



**THE TIME IS NOW**

A 4-WEEK DEVOTIONAL BY CHAD POE

YM360







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Esther: The Time Is Now

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Here are a few things you need to know to make this book meaningful for you.

### **Make This Book A Priority**

Pretty much every Christ-follower, no matter how old they may or may not be, struggles to spend meaningful time with God every day. If you're going to learn from this book and be impacted by it, you have to decide that it's important to you. The truth is that you really can learn and grow from reading this book. But it has to matter. So commit to spending at least 5-10 minutes each day with this book.

### **Have Your Bible Open**

Resist the urge to ignore the spots where this book will tell you to read a passage of Scripture. This book is only a guide for THE Book (your Bible). The spiritual growth and the close relationship with God that you want only happens by reading and doing what's in the Bible. So have your Bible or a Bible app open and a pen or pencil available as you go through this book.

### **The Book Is Designed To Help You Stick With It**

This devotional study through the Book of Esther was designed to be completed in four weeks. For the first five days of each week, you'll read through a few verses or a chapter in Esther, and an insightful breakdown of those verses that will help you better understand their meaning, significance, and application. After that, each day will provide you with some questions for honest reflection and prayer prompts to guide you in responding to what you learn. There is even a dedicated page at the end of each daily devotional to journal your thoughts, jot down things from that day's study or Scriptures that stuck out to you, and note any follow-up questions you might have. The last two days of each week are left open on purpose. Life is busy and full of unforeseen 'surprises' that pop up out of nowhere. Use these days as a time of further reflection, rest, and worship. Or use them to catch up on a day of study you missed due to one of those 'surprises' that popped up.

### **What If I Miss A Day of Reading? Or Three?**

Don't give up! Take this at your pace! The goal is your spiritual growth and for you to grow closer to God. If you miss a day or two . . . or four . . . don't throw in the towel. Instead, pick this book back up and start where you left off. You can do this!

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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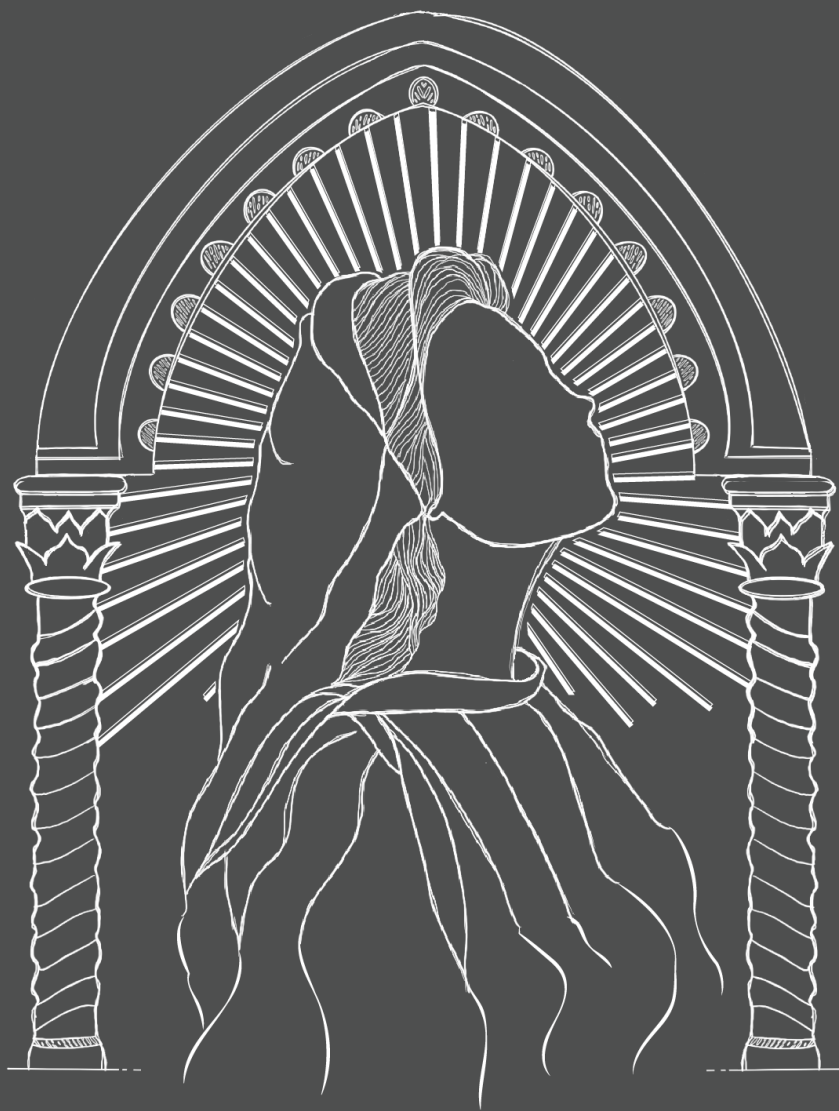
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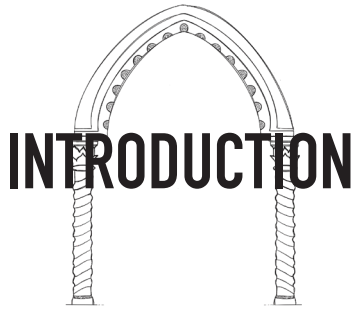
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# INTRODUCTION

If you were to ask anyone, “Who is the Bible about?” the answers “God” and “Jesus” would be high on every list (they may be the entire list). In a sense, the whole of Scripture cannot be understood apart from the work of God. For our purposes, here is a basic run-through of the Bible: The Bible is about God the Father making men and women in His image, us rebelling against Him, and Him sending God the Son to die for sin. On the third day, Jesus (God the Son) leaves the grave alive and will one day come again to bring His people home. Until that day, God the Spirit dwells in His people, directing each of them to a life that will honor Jesus.

To put it simply: The Bible is about God.

So with that being true, there is a small problem that the Book of Esther presents. In the Book of Esther, God is not mentioned once. What are we supposed to do with a book of the Bible that doesn’t mention God at all? How are we supposed to see Jesus or acknowledge God in a book that doesn’t mention either of them by name? And the book of Esther brings up more questions, like, what should we do when our world is awful, and our comfort has numbed us to it? Where are we supposed to go? To whom are we supposed to turn? And to what extent should we go to care for what He cares for? In a world of comfort, is this God really worth the risk?

The human experience is full of risks. Asking someone on a date has the potential for failure. Trying out for a sports team may cause great joy as well as remind us of numerous insecurities. There is the risk of social media and its ever-increasing impact on us. But also the potential for good it may have. On some level, every person who has ever lived has tried and failed at something. They have taken some sort of risk and reaped the reward or punishment.

Esther makes us think, "Are people really worth the risk?" Esther's people (the Jewish people) were living in Persia after being exiled from the Promised Land. After the exile, they had the opportunity to return to the place that God had given His people. This was premium land and something the Jewish people would have ideally been excited to return to and restore. But, many of them chose the comforts of the Persian kingdom rather than honoring God.

Haman, one of the Persian King's top advisors, hated the Jewish people and urged an impetuous King Xerxes (pronounced like Zerks-ees) to issue a decree killing those very people. But, King Xerxes' wife, Esther, had risen to her position as Queen while hiding who she really was. Esther was a Jewish woman! The people that were in danger were her people. And for them to be rescued from a terrible fate, she had to take a risk.

The hand of God was subtly working in the story of Esther as she took risk after risk for a people He loved. God does not have to be mentioned to be powerful. God does not have to speak to be heard. There are times when God is at work in the whisper, allowing His people to live in a way that reminds us of His grace.

The story of Esther is a story of risk for her people. It is the story of her showing King Xerxes who she was at just the right time

and risking her reputation and life for a people that are far more valuable than Haman believed.

There will be risks that we take as we follow Jesus. We will risk being ostracized, left out, unloved, and ignored. There is the potential for negative things to be said. Yet, in all of this, we are able to align ourselves with the person of Jesus and display His sacrificial love to those who are compromised by their own comfort. Because as we will see in Esther, the risk of sharing God's word and purpose with the world can also bring about great things. When you share the Gospel with others, you will find that some will have their lives completely changed. When you put spiritual fruits like kindness, love, and patience on display for the world, you can witness the blessings that it brings other people at a time when they need it most.

Let's spend a few weeks together and see how Jesus calls us to take risks and live boldly for Him. He is the reason we act when we do, and His guidance dictates how we move. Esther was meant for this specific moment in history. And you are meant for such a time as well. You might be wondering when that is. For you: The Time is Now.



# WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION

This week, we get to look at the Persian kingdom and how it was built on pleasure and power by its leader, King Ahasuerus (also known as King Xerxes). Persia was not the first or the last kingdom in the world to hold these values. Much of what we see happening in Persia happens in our own culture today! Humanity has always been tempted to build societies that embrace sin and make it easier to practice. King Xerxes and his kingdom are no exception. Get ready to see multiple similarities between Esther's time and our own time today.

If we want God's Kingdom to come, our kingdoms have to crumble. As we move into this week together, I encourage you to wrestle with this: What do I need to remove to build the Kingdom of Jesus?



# WEEK 1 | DAY 1

Imperfect People, Perfect God

## Esther 1

Begin today by opening your Bible to Esther chapter 1. Esther is a smaller book in the Old Testament, and it comes just before the book of Job and the book of Psalms.

Over the years, Esther has been problematic for scholars and Bible students for numerous reasons. First and foremost, the book never mentions the name of God. Instead, we see God's people living their lives in a worldly kingdom. There is no mention of prayer or sin. There doesn't seem to be any longing for the promised Messiah. Really what you are seeing is a good picture of a culture that does not know God. For a little context, the Jewish people (God's people) had been released from their Babylonian captivity by the new Persian government. They were free to return home to their own land, and yet our entire story is about the Jewish people who stayed in Persia. Mordecai, one of our main characters in the book of Esther, has taken a Persian name. Esther is a Persian name as well. We are reading a story full of people who are disconnected from their God and faith altogether.

Let's compare Esther to some of the other 'biblical heroes' for a moment. David stood as Israel's champion before the Philistines (1 Samuel 17). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace for not bowing down to the statue representing the Babylonian deity (Daniel 3). Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for not following the king's edict about only worshipping him (Daniel 6). These are all examples of

God's people standing firmly against their culture in very public and dangerous ways. The story of Esther starts off a lot less dangerous than all of these. Esther spoke the Persian language; no one would know she was Jewish. Though we know the story of Esther is about survival, it also includes power, glory, and influence. She was instructed to keep her real identity a secret by her uncle Mordecai so that she would be able to safely navigate her way into power.

There are a lot of ways that we are like Esther. We have the spoils of our kingdom at our disposal, and we have a choice of how we can use them. Yes, it is comfortable to enjoy these things and simply fit in with the culture around you. However, by the time we get to the end of Esther, you will be able to see that Esther used her power and influence for the Kingdom of God. And it was far from comfortable for her. You, too, have this choice to live for something greater than the culture around you.

The story of Esther gives us hope. In God's good design, He lets us see the whole of this story. Mordecai and Esther were living in a worldly nation that operated apart from God's Word. There were aspects of their life that were influenced by this. Like you and I, they had to choose daily to be a part of the world but ultimately find their identity as members of God's people.

## REFLECTION

1. What in your past or present causes you to feel disqualified from stepping into God's call on your life?
2. What fears do you have that keep you from interacting with your neighbors for the sake of Jesus?
3. What does it look like for you to step out of your comfort zone and live boldly for Jesus?

## PRAYER

Pray that God would reveal areas in your life that have become too comfortable. Ask Him to help you live for something greater- for His Kingdom. Thank God for His many blessings in your life, and ask Him to show you ways to use those things and opportunities as ways to enhance your faith. If there are any fears that keep you from sharing His love with others, ask for strength and comfort.





# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY



# WEEK 1 | DAY 2

The Persian King

**Esther 1:1-12**

One of the biggest movies in the summer of 2019 was “The Lion King.” It is a photorealistic computer-animated remake (in other words, they don’t look like cartoons) of the 1994 classic Disney animated film. The filmmakers tell us that the story is a take on Shakespeare’s Hamlet and the biblical stories of Joseph and Moses. In short, it is the story of a king who returns to take his rightful place as the sovereign ruler over an entire kingdom.

“King” is a pretty foreign concept for us as Americans. We don’t have one. Unlike so many other nations globally, we have never had one. The closest thing we have to royalty here would be celebrities or athletes, both of which compete for the affection of the public through victories or great performances. Yes, we do have a government that rules over our land, but we also have the freedom to re-elect or remove people from office every few years. When we talk about kings and royalty from here on out, understand that it was a never-ending position of power. You were either loyal to your royal, or you were punished and removed.

In his day, Xerxes was the King of Persia. We join Xerxes as he is throwing a six-month party to get people invested in his kingdom and military exploits. This is a pretty common practice, and like many kings, Xerxes would have had a bunch of resources and an unlimited party budget. As the party comes to a close, Xerxes lets the wine get the better of him and makes a drunken order to have his wife (Vashti) come present herself at the party.

Lots of commentaries believed he wanted to make a display of her, and he would have had her carried in wearing nothing but her crown. So naturally, you can see why she declines his request. However, when she refuses the request, Xerxes' men urge him to banish her from the Kingdom. He listens. When the wine wears off, Xerxes realizes he has made a decision that has long-lasting consequences.

Here is what we see from this earthly king: We see a guy who does not honor others or give them respect and dignity. Instead, he just demands from them. Here is a guy that chases after every pleasure available to him and allows others to negatively influence and manipulate him. As you think about the state of the King of Persia, spend some time comparing him to Jesus, whom we, as believers, call the King of Kings. Jesus sees us as people to be loved. Jesus desires that we cherish Him and rest in His presence. Jesus dresses us in righteousness (or goodness) and invites us to His eternal Kingdom, from which we will not be cast out and banished. Do you see the difference?

Earthly kings always end up a lot like King Xerxes. They may seem powerful, but they get loyalty mostly through fear and bullying. That is why we see the same pattern playing itself out over and over again in history. But Jesus is so much different! He is the King of an eternal Kingdom and invites us into safety and everlasting life in His presence. How are we responding to our King of Kings, Jesus?

## REFLECTION

1. Can you think of a world leader who acts and rules like King Xerxes? What are the similarities?
2. How is Jesus' rule different than the person you mentioned above? In what ways is His leadership better?
3. Do you think you could be tempted to act the way King Xerxes did? How?

## PRAYER

Begin your prayer time by worshipping King Jesus. This could include a moment of silence, where you reflect on all of the good He has done, or it could even look like saying out loud all of the ways you think He is wonderful. Imagine that while you pray, you are in a room with a throne, and on that throne, Jesus is sitting there. You may feel led to ask Him for help in certain matters. Whatever the case may be, keep in mind that He is on an eternal throne, and He has invited you to join an eternal Kingdom.



# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY



# WEEK 1 | DAY 3

The Power of Influence

**Esther 1:13-22**

Begin today by reading Esther 1:13-22. Then turn your Bible to the book of John in the New Testament, and read John 13:34-35.

I am a sucker for a movie trailer. I am baffled by the fact that it only takes three minutes to get me to commit a whole two hours to a movie. If the dialogue is witty, or the special effects are polished, I will sit down with a bucket of popcorn, peanut butter M&M's, and a Coke Zero as soon as I get a window of opportunity. However, the most important influence in my life when it comes to movies is the approval of my friends. If they love it, I am there. If they don't, I will strongly consider staying away.

Throughout the book of Esther, we see both good and bad influences at work. The King is influenced by his advisors to banish Vashti, which essentially kills her. He is also influenced by Haman to issue a law killing the Jewish people (Esther 3). And interestingly enough, the Jewish people were largely influenced by the Persian culture around them, not only in language but also in how they lived. Mordecai is affected by political leaders. He takes a Persian name and spends time in the Citadel. Mordecai influences Esther when he puts her in a position to become the next queen. And not to skip too far ahead in the story, but we will see Esther use her influence as queen to save God's people from more death and destruction.

The people and situations that surround us influence us more

than we know. Jesus constantly talks about the importance of these relationships and how you interact with those who share your beliefs and those who don't. All of our influence, near and far, provides us the chance to see the world influenced by the Good News of Jesus. Just as all of the people in Esther are influenced by the culture and people around them, we are also able to be influenced by Jesus. When you view the Kingdom of God as your Kingdom, it changes the way you live! In John 13:34-35, Jesus says that the world around us will know us by how we display God's love to one another. Keep that in mind as you think about the influence you have in your own context.

## REFLECTION

1. What are the things that influence you the most?
2. How are you using your influence in the lives of believers?
3. How are you investing in the lives of people who don't trust Jesus?

## PRAYER

Today, pray that God would reveal areas in your life that you have influence. Or, if you feel that you are not yet influential anywhere, ask God to bring some opportunities into your life. Maybe there are areas of your life that you are already using to proclaim the Gospel. If so, pray that God will continue to give you the strength and courage to share the truth in love. Ask that He would soften your heart to those who need your influence.





# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY



# WEEK 1 | DAY 4

Plans and Providence

**Esther 2:1-18**

Begin by reading Esther 2:1-18 in your Bible.

If you have ever watched a dating show on television, you have probably seen some of the most dramatic interactions between the contestants and their potential love interests. One of the most famous shows that has been running since 2002 is “The Bachelor.” It is easy to imagine that King Xerxes’ search for a wife was something like this. After all, Xerxes’ advisors sent out a letter having young maidens gathered from around the kingdom. The women received months of training, spices, and make-up. They were then scheduled to meet with Xerxes and attempt to be chosen as his bride after living in this state for twelve months.

However, it is much more wicked. If you didn’t get crowned queen, you didn’t get to go home to your family. All of the women that were brought in were used by the King and likely remained in his concubines for the rest of their lives. They never got a second shot at love if they wanted it. If you are Esther (or any other contestant), submitting yourself to this process is a huge risk and, ultimately, a no-win situation. Imagine trying to win the heart of a person who just banished their former partner for not doing what he wanted when he wanted. And even if you don’t get the crown, you are still stuck living with the person that rejected you. Yikes.

There were likely plenty of times in this process when Esther

wondered how God could possibly use this situation for good. But what she would soon find out is that our God takes bad situations and plans that are obviously imperfect, and He works through them for the good of His people. Our greatest example of this is on the Cross of Jesus. God takes man's cruelest torture device, a Roman cross, and deals with the sin of humanity that created it. Think about this: What men wanted to use for their own desires, God uses to display of His good hope for the world.

If He can do that, just imagine how much He can do through the impossible situations in your life!

## REFLECTION

1. Imagine that you are in a situation similar to Esther's. What are some things that you might pray to God? What kind of encouragement would you want to receive in that situation?
2. How have you seen God use negative situations in your own life for something better?
3. At this point in the story of Esther, what kind of person do you think Esther is? What things are you picking up about her that might be important later in the story?

## PRAYER

Thank God for working in the impossible situations in your life. Even if you haven't felt the effects of His presence yet, acknowledge that He is working in ways you do not fully understand. Ask Him to give you faith when it seems like things do not make sense. If you know someone who is going through a difficult situation, pray that God's presence would be felt in their life, and ask God to use you as an encouragement or comfort to them.



# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY



# WEEK 1 | DAY 5

Forgotten

**Esther 2:19-23**

Begin today by reading Esther 2:19-23.

Comparison steals our joy. Sadly, I am prone to it. In my 15 years of traveling, speaking, and pastoring, I have found myself in multiple situations where I looked at the status of those around me and was envious of their popularity in the eyes of onlookers. Don't get me wrong, I love what God has called me to do, and I am honored to have the opportunities He has given me. Yet, left to my own devices and doubts, it is easy to feel overlooked and forgotten, and there are few things worse than being forgotten.

In Esther 2, two of Xerxes' eunuchs were plotting to kill him. If you have been reading along, you may notice that eunuchs were put in charge of many things in the Persian royal household, primarily the women that belonged to Xerxes. Eunuchs were unable to have children, so there was no threat to the royal bloodline. Some of the eunuchs seemed to be happy with their stations, but these two, in particular, did not. When Mordecai overhears the plan, he reports it to Esther and thereby saves the King's life. Unfortunately, Mordecai receives nothing in return for this good deed. He goes right back to his life at the city gates.

We see people who feel forgotten all over the Bible. Job felt that way when Satan was torturing him (Job 3). David asked God in the Psalms, "Why have you forgotten me?" (Psalm 42:10). Elijah wants to go into a cave and die because he feels so lonely (1 Kings 19:4). In the lives of so many of the champions of the Bible,

we see glimpses of being alone and forgotten.

Have you ever thought life was unfair? Has there ever been a time when it seemed like you would receive recognition, reward, or promotion based on your merit and attention to detail, only for it not to be received? Has it ever seemed as if God has forgotten about you, leaving you to ask, "Why is this happening to me?"

When things feel desperate, it can be hard not to dwell on that. But God wants us to live a life of faith, and faith is trusting God's unseen hand even in the worst moments. The story of our struggles is not lost on our God. He saw that His people were in danger and used Esther to save them in an unlikely way. He is watching over you too!

## REFLECTION

1. When was a time that you felt forgotten?
2. What are ways that you can deal with feeling as if God has left forgotten you? How can you help others when they feel forgotten?
3. If you were put in Mordecai's shoes, how would you have responded?

## PRAYER

Spend some time reflecting on the areas of your life where you have felt forgotten. As you think about those moments, tell God what you felt in those moments. You might say something like, "God, I felt unseen," or "When that happened, I felt like that person didn't care about me."





# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY