

Esther 4

Synopsis of Study: Today we'll be reading through Chapter 4 of Esther. As we read through this chapter, we will focus on the way Esther reacts to Mordecai's news, the ways in which they both put their trust in God, and how defining moments help us put our faith in Jesus.

Pray for your time in God's word!

Leader's Note: Ask someone from your group to summarize what's happened so far in Esther in 60 seconds.

Read passage out loud as a group. Option: Give group 3 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

Part One: Reaction to the News

Esther 4: 1-6

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

4 When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

5 Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

6 So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.

Ask the Group: In verses 1-3, Mordecai and the Jews who had heard the king's edict were in sackcloth and ashes and tore their clothes. What is the significance of this? How does it help us understand what they were facing?

Possible Answer: This signified public mourning. For more occurrences of tearing clothes in Scripture, see Num 14:6, 2 Sam 1:11, 3:31, 13:31, Isa 36:22, and Ezra 9:3.

- **Ask the Group:** How is this response similar or different to how our culture tends to respond in the face of grief or suffering?

Ask the Group: In verses 4-6 we see Esther make various attempts to reach out to Mordecai. What is hard for you about reaching out to someone who is suffering? What helps you reach out?

Possible Answer: Esther attempts to meet Mordecai's needs physically (clothes) and also to understand what is troubling him.

Leader's Note: Responses to the second part of the question may be varied. The point of the question is to reflect on how we respond to and reach out to those around us who are going through trials, and to think about how the gospel equips us to do so.

Part Two: Responding to the Threat

Esther 4: 7-17

7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

9 Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Ask the Group: Try to place yourself in Esther's position. What thoughts and emotions do you think she experienced here? What would you have been feeling?

Possible Answers: She has to think through the reality of opposing a law (approaching the king without being summoned), she shows fear or uncertainty regarding her action, she confronts the real possibility of death because of her choice.

- **Ask the Group:** Has there ever been a time in your life when you did not do the right thing, or did not take action on something because of fear?

Ask the Group: What do you think Esther's decision reveals about what she believes about God and his involvement in the situation?

Possible Answer: She sees her decision as part of her faith community (asking everyone to fast), it shows she believes that God listens to his people and is with them, she sees the necessity of an acting in faith

Leader's Note: As a group, read through Joel 2:12-14 below. This passage has some parallels to the speech Mordecai gives in Esther 4.

Joel 2:12-14 (NIV)

12 "Even now," declares the LORD,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning."

13 Rend your heart

and not your garments.
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity.
14 Who knows? He may turn and relent
and leave behind a blessing—
grain offerings and drink offerings
for the LORD your God.

Ask the Group: With this passage in mind, why do you think Esther asked for Mordecai and the Jews to fast?

Possible Answer: To not act rashly; to put her trust in God to protect them rather than acting out of her own strength.

- **Ask the Group:** Are there areas in your life where you tend to rush in or to act on your own? What can you learn from Esther's example?

Part Three: Defining Moments

Ask the Group: Share about a choice you've had to make that became a defining moment for you. (job, spouse, place to live, difficult conversation, etc.) What did you choose, and how did you make that choice?

Leader's Note: This question is intended to draw out lots of conversation. Encourage your group members to answer this if they can...everyone has had to make difficult choices!

Leader's Note: You can skip the additional examples of defining moments in the New Testament if you are short on time. In that case, just go straight to Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit (last passage listed below).

Read to the group: We're going to look at some Scripture about choices that turned into defining moments. For each situation, think about those same questions for the character involved (i.e. what did they choose, and how did they make that choice?)

Matthew 18:15-27: THE RICH RULER

¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" ¹⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother, and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁰ "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" ²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven." ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

Possible Answer: The ruler chose his wealth over Jesus; he determined that his earthly treasures were of greater value than Jesus and the life he offered.

Galatians 1:11-18: PAUL

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

Possible Answer: Paul realized that God had a plan for him since birth. He was not swayed by people-pleasing, but instead followed God, even to the point of immediately going to another city and living his life in the service of Jesus.

John 12:27-28: JESUS

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

Possible Answer: Jesus knew his Father's will was to die, and so he did not retreat from it. He asked that the Father would glorify his name.

Leader's Note: We'll end our study with Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit.

Read passage out loud as a group. Option: Give group 3 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

John 14:15-21, 25-27

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them." ²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Ask the Group: Do you have an important decision that you are making? How does Jesus' teaching help you or encourage you as you face that decision?

Possible Answer: The Holy Spirit will remind us of what Jesus has said. He is our advocate, and is will

always be with us, even if non-believers do not understand Him.

Ask the Group: What is our community application of this passage?

Leader's Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.