those in need? What step could you take toward deeper generosity?
**DAY 30**

**Remember**

*I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.*

Psalm 77:11

Have you ever been to a feast? The closest thing most of us have experienced is Thanksgiving. It’s a holiday that helps us remember God’s goodness over the course of a year and reminds us to thank Him appropriately. It also helps us remember the years of guidance and provision He supplied while our nation was being formed.

This idea of “remembering” was also at the heart of the feast of Purim. It reminded Israel of God’s deliverance from their enemies, led by Haman. Once he and their other oppressors were destroyed, the Jews celebrated and were told to commemorate the occasion every year.

*The Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation . . .*

Esther 9:27-28

Like Esther and her people, we have an accuser. He prowls like an angry lion, seeking whom he may devour. But just as Haman swung from his own gallows, death was defeated on its own instrument. Jesus went to the cross to deliver His people from the power of sin and death. Like Esther and her people, we have a day of deliverance to remember.

*The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” . . . For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

“The world doesn’t celebrate the way we can celebrate. Christians can celebrate in a way that the world does not understand. Our celebration can be one out of true joy and true gladness.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

1. The Feast of Purim is a reminder that we are to pass down the memory of our deliverance to each generation. What could you do to help your children, friends, or coworkers remember (or discover) the deliverance they have in Christ?

2. Spend some time remembering your Deliverer. Thank Him for rescuing you from death.

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