

# Introduction

I was in the house under lockdown because of Covid, with Kimberly and Paul. We were living in the basement because our kitchen was in the middle of being renovated. There wasn't a tool to be heard, there was no work for Kim (and with her autism she needs to be busy!) and groceries were being delivered to our front door. I wasn't even able to say a proper "thank you" to the delivery person because they didn't want me to open the door.

I needed to know God was in charge of every detail... so the study of Esther began. As the weeks turned into months of lockdown, "The Gang" from our Bethesda Bible study started to meet on a daily Zoom call. This time became fun for all of us as we learned about Esther and her courage and how God's hands were on every part of her life...and we knew God was doing the same with us. May God do the same within your study. ☺

Thank you, Abba.  
Jill

**“Our bad things turn out for good.  
Our good things can never be lost.  
And the best things are yet to come.”**

*Jonathan Edwards<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Christian Happiness," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 10: 1720-1723, 294.

# Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| The Briefing   | 7   |
| Act 1 Queen Vashti Loses Her Crown!                      | 17  |
| Act 2 And the Crown Goes to...                           | 27  |
| Act 3 Not Everyone Is Happy...                           | 37  |
| Act 4 I Ain't Gonna Bow Down                             | 45  |
| Act 5 For Such a Time as This                            | 55  |
| Act 6 Esther's Turn to Have a Party                      | 67  |
| Act 7 Fingerprints Everywhere!                           | 77  |
| Act 8 Someone Is in Big Trouble... and It's Not Mordecai | 89  |
| Act 9 Fight for Your Life!                               | 99  |
| Act 10 Purim...the Party That Never Ends!                | 109 |
| The Encore   | 119 |



# The Briefing

## **SUMMARY**

### **The Briefing will:**

1. Show you how to use the manuals.
2. Help you solve problems in using an interactive study.
3. Help you enter the world of people with disabilities.

### **Contents of The Briefing:**


1. Act Summary
2. How to Prepare to Teach
3. Entering the World of Disability
4. “With-it-ness”
5. Fun Teaching Strategies
6. Jill Miller’s Instructional Videos
7. Act Sections
8. Frequently Asked Questions
9. God’s Fingerprints
10. List of Items for Your Prop Kit

## **I. ACT SUMMARY:**

**Each act or lesson include most of the following numbered parts:**

- A. Reviewing the Act
- B. Setting the Stage
- C. The Curtain Rises
- D. God Calls Me to the Stage
- E. Bow in Prayer
- F. Chorus
- G. Offstage

## **2. HOW TO PREPARE TO TEACH**

1. Read the lesson at least three times.
2. Understand how the lesson works:
  - Questions for the students are in **bold, pink font**, and “teacher talk”—explanations of answers or additional teaching—is in **plain, pink font** and should be read aloud.
  - This icon  <sup>2</sup> indicates that a student should read the Scripture passage listed. See “Fun Teaching Strategies” below for some ways to adapt the reading so everyone can participate.

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<sup>2</sup> “Reading.” *Flaticon*, Freepik, 14 June 2022, <https://www.flaticon.com/free-icons/reading>.

- Possible answers are suggested immediately after each **bold pink** question, indicated by parentheses and plain black font.
  - Comments or instructions for teachers are in *black italics*. Sometimes they are marked by **“Teaching Note.”**
3. Think about how the lesson applies to your life.
  4. Think about how the lesson may apply to students who will be attending the study.
  5. Pray...pray...pray. Pray for each of your students by name daily.
  6. Standard materials you will use in each lesson include:
    - scarves for role-play
    - Purim masks (a helpful website to purchase them is <https://alphamom.com/family-fun/holidays/purim-mask-printables>)
    - colored markers
    - Student Manuals
    - Keep these items accessible week to week for review.
    - In addition, you will want to assemble a prop box, adding items each week as they are identified in the lesson.

### **3. ENTERING THE WORLD OF DISABILITY**

- A.** Don't be afraid as you enter this amazing world. Look for God's fingerprints in their lives as you interact with them week to week. Expect to discover:
- We all have abilities and disabilities.
  - We all learn from one another.
  - We all are created in God's image. As you get to know people affected by disability, differences fade, and you no longer see them as people with disabilities; you see them as people.

### **4. “WITH-IT-NESS”**

- B.** “With-it-ness” is being aware of your students and in tune with them as a group and as individuals—but it goes deeper. With-it-ness is expecting to learn from your students and seeing each one as a beautiful creation of God with gifts to contribute.
- Look at your students to assess if they are “getting” the lesson.
  - Beginning to pray quietly if you see someone not engaged, asking God to show you how to engage him or her in the lesson.
  - Considering whether you have been using too many words.
  - Keep lessons moving and upbeat. Don't get stuck or belabor a point. (On the other hand, don't go too fast!)
  - Ask questions to make sure all students are with you.
  - Rephrase rather than repeat if a student doesn't understand.
  - Make what you are saying visual with props or drawings.
  - Encourage everyone to get up and act out the story or simply to take a walk around the room and sit back down.

- Make the lesson as multi-sensory as you can with the role-play, videos, audio, and props recommended.
- Adding a familiar song to each lesson to keep everyone engaged.
- Make space to learn from your students, even if it means giving up a little control. Everyone will benefit. This is an opportunity for you as a teacher to discover new things about God alongside your students.

**Jill's Personal Example:** *"When a student affected with autism needed to be more engaged, I gave him the bag of markers and asked him for specific colors as I was drawing on the flip chart."*

## **5. FUN TEACHING STRATEGIES**

We all love to have fun, and you and your students will learn more if you add a little fun to your teaching.

### **A. Drawings**

- It often works best to draw scenes on the flip chart as you speak.
- The "bubble people" in each lesson are deliberately simple so you can easily draw them. Label the drawings as you teach.

### **B. Props**

- Props are visualizations to help students engage all their senses in learning and remembering. Use them throughout each lesson to build connections. Use the previous week's prop in review.
- We find it useful to add the props to a prop box each week, so students have tangible reminders of all the lessons.

### **C. Review**

You and your students benefit from review. With all of the craziness of life, many of us forget previous lessons.

- Review the highlights of the previous lesson, including the props and drawings.
- At times, pull out props from earlier lessons. Students often enjoy exploring the prop box and relating props to previous lessons.
- Reviewing helps you see how everyone in the study is applying the lessons in their daily lives.
- Reviews give focus to what we have learned and inspire us to change through the power of Jesus.

### **D. Reading Scripture**

- Have students who are comfortable read aloud. Allow all who want to read the opportunity to read aloud, even if they are hard to understand.
- Adapt for readers who may be reluctant, slower, hard to understand, fast, or quiet. Adaptations may include giving students the words to say out loud or clarifying words or phrases that weren't understood by all.

- Give everyone the opportunity to read raises respect for one another.
- The verses are in different colors to help students find where they are in the passage.

### **E. Role-Play**

Bethesda studies, like all seeJesus Bible studies, are designed to be interactive. We recommend role-play for learners of all ages and abilities. Costume boxes, like prop boxes, can be a great tool for helping students remember lessons from previous weeks while also encouraging creative role-play.

- Different colored scarves or shawls worn over the head or around the shoulders make a quick costume.
- Engage students in as many roles as possible—including the role of narrator.
  - ◆ The students will act out the story using some of the dialogue.
  - ◆ The teacher or other students may prompt actors to speak, if necessary.
  - ◆ Keep the role-play quick and easy.
  - ◆ The focus of role-play is to get the class familiar with the characters and the plot. It allows students to walk through the story—engaged and involved—as if they were there.
  - ◆ Don't be too hasty to step in and guide the students' dialogue. As you get to know your students, you will sense when your support is needed.
- We have found printable Purim masks available online to be helpful. You can search "printable Purim masks" online, or you can access the ones we used here: <https://alphamom.com/family-fun/holidays/purim-mask-printables>.

### **F. Personalize Lessons**

- All of us enjoy hearing stories about other people, especially when we can relate to them. As you teach, try to think of a story from your own life and tell it to the class.
- Use examples your students know and can relate to.

### **G. Vocabulary**

At times, we introduce new words in the lessons (i.e. repent) by following them with other words that define. We suggest you pause and review the word and the concept with your students. Give them opportunities to interact with the new word immediately and as it comes up in future lessons.

### **H. Interactive and Inductive Teaching Style**

- Questions are designed to lead students to the answers. Feel free to adapt or rephrase questions for your audience, but try to keep the order of the questions for continuity.
- *Who? What? Where?* types of questions can be difficult for people affected by disability.
- Simple, leading statements from the teacher may be easier to understand.
  - ◆ Example: What do the palace guards plan to do?
  - ◆ Change to: Tell me about the plan made by the palace guards.
- Turn questions into multiple choice. Some students may know the answer but struggle to express it. To help them, turn the question into multiple choice or yes/no.
  - ◆ For example: Tell me about the plan made by the palace guards.

- ◆ Were they going to throw a party for the king?
- ◆ Were they going to buy a fancy present for Esther?
- ◆ Were they going to kill the king?

## **6. JILL MILLER'S INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS**

View a video of Jill Miller teaching Lesson #7 from the Bethesda *Compassion* study, along with interviews and a webinar at [www.seeJesus.net/resources/bethesda-video-library](http://www.seeJesus.net/resources/bethesda-video-library).

## **7. ACT SECTIONS**


Each act, or lesson, follows a basic pattern:

**A. Backstage:** Standard materials that will be needed each week. Additional props will be listed at the beginning of each lesson.

- The central theme of this study is: "Because he is the blessed controller of all things (1 Timothy 6:15), we can be still, and know that he is God (Psalm 46:10)." You may want to write this on sentence strips in your classroom.
- Different colored scarves or shawls (enough for each character in the story)
- Student manuals with the Scripture and reminder sheet for the lesson
- Prop(s) for the lesson
- Link to "Overview: Esther" by the Bible Project with the time stamp for each Act.

[www.bibleproject.com/explore/video/esther/](http://www.bibleproject.com/explore/video/esther/)

**B. Center Stage:** As you teach, make sure these lesson goals are woven throughout.

**C. God's Fingerprints:**  This icon<sup>3</sup> along with the "Fingerprint" from each lesson will appear in the student manual. God is never mentioned in Esther, but we see his fingerprints throughout the entire story. We want to help the students see them. Look for the icon and invite the students to highlight these fingerprints in their student manuals.

**D. Kim's World:** Kim, Jill's daughter, has multiple disabilities, including autism. In Kim's World, Jill shares personal insights to give you practical, inside glimpses into the world of disability. These will help you connect the lesson to the students in your class.

**E. Summing It Up:** Each section has a summary at the beginning to help the teacher keep focused on the objective and not get side-tracked.

**F. Reviewing the Act:**

- Use props and drawings on the flip chart to prompt recall of previous lessons.
- Use this time to ask the students if they have applied the lesson. Remember to share how *you* did!

**G. Setting the Stage:**

- Read the Scripture passage. You should read the passage at this point in each lesson. (See "Reading Scripture" in Fun Teaching Strategies above.)
- Invite the students to open up their student manual to discover the scenes from that day's Act.
  - ◆ Role-Play (See point E under Fun Teaching Strategies.)

<sup>3</sup> Golubev, Nikita. "Fingerprint." *Flaticon*, 14 June 2022, <https://www.flaticon.com/free-icons/fingerprint>.

- ◆ Watch the “Overview: Esther” by Bible Project of the segment that pertains to that day’s lesson

#### **H. The Curtain Rises:**

- After you have read the story from Scripture and reinforced it with the role-play, review the Act using the “bubble people” drawings in the student manual. Then get the students involved by asking the questions in the manual.
- Personalize the stories, using either your own or the students’ stories.

#### **I. Historical Background:**

- Use photos and other visual aids whenever possible.

#### **J. God Calls Me to the Stage:**

- This is how you connect the lesson to the student and yourself.

#### **K. Bow in Prayer:**

- Ask students for prayer requests.
- Use a prayer journal or the flip chart to record requests.
- Remember: we all need God’s help to move what we learned from our heads to our hearts.

#### **L. Chorus:**

*Send students home with the theme (below) echoing in their ears. Read it together as a class from the student manuals or from sentence strips displayed in the classroom.*

*Because he is the blessed controller of all things (1 Timothy 6:15),  
we can be still, and know that he is God (Psalm 46:10).*

#### **M. Offstage:**

- Each lesson will include two questions for the students to consider.
- The questions for this study are:
  - ◆ This week, in what situations do you need to be still and remember that God is in control?
  - ◆ Where do you see God’s fingerprints in your life?
- Suggest they use the white space in their student manuals to write their answers to the questions during the week.

## **8. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Q. How do I handle so many differences in abilities in one group?**

This is a challenge to every teacher in every class. Don’t feel overwhelmed. It will take time to become familiar with all the abilities in your group and discern how to work with them together.

Strategies for a variety of learning styles are built into each lesson. Adapt questions to the individuals in your group. Someone who is non-verbal can better answer a multiple choice or yes/no question. Plan ahead by choosing specific questions for specific people. Ask questions in a way that students can answer. Use the choices of puppets, video, role-play, etc. to address the learning styles of the people in your class. If necessary, use all of them.



**Author's comment:** *Some students may need to move more. Let parents or caregivers help you with tips on keeping their loved one engaged. I have found that having typical peers in the room encourages all students to be positively engaged. For example, one of the students in our class would wrap the scarf around his face during role-play to try to scare other students. One day a very pretty gal sat next to him, and that scarf never wrapped around his face again!*

**Q. Can I shorten or split a lesson?**

Yes. You must be in tune with the students and understand what they are or are not retaining. If you are regularly running out of time to complete a lesson, consider picking up the pace. Remember with-it-ness!

**Q. How do I make the lessons hands-on?**

Use props and role-play to help students engage the lesson. Passing the prop around the room allows everyone a hands-on experience. Additionally, when you draw as you teach, the pictures will help tune the students to the lesson. All of us want what we're learning to matter to our daily lives; hands-on teaching helps to make that connection!

**Q. What translation do you use in the studies?**

Primarily NlrV (New International Readers Version) and *The Message*. The text is inserted into the lesson at Point 2, "The Curtain Rises."

**Q. How do I form a group?**

People who have disabilities or special needs are one of the most unreached people groups in the United States. Many families need a "breather" and would be thrilled to have a place where their family member is welcomed and wanted. Once you have two or three families involved, the word will spread!

There are group homes around you which include adults affected by disability. Find the group homes in your area, visit them, invite residents to come, or ask if you can take the study to them.

**Luke 14:12-14**

<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus spoke to his host. "Suppose you give a lunch or a dinner," he said. "Do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, or your relatives, or your rich neighbors. If you do, they may invite you to eat with them. So you will be paid back.

<sup>13</sup> "But when you give a big dinner, invite those who are poor. Also invite those who can't walk, the disabled and the blind. <sup>14</sup> Then you will be blessed. Your guests can't pay you back. But you will be paid back when those who are right with God rise from the dead."

**Q. Should I purchase a student manual for each student?**

Yes. We have found that reminder sheets, included in the manual, are used, applied, and enjoyed by students. Many teachers have found it helpful to keep the manuals in the classroom

and copy the page for students to take home. This assures the manuals are available week to week. At the end of the full study, send one student manual home with each participant. You can purchase student manuals at [seejesus.net](http://seejesus.net).

**Q. What is unique about *Bethesda*?**

- a. The study uses questions to get students to think rather than a teacher lecturing them. You'll love seeing the lights go on as students discover scriptural insights for themselves. Once you've taught with a method that elicits people's responses, it's hard to go back to lecturing.
- b. The study incorporates some historical insights and draws on the latest discoveries in biblical archaeology and our growing understanding of the Ancient Near Eastern world. *Bethesda* shares this information with students to increase their general knowledge.
- c. Questions have been tested and refined by the author and others to find the best phrasing to draw students into deeper understanding. Questions are sequenced so that one question smoothly follows the prior one.
- d. The study focuses on the heart. The goal of each lesson is not only behavioral change but also insight into the heart of the student and the teacher and how the heart drives behavior.

**Q. Can I use the *Esther* study with kids not affected by disabilities?**

*Esther* is designed for use with students with intellectual disabilities, but it has been used in classes with typical children, in inclusive classrooms, and with oral learners. Little adaptation is needed. In fact, typical peers often speak about how much they learned through these lessons. If you find the lessons are too slow for your students, you can review less or combine points. You may divide into small groups to talk about and pray through the **God Calls Me to the Stage** section.

*We find that students of all ages appreciate the props and the role-play, so we encourage you not to eliminate them. If you use these materials with typical kids, please pray about how you might also use them to build a bridge to those with disabilities in your community.*

## **9. GOD'S FINGERPRINTS**

|  |
|--|
| <b>Act 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ God used an arrogant, unreasonable king who loved extravagant parties as the beginning point of the story.</li><li>❖ Queen Vashti lost her crown.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Act 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Esther was Jewish, and she kept it a secret.</li><li>❖ Esther won the contest!</li></ul>  |
| <b>Act 3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Mordecai “happened” to hear about the plot to kill the king.</li><li>❖ The king forgot to reward Mordecai.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Act 4</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Mordecai was a Jew.</li><li>❖ God made sure the Pur dice showed a date nearly a year later.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Act 5</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ God put Esther in this exact moment of history to save the Jews.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Act 6</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ God made the way for Esther to stand before the king.</li><li>❖ God permitted Haman to set up the pole where he wanted Mordecai to hang.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Act 7</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ The king couldn't sleep.</li><li>❖ Boring records were read to help the king get to sleep, but God highlighted one page about Mordecai.</li><li>❖ God directed Haman to enter the outer courtyard of the palace at just the right moment.</li><li>❖ Mordecai was honored.</li></ul> |
| <b>Act 8</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Haman got the punishment that he wanted to give Mordecai.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Act 9</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ God gave permission through King Xerxes for the Jews to defend themselves, if attacked.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Act 10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ At the exact date the Jews needed deliverance, they got it!</li><li>❖ God made all things work together for good for those who loved him (Roman 8:28).</li></ul>   |

## **10. LIST OF ITEMS FOR PROP KIT**

- Act 1      Map or globe showing King Xerxes' empire
- Act 2      Lipstick
- Act 3      Bottle with poison sign on it
- Act 4      Pair of dice
- Act 5      Burlap to wear as a shawl
- Act 6      Wine glass
- Act 7      Paper scroll ( You can search YouTube for direction on how to make your own if you prefer.)
- Act 8      Party blowers (one for each student)
- Act 9      A crown
- Act 10     “Graggers” (Purim noisemakers—can be purchased through Amazon)



# Act 1

## Queen Vashti Loses Her Crown!

### **The Script: Esther 1**

*(with an additional verse from Psalm 135:6, included in the student manual)*

*To simplify the reading, we have left out text (...) and removed the names of everyone but the five key characters. We have replaced names of minor characters with their titles in brackets [ ].*

### **Backstage**

- Flip chart
- Bible Project video — “Overview: Esther” (time stamp 0:00-1:41)  
[www.bibleproject.com/explore/video/esther/](http://www.bibleproject.com/explore/video/esther/)
- Online article with pictures: “FOOTSTEPS: Three Things in Susa Esther Likely Saw”
- <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/08/23/footsteps-three-things-in-susa-esther-likely-saw/>
- Fingerprint kit for kids (Amazon) [https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000GKU7BG/ref=cm\\_sw\\_r\\_awdo\\_navT\\_a\\_6ZX3G9TPB21RA7H8CJMK](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000GKU7BG/ref=cm_sw_r_awdo_navT_a_6ZX3G9TPB21RA7H8CJMK)
- The prop: map or globe\* showing King Xerxes' empire
- Costumes: masks\*\*, two crowns, scepter, two swords or police badges, two scarves or shawls
- Bible
- Student manual, one for each student

*\*If you can find one at a thrift shop, outline King Xerxes' empire with a permanent marker.*

*\*\*See The Briefing.*

### **Center Stage**

*Love:* God promises that all things will work together for good. All things.

*Faith:* Sometimes it seems that God is quiet and uninvolved...but our God is always working!  
See John 5:17.

*Students will need highlighters or pencils to mark the fingerprints in their student manuals.*



## God's Fingerprints

- ❖ God used an arrogant, unreasonable king who loved extravagant parties as the beginning point of this story.
- ❖ Queen Vashti lost her crown.



**Kim's World:** *Kim can barely stay at a party for two hours, let alone six months! Even though Kim will talk about all the fun she is looking forward to at a party, then remember for days, weeks, and sometimes years the fun she had while there, she still wants her time short at parties. I'm not exactly sure why, but "it's all part of the story!"*

## I. Setting the Stage

10 minutes

**Summing it up:** King Xerxes was a very powerful king but not powerful enough to make his wife, Queen Vashti, obey him.

Watch the beginning of “Overview: Esther” by Bible Project (time stamp: 0:00-1:41).  
[www.bibleproject.com/explore/video/esther/](http://www.bibleproject.com/explore/video/esther/)

This is a nine-minute video of the entire book of Esther. Because its pace is too fast for everyone to understand, watch the video at .75 speed. Show the segment that covers the day’s lesson or, in future lessons, the segment(s) that will refresh students’ memories. Watching the video one chapter at a time helps us all see how God brings this whole story together in an amazing way!

**Read Esther I.** (Invite the students to follow along in their student manuals.)

Students who are comfortable reading aloud may take turns reading the colored paragraphs. Adapt for slower readers by assisting them and/or giving them shorter portions to read.



**Teacher’s Note:** To simplify the reading, we have left out text (...) and removed names of everyone but the five key characters. We have replaced names of minor characters with their titles in brackets [ ].

### Esther I

**1** King Xerxes ruled over the 127 territories in his kingdom. They reached from India all the way to Cush.... **3** In the third year of his rule King Xerxes gave a feast. It was for all his nobles and officials....

**4** Every day for 180 days he showed his guests the great wealth of his kingdom. He also showed them how glorious his kingdom was. **5** When those days were over, the king gave another feast. It lasted for seven days. It was held in the garden of the king’s courtyard.... Everyone from the least important person to the most important was invited. **6** The garden was decorated with white and blue linen banners.... There were gold and silver couches in the garden.... The floor had purple crystal, marble, mother-of-pearl and other stones of great value. **7** Royal wine was served in gold cups....

**8** [The king] commanded that they should be allowed to drink as much or as little as they wished....

**9** Queen Vashti also gave a feast. Only women were invited....

**10** On the seventh day Xerxes was in a good mood because he had drunk a lot of wine.... **11** King Xerxes told [his officials] to bring Queen Vashti to him.... He wanted to show off her beauty....

**12** The attendants told Queen Vashti what the king had ordered her to do. But she refused to come. So the king became very angry....

**13** It was the king’s practice to ask for advice about matters of law and fairness. So he spoke with ... [the special advisers] ... **15** “You know the law,” the king said. “What should I do to Queen Vashti? She hasn’t obeyed my command. The officials told her what I ordered her to do, didn’t they?”

**16** Then [one of the special advisers] ... said, “Queen Vashti has done what is wrong. But she didn’t do it only against you, King Xerxes. She did it also against all the nobles. And she did it against the people in all the territories you rule over. **17** All the women will hear about what the queen has done. Then they won’t respect their husbands....

**19** "So if it pleases you, send out a royal order. Let it be written down in the laws of Persia and Media. Those laws can never be changed. Let the royal order say that Vashti can never see you again. Also let her position as queen be given to someone who is better than she is. **20** And let your order be announced all through your entire kingdom. Then all women will have respect for their husbands...."

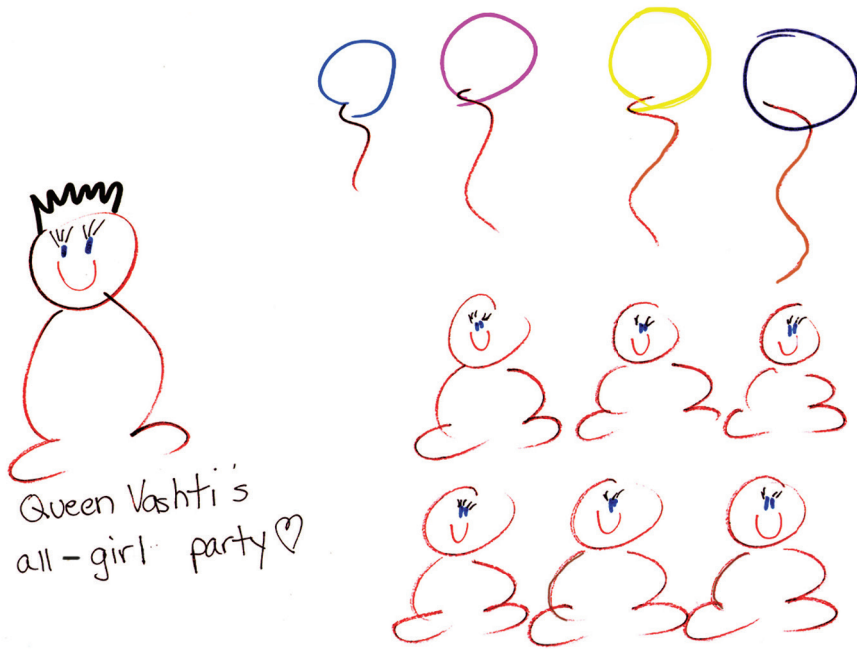
**21** The king and his nobles were pleased with that advice....

**22** The king sent messages out to every territory in the kingdom.... The messages announced that every man should rule over his own family....

Invite the students to open up their student manual to discover the scenes from Act I.







Queen Vashti's  
all-girl party ♡



Role-play the drama with the costuming noted below.

## The Cast and Costumes

| Actor    | Role              | Costume               |
|----------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Person 1 | King Xerxes       | mask, crown, scepter  |
| Person 2 | Queen Vashti      | mask, crown           |
| Person 3 | Queen's attendant | sword or police badge |
| Person 4 | Queen's attendant | sword or police badge |
| Person 5 | King's official   | scarf or shawl        |
| Person 6 | King's official   | scarf or shawl        |

## 2. The Curtain Rises

15 minutes

This story is true, and it happened about 500 years before Jesus was born. Life was feeling out of control and dangerous for some of God's people. There are ten chapters in the book of Esther.

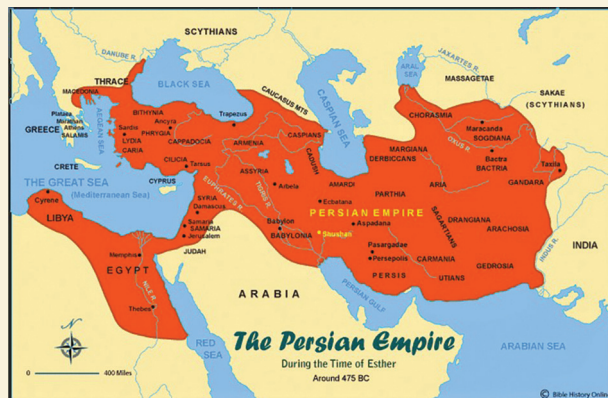
Show students where the book of Esther is in the Bible.

Each chapter is like an act in a play, with the curtain rising at the beginning of the chapter (*lift your hands and arms, imitating a curtain rising*) and the curtain coming down at the end of the chapter (*drop your hands and arms, showing the curtain coming down*). Like a good play, the chapters are filled with love, jealousy, evil, suspense, justice, and courage.

King Xerxes was king over Persia and Media during this time. He had lots of palaces that he lived in. One of his favorite castles was in Susa.

Show pictures from <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/08/23/footsteps-three-things-in-susa-esther-likely-saw/>.

## Map of the Persian Empire<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Image used with permission from Bible History Online.

This is the empire King Xerxes ruled over. It goes from India to Cush, which is now Ethiopia.

Use the map or globe, the prop for this lesson, to show the magnitude of King Xerxes' reign.

**Q. Does this look like a lot of area for the king to reign over?** (Yes.)

**Q. Do you think this king was an important king?** (Yes.)

He was a very, very powerful king.



Invite a student to re-read Esther 1:3.

**Q. What does King Xerxes do?** (He gives a huge dinner.)

**Q. Who does he invite to this party?** (Nobles and officials. Military people.)

**Q. What is a noble?** (Important person.)

Oh yes. Nobles were important. They were part of a special group of people that probably thought they were more important than ordinary people.

**Q. How long does the party, or celebration, last? See v. 4.** (180 days.)

Now that is a long party! When I go to a party, I am ready to go home after a few hours!

**Q. How about you? Would you party for 180 days?** (Various answers.)

**Q. Tell me a few things you think King Xerxes wanted to show off.** (Money. Power.

He's the boss. How important he is.)

I think you are right on!

**Q. Now you would think after 180 days of partying that would be enough. But what does he do in verse 5?** (He has another big dinner.)

**Q. And how long does this party last?** (7 days.)

**Q. Who is invited to this party?** (People who are important and people who aren't important.)

**Q. Do you think these people from the town are excited to be invited?** (Yes!)

Tell me what you think. We all know now that King Xerxes was very powerful and rich, right?

**Q. So do you think most people paid attention to what he said? Do you think most people did what he asked them to do?** (Yes.)



Invite a student to re-read verses 11–13.

**Q. What's going on?** (The king orders the queen to come to his party and she says no.)  
Yes. I think that's trouble with a capital T!

**Q. And how does that make the king feel?** (Mad. Really mad.)  
Yes. He is furious. So the king asks his special advisers what he should do.

**Q. Do you know what an adviser is?** (Kind of like a teacher.)  
Yes. And maybe like a counselor.



Ask a student to re-read verse 17.

**Q. What are the advisers afraid of?** (Since the queen doesn't do what the king asked, women from all over won't do what their husbands ask them to do!)  
Yes. Women will hear what the queen has done. Then they will not do what their husbands want them to do.



Invite a student to re-read verses 19–20.

**Q. What does the king do?** (He writes a law that says the queen can never see him again.)  
So King Xerxes writes a law of Persia and Media that says Queen Vashti can never see the king again. The king also commands that Queen Vashti take off her crown and that another woman wear the crown and be given the title of queen.

#### **Historical Note:**

In the Old Testament of the Bible, we read about the official laws of Persia and Media a few times. Their laws could not be changed, which ended up being a stumbling block for God's people if the king made a stupid law. As we read more in Esther, we will see some of these laws.

So now King Xerxes has sent a message throughout his kingdom that women should respect their husbands and men should rule over their families. And that is where the curtain comes down on the scene for this week.

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### **3. God Calls Me to the Stage**

**10 minutes**

**Summing it up:** *God's name is never mentioned in the whole book of Esther, but you see his fingerprints all through the book.*

**Q. Have you ever seen your fingerprint?** (Various answers.)  
We're going to collect your fingerprints right now!

Get students' fingerprints, using the fingerprint kit. Then clean the top of the table and put both of your flattened hands on the table.

**Q. Are you able to see my fingerprints, like we have just seen your prints on the paper?** (No.)

You're right! My fingerprints are invisible, but you know my hands were on the table.

Did you know the name Esther in Hebrew is similar to the Hebrew phrase "I will hide" (Deuteronomy 31:18)? It's almost like God is hiding.

The book of Esther does not mention the name of God. God's name is invisible, like fingerprints. But God is working in every chapter. Even though it looks like this king is out of control with all his parties, and it looks like Queen Vashti may have gotten the bad end of the deal by losing her crown, God is working!

Let's read Psalm 135:6 in your student manuals—

*The Lord does anything he wants to do in the heavens and on the earth.*

Ask students to highlight the fingerprints in the student manual.



## God's Fingerprints

*God's fingerprints are everywhere, showing us that he is in every detail of our lives.  
The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.*

*Psalm 37:23 (NLT)*

- ❖ God used an arrogant, unreasonable king who loved extravagant parties as the beginning point of this story.
- ❖ Queen Vashti lost her crown.

**Q. Who is in control?** (God.)

**Q. So if God is in control of everything, who was in control of changing King Xerxes' love for Queen Vashti?** (God.)

Right!

**Q. And who allowed the king to remove the queen from her throne?** (God.)

Yes. As we see this story of Esther unfold, remember that God is the one who is controlling everything in this book. Everything.

**Q. Who is in control of all things?** (God.)

Yes! 1 Timothy 6:15 says,

*God ... is the blessed controller of all things, the king over all kings and the master of all masters<sup>2</sup>.*

**Q. If God is in control of the king's parties, is he in control of your week coming up?**

(Yes.)

**Q. Knowing that God controls all things, how does that make you feel on the inside?**

(Peace, safe.)

Yes! And when we have peace, we can relax. We can be quiet. We can be still. God is in charge of it all.

*Show with your body what it looks like to relax.*

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## 4. Bow in Prayer

Dear God, thank you that you control everything. Thank you that you know what I need. Thank you that everything will work out for good. Thank you. I love you. Amen.

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## 5. Chorus

Send students home with the theme (below) echoing in their ears. Read it together as a class from the student manuals or from sentence strips displayed in the classroom.

*Because he is the blessed controller of all things (1 Timothy 6:15), we can be still, and know that he is God (Psalm 46:10).*

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## 6. Offstage

Encourage the students to use the white space in their manuals to write their answers during the week.

1. This week, in what situations do you need to be still and remember that God is in control?
2. Where do you see God's fingerprints in your life?

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<sup>2</sup> Translation from J. B. Phillips New Testament.