

LIVE *it* WELL

A GUIDE THROUGH THE WINTER MESSAGES 2018

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**This is a study guide in which to take weekend message notes, participate in daily devotions and quiet time on your own, and, if you are in an Esther group, it also serves as your group material each week.*

THE BOOK OF **ESTHER**

The story of Esther is a page-turner filled with diabolical plots, palace intrigue, conflict between husbands and wives, evil villains and noble heroes. The book of Esther is set in the capital of the Persian Empire, the city of Susa, and it tells the unlikely story of a young Jewish woman who becomes queen at a time when her position, and its influence, is crucial to the survival of the people of God. As the story opens, the Jewish people have been scattered from their homeland of Judea, with its great capital of Jerusalem. Because they are scattered, the people are weak; in whichever part of the empire they find themselves, they are a marginalized and persecuted people. Because of this ongoing lack of safety and various threats against the Jews, many people hid their Jewish identity. Their historical enemies (like the Caninities) remember their ancient hatred and would like nothing more than to wipe out all memory of the Jewish people. The book of Esther is a story about how God saved his people from the threat of total genocide. If the Jewish people are wiped out, then the promises of God to Abraham, David and the prophets will die as well. If the people of God are wiped out, then Nehemiah will never return to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, meaning there will be no holy city and no coming of Jesus; Christianity will never be established.

The story of Esther happens on and around the time of 473 BC. The Book of Esther is set in “the days of Ahasuerus,” a king who was known in secular history as Xerxes (485–465 BC). This king ruled over 127 provinces, in an empire that stretched from India to Ethiopia. The portrayal of Xerxes in this book corresponds to what the classical writers had to say about him.

Many Jews have already returned to Jerusalem and have rebuilt the temple. However, they are vulnerable because they

THE BOOK OF ESTHER (CONT.)

do not have a city wall and Nehemiah will not return to rebuild the wall for another seventy years. So, if Esther and Mordecai do not provide protection for the people through personal sacrifice, selfless service and literally risking their lives, Nehemiah could never have returned and the wall would have never been rebuilt.

There are many things that surprise us in Esther's story. First, we are surprised to find the hero (Mordecai) and the heroine (Esther) living among gentiles, eating gentile food and, in the case of Esther, even marrying the powerful gentile king. This stands in stark contrast to the story of Daniel, who served the gentile kings but did not follow their customs or assimilate into their culture. The heroes in Esther seem to be doing their best to survive during a very difficult period of Jewish history.

We are surprised and taken aback by the violence at the end of the story and by the looming threat of genocide throughout the entire book. Our modern sensibilities have trouble understanding the reality of the way people lived in this ancient culture. From our modern vantage point, and with several thousand years of hindsight, it can become easy to pass judgement on people from the ancient past and the times in which they lived, but each culture and time throughout history have traits that are noble and admirable and other traits that are dark and even evil.

Perhaps the biggest surprise in Esther is that God is not mentioned once in this book. This is accepted as a likely literary device the author uses intentionally to highlight God's providence, sovereignty and big-picture plan. Often, things can be most appreciated and noticed through their conspicuous absence. The Book of Esther ends with the Jewish holiday of Purim, which is a Persian word for "lot" or "fate." It is an ironic

THE BOOK OF ESTHER (CONT.)

play on words, because Haman (the villain) chose the date for his genocidal plot by leaving it to fate by throwing lots. It is also ironic because the author of the story has gone to great lengths to show that the God who is not explicitly mentioned is implicitly very much present and his plan is behind everything that happens.

The valuable, real-life kinds of lessons we learn from Esther are so timely and relevant today. Our world still desperately needs the men and women of God to take risks, to join God in his work, to understand the truth that we have an enemy, Satan, who longs to wipe us, the people of God, off the face of the earth, and that it will take our faith in God and personal courage to stand against his schemes (John 10:10, Galatians 6:10-20).

Perhaps the greatest lesson we learn from Esther is that even when we cannot see God and wonder why he is not acting on our behalf, the hidden hand of God is at work and will guide us and provide for us in ways that will amaze us.

So, take up the challenge! We have a God who has called all of us to come out of hiding, to stand up and serve, to reach out and share, to join him in the work he is actively doing.

The opportunities are endless. The potential we have together in Christ is limitless. And who knows? Perhaps, just as he did with Esther, God put you right where you are "for such a time as this."

-Pastor Paul

HOW TO HAVE A DAILY DEVOTIONAL TIME

At Jacob's Well, we believe it is important for each person to *individually* spend daily time with God and to also be in consistent community with other believers (a small group, for example) for discussion, learning, and group prayer. Why do we believe that having intentional, consistent time with God is so important? We believe that "Wherever we are on our journey, we need to take steps together to know and become like Jesus." To more fully know Jesus, we must deepen and strengthen our relationship with Him. To become like Him, we must know Him in relationship and then let that relationship change our lives.

We are all different. Each of us will have our own unique relationship with God. For this reason, it is important to understand that there is not one specific devotional pathway that will be a perfect fit for each person. Take time to discover the rhythm of studying God's Word, and to pick out a location and time of day that helps you feel most connected with God.

Some Suggestions for Your Quiet Time:

- Establish a time of day and specific place to begin.
- As you sit with God, start by becoming quiet. You can do this through a few deep breaths. Make sure your phone is in another room. Turn off the television and do your best to remove distractions.
- Sometimes it helps to have a pad of paper next to you. If distractions come, write them down so that you can work through them later. For example, if you remember you need to do something, make yourself a note so that you can let it go during your time with God.
- Start with a prayer asking God to open your heart to Him and His message.
- Jacob's Well is providing you this Esther resource which will guide you in choosing Scripture passages and lead you through your quiet time with God.
- As you finish your time, be silent and wait for a little bit to see how God works in your heart and mind. Don't rush away. You might miss something He is trying to say to you.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see what God might be speaking to you through the Scriptures and the teachings on Esther.

Some Suggestions as You Prepare for Small Group

- End your time in prayer, expressing Praise, Confession, Prayers for others and Prayers for yourself and your family.
- If you do not complete all of your devotions for the week, please still attend your group.
- For groups meeting early in the week, your group will discuss the message and prepare to learn through the devotions. Perhaps you will want to discuss the previous week's devotions if applicable. For groups meeting later in the week, your group will discuss the message as well as what you have learned in the devotions.
- Encourage everyone to participate. Please don't allow one group member to do all the talking.
- Be respectful. Listen and remember not to counsel one another. Make prayer a priority.
- Believe God. He desires to deepen our relationship with Him as individuals, group members and as a church. This is going to be a very exciting time. As God works, take notes and be ready to share your stories. We want God to receive all the glory for what He is about to do in us and through us as we study Esther together!

Verses for Memory

Esther 4:14

“For 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. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

1 Timothy 6:6-8

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.”

Psalms 24:1

“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.”

1 Timothy 2:5-6

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”



W O R K AS W O R S H I P

FEB 23, 2018 | 7:30am – 2:30pm
LUNCH WILL BE INCLUDED

REGISTER AT: bit.ly/jw-waw
COST: \$25/PERSON

YOU MUST REGISTER ONLINE IN
ADVANCE TO ATTEND THIS EVENT

SEE PAGE 59 FOR MORE INFO!

Questions? E-mail Grant Schultz at
gshultz@jacobswellchurch.church



WEEK 1

JANUARY 27 & 28, 2018

**"WATCHING FOR THE
ONE NOT MENTIONED"**



If you have not yet logged on to Right Now Media you may do so at this link:
<https://www.rightnow.org/Account/Invite/jacobswell>



Please watch the overview video on Esther included in this training post.
<https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Training/Post/View/209315>



WEEKEND MESSAGE NOTES:

If you were unable to be present at the weekend service, please watch the message online at <http://jacobswellchurch.church/resources/messages-devos/>





GROUPS MATERIAL

Special Note for Group Leaders from Pastor Grant:

Group Leaders, the Esther series has begun, but there is still another week before Esther groups officially begin (starting with week 2 of the series, next week). Use this time to pray for those in your group, to prepare to lead and guide your group, and to remember the most important things on which to focus as you lead your group throughout this semester.

Group Leader Instructions:

- Refer to the JW Group Leader Covenant. Remember your commitment to lead well, to follow through on your responsibilities, and to maintain open communication with your group members and with church staff.
- Plan ways in which you can live out our church's Five Commitments as a group. When we come together to Worship, Grow, Belong, Serve, and Share, others can and will experience God's love as a result. Help inspire and motivate your group to serve the church and the community together in creative and needed ways.
- Spend some time thinking about the Three R's of good group leadership: Relationship, Role (facilitator and shepherd), and Responsibilities. Our 2017-2018 Groups Leader Guide contains descriptions of these areas. Familiarize yourself with these Three R's to help guide your leadership skills in the moment.
- Build a growing sense of trust and safety within your group through wisdom, humility, and compassion. Be sensitive to individual personalities and needs among your group's participants. Before instructing someone to read aloud, for example, make sure they feel comfortable and willing to do so. The more those in your group know you genuinely care for them and want them to have a good experience, the more their sense of trust and safety will grow, which means they'll be more fully able to experience the depth God has for them as part of your group.
- Also, remember that after the Esther series is completed (final weekend message March 10-11, study guide finishes March 16) your group will continue; there will still be ten weeks remaining in the semester at that point. So, along with your group, start planning ahead and decide as early as you can which study material your group will use to finish out the semester together.

As always, our Formation Team staff is here for you! As you prepare to lead well, and as you lead your group this semester, email me at gschultz@jacobswellchurch.church with any questions or feedback, or call the church office at 715-833-2050. We can't wait to continue this journey together with you!



MONDAY JANUARY 29, 2018

In the story of Esther, it is significant to note that the author of the book is anonymous. More intriguing though, is that God is never mentioned in the book. Still, God is present throughout the entire story, so the book of Esther is an invitation to look for God's activity behind the scenes. Esther is an opportunity for every follower of Christ to see the providential work of God even when He seems absent.

Think about your own life. What examples from your own story can you give of when God seemed absent, but you realized later He was working all along behind the scenes?

Though God is not directly mentioned in Esther, we know that He chose the time, the place, the circumstances and the people involved in the story. In similar ways, God is also at work in our own stories. Our individual stories are part of a bigger story. Our God, who is behind the story of Esther, is behind the greater story of human redemption through Jesus Christ.

Do you believe your life matters in God's Kingdom? Why or why not?

Read Hebrews chapter 11. What thoughts do you have as you read?
Write them here...

“Heavenly Father, as our church begins the journey through the book of Esther, help me see that my life, my story, my own journey is part of a grander story. Give me eyes to see that I am part of something bigger than myself. Prepare my heart for the lessons we will learn together through the book of Esther. Help me understand how my life becomes significant in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.”

TUESDAY JANUARY 30, 2018

Even though God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, He knows the whole story from beginning to end as it is happening in real time. Take a minute to reflect on where you are on your journey. In what part of your story, happening in real time, has God perhaps appeared to be absent? Where have you needed to be reminded of the truth that God knows your story from beginning to end?

Read Exodus Chapter 14. Imagine 600,000 Israelite men plus women and children, standing against the Red Sea watching Pharaoh and the Egyptian army descending on them in attack. Exodus 14:10-11 shares the Israelites fear as they looked up and see the Egyptian army in pursuit. In their fear, the Israelites could not understand how God was at work to save them. In your own life, is there something happening on the surface that creates the belief that God isn't there, or that God is unable to work on your behalf to provide a beautiful ending? This could be your story or the story of someone you love. Write down some reflections about what you see:

In Exodus Chapter 14, God knew the whole story. The Israelites had no idea God was going to part the Red Sea and allow them to cross on dry land. In the moment before the sea parted, they believed God had brought them into the desert to die. As we follow Christ, each of us will go through times of struggle, difficulty and pain. Whether we fully understand in the moment or not, we can trust and believe God for His goodness. He loves us and He is at work even when we cannot see. As you end your time today, listen to this worship song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEsNAt5FAQQ>



As you listen to the song and read the words on the screen, offer up praise and thanksgiving that even though you don't know the ending of the story, God does and He has you in His hand.

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NEXT PAGE

TUESDAY JANUARY 30, 2018: (CONT)

Spend time in prayer with these questions in mind:

- How may God be guiding you and/or your loved ones in this situation?
- Where do you see God at work in you and/or your loved ones in this situation?
- What qualities of God are you and/or your loved ones relying on as you/they walk through this difficult time?
- When have you/they felt God's blessing in the in the midst of the struggle?

Ask God to prepare your heart for the valuable lessons we will learn together through the story of Esther.

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 31, 2018

Read Proverbs 3:5-6.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.*

Take time for honest reflection. Ask yourself these questions, "Do I trust God and His Sovereignty?" Write out why or why not in this space:

In the message this past weekend, Paul expressed the importance of trusting God. We must believe in God's reliability, truth, ability, and strength even when we can't see how He is at work. King David went through some incredibly difficult times in his life. Some of the difficult times came through King Saul, but some of David's struggles came through the consequences of his own sin. Despite the hard times, David knew God and believed that no matter what, God was good and was at work behind the scenes of his life. On the lines provided on the next page, write out the verses of Psalm 145, a Psalm of Praise, written by King David. Highlight the verses that are most meaningful to your story right now. Pray the verses as your own. Ask God to prepare your heart for the lessons we will learn together through the book of Esther.

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WEDNESDAY JANUARY 31, 2018: (CONT)

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THURSDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2018

Read 2 Kings 6:15-17

Elisha knew God was with Him, but Elisha’s servant was afraid. Elisha asked God to open the eyes of his servant. Elisha knew that if the servant saw God’s army around them, the servant would believe God was in control.

When we are in the middle of our stories, in seasons of heartache and pain, we can believe things about God that are not true. Look up each Scripture. Draw a line to what it tells you about who our God is.

Deuteronomy 32:4	A God who gives the afflicted their right.
Genesis 16:13	A God who forgives.
Job 36: 5-6	A God who provides.
Psalms 46:1	A God of endurance and encouragement.
2 Corinthians 1:3	A God of all comfort.
Genesis 22:14	A God of faithfulness.
Romans 15:5	A God who sees.
Ephesians 4:32	A God who sustains.
Psalms 54:4	A God who is our refuge and strength; a very present help in times of trouble.

In the middle of our stories, we can be tempted to believe things about God that are not true. We can also be tempted to judge our story based on what we see in the middle chapters, giving up on God instead of holding onto Him until the end. When have you been tempted to give up on God instead of holding onto Him?

Write Philippians 1:6 here:

What do you feel when you think of the “good work” being completed in you?

God is always at work. He has a greater plan than we can imagine. His ways are not our ways. More often than not, we will have questions regarding our situations. With a sincere heart, we can ask God all our questions. We see David do this in the Psalms, but in the end David always comes back to God and remembers God’s character. This is what we must do too, trusting God that His plans are greater than we understand. He is about the inner work of transformation. End your time praying Ephesians 3:14-21 as your own. Ask God to prepare your heart for the lessons we will learn together through the book of Esther.

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 2, 2018

Esther's story is full of plot twists! Though things looked bleak for the Jews, God worked out every detail for them in the end. In the stories of our own life, we want to look for the plot twists too. We want to hold onto God and see how He is working for our good.

Write out Romans 8:28 here:

Over the next six weeks following this one, we will be learning through the examples of Mordecai and Esther, how to live a life that matters in God's Kingdom. We will see how our life is a stewardship and trust. We are part of something bigger than ourselves!

If we can believe that in every way God is working out our stories for good, it will change our perspective. We will grab hold of the greater story of our life, remembering we are part of God's plan for the human redemption of the world through Jesus Christ.

In the days ahead, watch carefully for the One not mentioned in the story of Esther. God was present the entire time, orchestrating all that happened. Spend time writing out your thoughts, questions, and what you hope to learn through Esther over the remaining six weeks of this series. What are you anticipating?

Pray about joining an Esther Group if you are not currently part of one. It is not too late! If you are in a group, pray for your group to be all-in for this series. God is about to take us through an incredible journey with Him through the book of Esther. Allow the hope of who God is, the hope of who He is creating us to be, and the hope of a beautiful ending to our stories to resonate in your soul.

End with the prayer we started the week with.

“Heavenly Father, as our church begins the journey through the book of Esther, help me see that my life, my story, my own journey is part of a grander story. Give me eyes to see that I am part of something bigger than myself. Prepare my heart for the lessons we will learn together through the book of Esther. Help me understand how my life becomes significant in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.”

A Place to Journal and Take Prayer Requests:

If you have a family, share in doing this week’s devotional together or use portions of the small group questions to generate family interaction.

WORK AS WORSHIP



FEB 23, 2018 | 7:30am – 2:30pm
LUNCH WILL BE INCLUDED

REGISTER AT: bit.ly/jw-waw
COST: \$25/PERSON

YOU MUST REGISTER ONLINE IN
ADVANCE TO ATTEND THIS EVENT

SEE PAGE 59 FOR MORE INFO!

Questions? E-mail Grant Schultz at
gshultz@jacobswellchurch.church



WEEK 2

FEBRUARY 3 & 4, 2018

"THE KING"

ESTHER 1:1-22

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE

Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, ²in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, ³in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, ⁴while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. ⁵And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. ⁶There 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. ⁷Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. ⁸And drinking was according to this edict: "There is no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. ⁹Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

¹²But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

¹³Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, ¹⁴the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom):

¹⁵"According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?"

¹⁶Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

¹⁷For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' ¹⁸This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will

be contempt and wrath in plenty.
¹⁹If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. ²⁰So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to

their husbands, high and low alike."
²¹This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. ²²He 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 and speak according to the language of his people.

ESTHER 1:1-22

WEEKEND MESSAGE NOTES:

If you were unable to be present at the weekend service, please watch the message online at <http://jacobsowellchurch.church/resources/messages-devos/>





GROUPS MATERIAL

OPEN WITH PRAYER

1. Discuss as a group what has excited and surprised you about Live It Well. If you are in the same group as you were for the study of Nehemiah, look back over your Nehemiah study guide for reference. If your group is new, what excites you about moving forward?
2. During the Esther series, we want everyone to realize that our lives are a trust and a gift to be used for the common good. Do you believe this is true? Why or why not? Discuss as a group.
3. Ask for a volunteer to read Esther chapter 1 out loud to the group.
4. King Ahasuerus burned with anger against Queen Vashti because she did not come when he called. King Ahasuerus felt he should have exactly what he wanted when he wanted it. This is a dangerous attitude. What consequences occur when people feel entitled? How does a sense of entitlement affect their relationships?
5. King Ahasuerus was not a servant leader. He demanded respect, but he didn't offer respect. How do we see this demonstrated throughout chapter 1 of Esther?
6. Through King Ahasuerus life, we see three signs of an owner mindset:
 - He lived as an owner who expects to be served.
 - He believed what he owned entitled him to what he wanted.
 - He thought his possessions, power and privilege made him great.

Jesus lived as a steward. (Together read Mark 10:45). Through Jesus' life, we see three signs of a steward mindset:

- A steward believes their life is a gift to be given in service.
- A steward believes that what they own obligates them to give.
- A steward believes greatness is seen when they use their possessions, power and privilege to serve the common good.

A steward mindset is counter cultural. How have you seen this to be true?

7. Read Luke 22:24-27 out loud as a group. What did Jesus tell His disciples about who was the greatest?
8. Read John 13:1-17. Compare Jesus' behavior to King Ahasuerus. Discuss as a group.
9. Take time to pray for your group members and for our Live It Well initiative, of which this series is a part. Pray for the people in our whole community and region to see Jesus through all that is about to happen in our church.



(MORE GUIDANCE FOR LEADERS)

Use the questions and information provided for you as is best for your group. Some groups will complete all of the questions. Some will participate in a few. This booklet is a guide.

OWNER	STEWARD
CONSUMER	SERVANT
CONTROL	FREEDOM
PRESSURE/ANXIETY/FEAR	TRUST/PEACE/JOY
SELFISHNESS	SERVICE
MEANINGLESSNESS	MEANING
PLAY IT SAFE (PROTECTS SELF)	TAKE STEPS OF FAITH/RISK
ISOLATION	COMMUNITY: US AND GOD
US/ME VS. THEM MENTALITY	EXPERIENCE GOD
GOD IS DISTANT	LEGACY
STUFF/TOYS	

Statements to ponder....

1. "I want to follow God but I want to be in charge."
2. "I want God to change me but I want it to be safe."
3. "I want to experience God but I don't want it to cost me too much."
4. "I want to see lives change but I want it to be easy, not too messy."
5. "I want a life of meaning but I want it to be convenient."



MONDAY FEBRUARY 5, 2018:

Read Esther 1:1-8

King Ahasuerus, in the third year of his reign, displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom for 180 days. When these days were over, he gave a banquet that lasted 7 days. Write what you learn about this banquet in verses 6-8.

The King seemed to be the most powerful man in all the world. What through these 8 verses shows this to be true?

The King considered his position, power, possessions, and privilege as his own. He did not use his power and wealth for good, but instead believed his power and wealth was for his own glory. Last year at this time, we talked about the mindset of an owner vs. the mindset of a steward.

OWNER	STEWARD
CONSUMER	SERVANT
CONTROL	FREEDOM
PRESSURE/ANXIETY/FEAR	TRUST/PEACE/JOY
SELFISHNESS	SERVICE
MEANINGLESSNESS	MEANING
PLAY IT SAFE (PROTECTS SELF)	TAKE STEPS OF FAITH/RISK
ISOLATION	COMMUNITY: US AND GOD
US/ME VS. THEM MENTALITY	EXPERIENCE GOD
GOD IS DISTANT	LEGACY
STUFF/TOYS	

Take time to reflect on where you are in your journey. Do you have the perspective of an owner or a steward? Why?

During the Esther series, we want everyone to realize that our lives are a trust and a gift to be used for the common good. Do you believe this is true? Why or why not?

Read Luke 22:24-27. What did Jesus tell His disciples about who was the greatest?

End your time in prayer. Ask Jesus to give you His perspective. Ask Him to help you understand the life of a steward rather than the life of an owner.

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 6, 2018:

Read Esther 1:9-12

Yesterday we talked about King Ahasuerus and his life as an owner. How does his owner perspective come through in the Scripture verses for today?

Through King Ahasuerus' life, we see three signs of an owner mindset:

- He lived as an owner who expects to be served.
- He believed what he owned entitled him to what he wanted.
- He thought his possessions, power and privilege made him great.

Jesus lived as a steward. (Read Mark 10:45). Through Jesus' life, we see three signs of a steward mindset:

- A steward believes their life is a gift to be given in service.
- A steward believes that what they own obligates them to give.
- A steward believes greatness is seen when they use their possessions, power and privilege to serve the common good.

A steward mindset is counter cultural. How have you seen this to be true?

As we seek to know and become like Jesus, a steward mindset is imperative. Why is this so?

Living as stewards reminds us that God is the owner of our lives; pray Psalm 100 with this in mind. Remember: God made us. We are His people. With Him as owner, our lives become meaningful in Him. Pray that He shows you, through our study of Esther, the truth that our lives find their meaning in Him.

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 7, 2018:

Read Esther 1:13-14

King Ahasuerus looked to his wise men for answers. We can make that mistake too. God is the source of wisdom. It is important we go to Him in prayer before we look to people for answers.

James 1:5

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God,
who gives generously to all without reproach,
and it will be given him.*

King Ahasuerus seemed to be bigger than life, but the truth is he was really very small in wisdom and character. Incredibly insecure, he reacted in anger and he made impulsive decisions. We will see him exemplify these character traits throughout the book of Esther. How have these character traits surfaced at times in your life? What chaos did they create?

If we go to God in prayer and His Word, asking for wisdom, it provides us time. We have time to stop ourselves from reacting in anger and from making impulsive decisions. Share about a situation in which this is true of your life.

Because King Ahasuerus was incredibly insecure, he was also easily manipulated. Is there an incident in your life, in which your insecurity allowed someone to take advantage of you? If so, write about it here.

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WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 7, 2018: (CONT)

When we feel insecure, it can be difficult to have healthy boundaries. People can take advantage of us without us even realizing it in the moment. Our insecurity can also produce shallow friendships. Typically, this occurs because we want the other person to like us instead of being honest about our beliefs. We consider if they like us, then we will be secure. How have you seen this to be true?

King Ahasuerus, by his thoughts, words and actions, proved himself unwise. Thankfully, as a steward, we have the blessing of living God's wisdom as we walk in relationship with Him.

“Heavenly Father, In James 1:5, You say if we lack wisdom, we are to ask You. You give generously to all without reproach. Show me how to Live Wisdom through my relationship with Christ, discovering the difference between Your wisdom and the world's. Help me take steps to know and become like Jesus because I want to Live Wisdom in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.”

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2018:

Read Esther 1:15-20

King Ahasuerus burned with anger against Queen Vashti because she did not come when he called. King Ahasuerus felt he should have exactly what he wanted when he wanted it. This is a dangerous attitude. What consequences occur when people feel entitled? How does a sense of entitlement affect their relationships?

Read Luke 15:11-32

We immediately see the entitlement mentality of the younger son, but the older son had the same problem. Why is this true?

In both situations, the sons wanted what they desired regardless of how it hurt each other or their father. When our lives become completely focused on our own thoughts, desires and plans, we lose sight of the people around us. The people around us become a means to an end. We stop caring about their thoughts, desires, and plans. How have you seen this to be true?

King Ahasuerus sense of entitlement not only affected those closest to him, but it affected the entire kingdom. The King thought his royal decree would work to control the people in Persia. His law may have changed someone's behavior for the moment, but issuing a royal decree did not bring the change the King was ultimately after. Only a relationship with Jesus changes a person from the inside out, causing them to do the right thing regardless of the rules. A law brings momentary change, but a relationship with God brings a change of heart. Think about this truth in religious terms. How is following a religious rule different from following Jesus?

"Living it well" comes by transformation from the inside out. It is the result of knowing and becoming like Jesus. It is not about following rules, it is about following Jesus. As you think about all we are learning this week, pray and ask God to help you see your next step in Him.

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 9, 2018:

Read Esther 1:21-22

The King and his nobles were pleased with their decision. They put their decree into law, and sent it off for everyone in the kingdom to obey. Have you experienced a situation at home, in school or in your job in which a rule seemingly came out of nowhere? The rule may not have been bad, but it happened void of good communication and understanding? What was the situation? How did it affect you?

All of us lead in one capacity or another. We lead at home, at school, at work, at church, and in our community. Living it well creates a stewardship conviction as well as a servant leadership approach. Jesus was a servant leader. He led by example. King Ahasuerus was not a servant leader. He demanded respect, but he didn't offer respect. How do we see this throughout chapter 1 of Esther?

Read John 13:1-17

Compare Jesus' behavior to that of King Ahasuerus. Write your thoughts here:

As you look over your thoughts above, name one step you could take that would move you from being like King Ahasuerus to being like Jesus. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to work in your heart, mind and soul. Ask Jesus to show you His perspective as a steward and servant leader. Ask God for His wisdom to live well and lead well.

A Place to Journal and Take Prayer Requests:

If you have a family, share in doing this week's devotional together or use portions of the small group questions to generate family interaction.



WORK AS WORSHIP

FEB 23, 2018 | 7:30am – 2:30pm
LUNCH WILL BE INCLUDED

REGISTER AT: bit.ly/jw-waw
COST: \$25/PERSON

YOU MUST REGISTER ONLINE IN
ADVANCE TO ATTEND THIS EVENT

SEE PAGE 59 FOR MORE INFO!

Questions? E-mail Grant Schultz at
gschultz@jacobsowellchurch.church



WEEK 3

FEBRUARY 10 & 11, 2018

**"THE GOD OF
COINCIDENCE"**

ESTHER 2:1-23

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE

After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. ²Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. ³And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. ⁴And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so.

⁵Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, ⁶who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. ⁷He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. ⁸So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa the citadel in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the

women. ⁹And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem. ¹⁰Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. ¹¹And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

¹²Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women— ¹³when the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

¹⁵When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing

except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. ¹⁶And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, ¹⁷the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

¹⁹Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰Esther had not

made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. ²¹In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ²²And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. ²³When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

ESTHER 2:1-23

WEEKEND MESSAGE NOTES:

If you were unable to be present at the weekend service, please watch the message online at <http://jacobsowellchurch.church/resources/messages-devos/>





GROUPS MATERIAL

OPEN WITH PRAYER

1. God controls and directs all the seemingly insignificant coincidences throughout the story of Esther. Do you see God working behind the scenes of your life? Do you see how He is controlling and directing all the seemingly insignificant coincidences throughout the story of your life just as He is doing in the story of Esther? Why or why not?
2. As Mordecai comes into the story, what immediate contradiction in character do you see between him and King Ahasuerus?
3. Following Christ with your life and learning to live it well causes people to see something different in you. How have you seen this to be true? What have you seen in the lives of the people you know who follow Christ?
4. God provided for Esther through her cousin Mordecai. God did not leave her alone. He gave her a cousin to love and care for her every need. How has God provided for you through tragedies, difficulties and struggles? Who has He placed in your life? Who has been there, watching out for you?
5. Jacob's Well is a place where people can meet Jesus and their whole lives can be changed. This is the number one reason we are building our new South Venue. We want to continue to provide space for people to know and become like Jesus. How has your life been changed since God brought you to Jacob's Well? How is God at work in you and your family? How does your heart continue to be changed?
6. Read Matthew 22:36-38. Imagine what could happen in the Chippewa Valley if we all lived our lives surrendered in love to God's will and God's ways. Discuss this as a group.
7. Pray for the love of God to be known in our community, nation and world. Pray that God would be working to show us His will for the land next door to the church. Ask God how He wants to show His love through each of us individually and all together as His church.

MONDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2018:

Read Esther 2:1-4

God controls and directs all the seemingly insignificant coincidences throughout the story of Esther. Think about your life as we begin this week. Do you believe God controls and directs all the seemingly insignificant coincidences in your life? Why or why not?

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you can trust that God is moving and actively working in your life. As chapter 2 of Esther begins, we see King Ahasuerus appointing commissioners in every province of his kingdom to bring all the beautiful young women into his harem and put them under the care of His eunuch Hegai. King Ahasuerus was looking for a beautiful young woman to replace Vashti as queen, but God was working to put the woman of His choice on the throne.

The young women brought into the harem had no idea what to expect. Their lives were no longer their own and their circumstances were beyond their control. Share about a time when your circumstances were beyond your control. What happened?

Read Matthew 27

Imagine being a part of all that happened during the time of Jesus' death. If you were in the background watching the events take place, it would be easy to believe everything going on was beyond anyone's control. Contemplate what it must have been like to witness Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Imagine your feelings. What do you see and hear?

In the moment, the disciples believed everything was lost and out of control. They had no idea the chaos of Christ's death was rewriting history, and ushering in God's plan to save the world. Think about all the places in your life that are in chaos and out of control. Spend time in prayer. Ask God to show you how He is directing all the seemingly insignificant coincidences in your life, orchestrating things behind the scenes to bring the chaos into order. Pray for His plan to unfold as you patiently wait on Him for His will.

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 13, 2018:

Read Esther 2:5-7

Next week we will specifically study Mordecai. This week we are introduced to him in Scripture. In our reading, we learn he has a cousin named Hadassah who was also known as Esther. Mordecai cared for Esther and brought her up because her mother and father had died. As Mordecai comes into the story, what immediate contradiction in character do you see between him and King Ahasuerus?

Following Christ with your life and learning to live it well causes people to see something different in you. How have you seen this to be true? What have you seen in the lives of the people you know who follow Christ?

King Ahasuerus lived for himself; in contrast, Mordecai let his life be a trust and a gift to be used for good. We want to live Mordecai's example, understanding how our life is a stewardship and a trust too. This is Living It Well. Through this part of the story, we also want to see that even though Esther's parents were killed, God provided for her through her cousin Mordecai. God did not leave her alone. God gave her a cousin to love and care for her every need. How has God provided for you through tragedies, difficulties and struggles? Who did He place in your life? Who was there watching out for you?

In the moment, we may feel completely overwhelmed and full of anxiety. As we pray and call out to God, He is at work, even in ways we cannot always see. In fact, sometimes we can't see God's provision until years later. How has this been true in your life?

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TUESDAY FEBRUARY 13, 2018: (CONT)

In the Scriptures, God controls and directs all the seemingly insignificant coincidences in Joseph's story. His first seventeen years are detailed in Genesis 30:24-37:2. Joseph's 17 to 30 years are detailed in Genesis 37:2-41:46. During this time, Joseph's brothers throw him into a cistern. They sell him for 20 shekels of silver to a group of Midianite merchants. The Midianites take him to Egypt, and sell him to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. Read Genesis chapters 39 and 40. What are all the seemingly insignificant coincidences that occur in Joseph's life in these chapters?

In chapter 41, Pharaoh sends for Joseph in prison. Pharaoh looks to Joseph to interpret his dreams. Joseph gives God the glory, and God shows Joseph the meaning of the dreams. Pharaoh then puts Joseph in charge of Egypt. From 17 years old to 30 years old, Joseph's life was not what he planned. Through everything, Joseph trusted God. In the end, Joseph's cares for the people of Egypt, and saves them from a severe famine. Joseph's brothers eventually return to receive grain from Egypt, because the severe famine has affected them as well. In Genesis chapter 45, Joseph makes himself know to his brothers.

Read Genesis 45:5-11

Joseph could have easily given up on God. Instead, he persevered through every struggle trusting God was in control. Like Mordecai, Joseph let his life be a trust and a gift to be used for good. Ask God to help you live your life as a trust and a gift for good. Ask Him to help you see how He is at work behind the scenes just as He was in the life of Joseph, Mordecai and Esther. Meditate on the words of 1 Peter 5:6-7.

...Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 14, 2018:**Read Esther 2:8-11**

How did God provide for Esther as she was taken into the King's harem? Name some of the different ways she was cared for and looked after.

Think of the ways God is currently at work to care and look after you and your family. Write some of the ways here. If you can't think of any, pray and ask God to show you how He has been and continues to be at work to care for you and your family.

In the verses from today's reading, Mordecai forbids Esther to reveal her nationality. Why do you think Mordecai asked Esther to keep her nationality hidden?

Esther obeyed Mordecai and worked to conceal her Jewish identity. We will read later in the story why this was so important. For this week, focus on the fact that Esther kept her nationality a secret, which meant she was unable to continue observing the Jewish dietary laws. Read Daniel 1:1-16. Daniel and his friends did continue to follow the Jewish dietary laws even when they were taken captive in Babylon, but they could have been in peril for asking. Instead, God protected them. In Persia, God was at work to protect Esther and Mordecai, even though Esther did not follow the Jewish dietary laws.

Think about this for a little bit. Just as God controls and directs all the seemingly insignificant coincidences in our lives, He is at work to protect us in the middle of (and even through) our surroundings. He shielded Daniel and his friends so they

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WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 14, 2018: (CONT)

could continue to observe the Jewish dietary laws in the King's palace, while at the same time He sheltered Esther and let her refrain from observing the Jewish dietary laws so that her nationality could remain hidden. In both situations, it wasn't about the rule. It was about Daniel and Esther's desire to follow God. How does their desire to follow God inspire you today?

As we grow in relationship with God through prayer and His Word, we understand more of who we are in Him. As we learn and grow, He transforms us to be more and more like Jesus. We are changed by His great love and power at work in our lives by His Holy Spirit. As we confidently wait on Him, He can, will, and does work for our good. Some people may have believed that Esther should have followed the Jewish dietary laws regardless of her situation, but Esther trusted and followed God. Through Esther, God worked to change history and stop the genocide of the Jews in Persia.

Listen to the words of this song from Bethel Music: "You Know Me", featuring Steffany Frizzell. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVVlMQved8k>



Pray Psalm 139 verses 1-16. Thank God for the way He controls and directs the details of our stories. God provides great care for us by His own creative design. He is at work to protect us as we seek Him. He loves each of us with a deep and everlasting love. Ask Him to show you.

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2018:

Read Esther 2:12-18

In these verses, we see Esther replace Vashti as queen: this is God continuing to orchestrate details and guide Esther on her journey. Similarly, God continues to orchestrate details and guide us in our individual lives and in the life of our church. Today, we will concentrate on all the seemingly unconnected coincidences that brought Jacob's Well to where it is today.

Sixteen years ago, 12 people met in Paul and Whitney's living room and dreamt together of planting a church in the Chippewa Valley. In March 2001, the church launched its first weekend service at Delong Middle School. 200 people came and the vision of what God was doing began to spread. During the next four years, the church moved from Delong Middle School to Altoona High School to South Middle School and then back to Altoona High School. The school district would only allow the church to lease a year at a time. Moving around was hard and so was setting up and tearing down the church in the schools each weekend. Attendance grew to 400 and the church needed a permanent home. Rick Podolak, a member of the church, worked for AT&T. Even though at that time the Highway 53 bypass had not been started, Rick knew of those future plans. Rick brought Paul to the area where the church is now located, and the two began talking to local land owners. They made repeated visits in the area, asking if anyone would be interested in selling their undeveloped land to a church. Rick and Paul met a family who was delighted that their 64 acres could be developed for a church. Jacob's Well purchased the 64 acres of land for less than \$500,000. Soon after the purchase, land values in the area skyrocketed because of the new highway.

As trees were cleared, Rick heard of a group called Builders for Christ. Rick worked with their leader, an architect named Lawrence, to find out more and to bring the group in for a meeting. Builders for Christ (BFC) came and it was decided that BFC and Jacob's Well would begin a partnership. Later, as Lawrence looked through building plans, he realized the children's ministry area was not adequate for the growing church. He stayed up all night redrawing the plans so they could be presented that Sunday morning at a service held on the vacant land. Without Lawrence's new drawing, the children's ministry would never have been able to grow to house the 500 children who currently attend each weekend.

The first phase of the building went up in the summer of 2006. Over time, the church continued to grow. A new partnership with Builders for Christ brought them again in the summer of 2011 to build the North Venue addition. Over the first 90 days of the North Venue being open, 500 new people came to the weekend services.

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THURSDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2018: (CONT)

Think about all the different seemingly insignificant coincidences that brought Jacob's Well to where it is today. And then think about all the behind-the-scenes work we aren't even aware of! Only God could accomplish all that has transpired here over the last 16 years. As we look at Esther's life, we see all the seemingly unconnected coincidences that ended up saving the Jewish people from annihilation. As we look at the life of Jacob's Well, we see all the seeming coincidences that brought people from all over the Chippewa Valley into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Jacob's Well exists to meet people wherever they are on their journey and to help them take their next step to know and become like Jesus. What brought you to Jacob's Well? Maybe you feel it was a coincidence. It wasn't. It was God. Do you believe that? Why or why not?

Reflect on your own life. Reflect on the lives of the people you know who attend Jacob's Well. What has God done? What is He continuing to do? Read John 4, the Scripture passage our church is founded on. Thank God for His church. Thank Him for all the lives that have and will be changed as He continues to work!

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 16, 2018:

Read Esther 2:19-23

Every day Mordecai walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was doing. He continued to stay close and watch over her even as she was under the palace's care. In our reading today, we find Mordecai continuing to stay close to the palace, sitting at the King's gate. While he was there, two of the King's officers guarding the doorway became angry and conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus. Mordecai overheard their plot and he told Esther. She reported the plot. When it was found to be true, the two officials were executed. All of this was recorded in the "Book of the Annals" in the presence of the King. We will learn more about this book later in our study.

This week we are learning how God controls and directs all the seemingly unrelated coincidences throughout the story of Esther. Mordecai was in the right place at the right time, but not because of coincidence. Mordecai was in the right place at the right time because God was working behind the scenes. Think about a time you were in the right place at the right time. Maybe you happened to have a random conversation with someone, which later turned into a lasting friendship, a new job, a connection for work etc. Perhaps you chose a different route on a walk or a drive, which landed you right into a needy situation. Think about a time like this in your own life. Share about it here:

Do you see God working behind the scenes of your life? Why or why not? How has your answer changed since day one of this study?

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 16, 2018: (CONT)

This week on Monday we read Matthew 27. In the moment of Jesus' death and burial, the disciples believed everything was lost and out of control. They had no idea the chaos of Jesus' death was ushering in God's plan to save the world. Read Romans 5:1-11. First, note that God poured His love into our hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit. When we experience pain and suffering, God works through the suffering so that it produces endurance, character and hope. We can't see this in the moment of the pain. It is very hard to understand, but God is at work in our hearts through everything that happens in our life. He is orchestrating far more than we can see.

The most amazing news, of all God's work in our lives, is that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were enemies of God, we were reconciled to Him through the death of his Son. We are saved by the life Jesus gave for us on the cross. When we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we know that as we walk through the difficulties of this life, this is not the end.

Take time to praise and worship God today. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice. Pray for those you know who don't have a relationship with God, that they would understand the gift we have all been given in Jesus. If you don't have a relationship with God, consider praying today to give your life to Christ. Tell Jesus you believe in Him and what He did for you on the cross. Confess your sins and tell Jesus that just as He was raised from the dead, you want to be raised to a new and transformed life in Him. Begin to follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Tell someone of the decision you have made, and talk to the prayer team or staff at Jacob's Well for you next step! You can reach Laura Garry at lgarry@jacobswellchurch.church for more information.

A Place to Journal and Take Prayer Requests:

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WEEK 4

FEBRUARY 17 & 18, 2018

“MORDECAI”

ESTHER 3:1-4:14

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. ²And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. ³Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" ⁴And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. ⁵And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. ⁶But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

⁷In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. ⁸Then

Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. ⁹If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries." ¹⁰So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹And the king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."

¹²Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.

¹³Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews,

young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. ¹⁴A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. ¹⁵The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

^{4:1}When Mordecai learned all that had been done, 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. ²He went up to the entrance of the king’s gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth. ³And 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.

⁴When Esther’s young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that

had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. ⁹And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.”

¹²And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. ¹³Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴For 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. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

ESTHER 3:1-4:14

WEEKEND MESSAGE NOTES:

If you were unable to be present at the weekend service, please watch the message online at <http://jacobsowellchurch.church/resources/messages-devos/>



GROUPS MATERIAL

OPEN WITH PRAYER

1. Have someone read Esther 2:19-3:1 out loud to your group. Mordecai uncovered the plot to assassinate the King, but even though he brought the news forward, he was overlooked. Have you ever worked hard in school or at work only to discover that your hard work went seemingly unnoticed? What happened? How did you handle it? Discuss as a group.
2. Have someone read Esther 3:2-3:11 out loud to your group. Why do you think Mordecai refused to bow down and pay homage to Haman?
3. Mordecai did not create a narrative about Haman exclusively based on his own thoughts, ideas, and opinions. As a group, talk about a time when you thought badly of a person, but realized later the person was completely different than you thought. Share what you learned through the experience. How did it change your perspective?
4. What about a time you believed a person had honest and good intentions only to find out they were not what they seemed? Only God knows a person's thoughts and inner behavior. Talk about the importance of asking God to reveal the truth about the people and situations in our lives.
5. Mordecai didn't incite others to fight against Haman and he didn't spread gossip. He simply lived out his convictions by refusing to bow. Compare your life to Mordecai's. If there is someone whose beliefs and behaviors you disagree with, how can you remain respectful, while at the same time refusing to follow their behavior? Discuss as a group.
6. Have someone read Esther 3:12-4:3 out loud to your group. When Mordecai learned what Haman had done, he tore his clothes. He dressed in sackcloth and ashes. He went to the center of the city and he sat crying out with loud and bitter cries. Mordecai knew his peoples only hope was God. Mordecai immediately went to God. Where do you go first in trouble? Is God your refuge and strength? Do you believe He is your ever present help in trouble? Why or why not? Share as a group.
7. Have someone read Esther 4:4-14 out loud to your group. Mordecai is incredibly wise. He realizes Esther's providential placement upon the throne. He encourages her to step into her purpose. Do you have someone like Mordecai? A person who has or is encouraging you, speaking truth in love in order for you to step into your purpose and calling as God's son or daughter? Share as a group.

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GROUPS MATERIAL (CONT)

8. Do you realize that you can be a Mordecai too? To stand up against the evil of things like genocide, human trafficking, abuse in its many forms, racism and hatred toward people God loves, along with many other injustices, we need people like Esther and Mordecai to take action. In fact, we need to *be* people like Esther and Mordecai. How can you, as an individual, as a family, as a group, stand against evil and injustice in Jesus' name?
9. Do you pray for the people around you to embrace their calling as sons and daughters of God? Why or why not?
10. Read Esther 10:1-3. Mordecai was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers. Mordecai rose to his place in the kingdom for two reasons. What were they according to Esther 10:3? How can we seek the welfare of others like Mordecai did? How can we speak peace to the people in our lives like Mordecai did? Share some examples.
11. Take prayer requests and pray for one another.

YOU ARE INVITED TO THE WORK AS WORSHIP RETREAT AT JACOB'S WELL!

You're invited to the *2018 Work as Worship Retreat*, where influential authors, business leaders, and pastors will discuss what it looks like to connect faith and work. Taking place as a 1-day local church retreat THIS FRIDAY February 23, 2018, the live event in Dallas will be web-streamed to over 2,000 churches around the world, including ours right here at Jacob's Well!

This is an amazing opportunity for the people of our church and the whole Chipewewa Valley! God has a purpose for us on this earth. Our calling is to be on mission for God right where He has placed us. Since so many people spend the majority of their waking hours on the job, we have to stop compartmentalizing life into "spiritual activities" and "work activities." How are we living examples of the gospel while we work?

Join Patrick Lencioni (Author, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*), Joel Manby (CEO, SeaWorld), Phil Vischer (Creator, VeggieTales and Jellyfish Labs), Wendy Davidson (President, US Specialty Channels Kellogg Company), Matt Chandler (Lead Pastor, The Village Church), and others in a day filled with real-life stories, biblical teaching, and practical wisdom that will equip believers in the marketplace to see their work as an opportunity to care for their families, fulfill their calling, and bring glory to God.

A dark gray rectangular graphic with white text. At the top, the words "WORK AS WORSHIP" are written in a spaced-out, sans-serif font. The word "AS" is enclosed in a white circle, which is part of a larger white graphic consisting of two parallel diagonal lines intersecting at the circle. Below this, the text "FEB 23, 2018 | 7:30am - 2:30pm" and "LUNCH WILL BE INCLUDED" is displayed. Further down, it says "REGISTER AT: bit.ly/jw-waw" and "COST: \$25/PERSON". At the bottom, it reads "YOU MUST REGISTER ONLINE IN ADVANCE TO ATTEND THIS EVENT".

WORK AS WORSHIP

FEB 23, 2018 | 7:30am – 2:30pm
LUNCH WILL BE INCLUDED

REGISTER AT: bit.ly/jw-waw
COST: \$25/PERSON

YOU MUST REGISTER ONLINE IN
ADVANCE TO ATTEND THIS EVENT

Questions? E-mail Grant Schultz at
gscultz@jacobswellchurch.church

MONDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2018:

We are learning, through the examples of Mordecai and Esther, how to live a life that matters in God's Kingdom. We are beginning to understand how our life is a stewardship and a trust. During the first week of our series, we studied King Ahasuerus. We discovered how the King lived only for himself. In contrast to the King, Mordecai let his life be a trust—a gift to be used for the common good. We want to live like Mordecai did, with that same understanding—that our lives are not our own. When we set our own personal plans and self-focused desires aside, we find freedom in choosing to put God's purposes and plans first, and along the way, we know that God, our good Father, will take care of us and provide for us.

Read Esther 2:19-3:1

Last week in the story of Esther we saw that Mordecai overheard Bigthan and Teresh plotting to kill the King. Mordecai was in the right place at the right time, but not because of mere coincidence. Mordecai was in the right place at the right time because God was working behind the scenes.

What happened next in Mordecai's story probably brought him great confusion: he uncovered the plot to assassinate the King, but even though he brought the news forward, he was overlooked. The perpetrators of the plot were executed but Haman, rather than Mordecai, was promoted.

Has something like this happened in your life? Have you worked hard in school or at work only to discover that your hard work went seemingly unnoticed? What happened?

How did you handle the above situation? Did you fight for the advancement you felt you deserved? Did you walk away crushed and heartbroken? Did you feel the temptation to hold on to negative feelings toward the person who was elevated? What did you do in the end?

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MONDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2018: (CONT)

In the Book of Esther, Mordecai does not focus on the fact that he is not rewarded when he reveals the plot against the king. Instead, he waits on God. He realizes His life is in God's hands. This perspective is a challenge for us most days. When we work hard and are overlooked for an advancement or reward, it can be devastating. We can feel lost and alone. The truth we are learning in Esther is that even when God seems absent, even when we are overlooked and passed by, God is watching and He is at work. Another example of this truth is seen in King David's life. In 1 Samuel 16:13, David is anointed as the future King. At the time, David is still a young shepherd in his family's fields. For the next 25 years David works hard, but is treated horribly by the reigning King, named Saul. David spares King Saul's life in 1 Samuel 24 and again in 1 Samuel 26. Even though Saul continually tries to kill David, David does not take Saul's life into his own hands. Rather, David prays and waits on God. David reveals this tension in his own words in the Psalms. Read Psalm 142. In this Psalm, how does David describe God as a refuge? How could you apply this same understanding to something going on in your own life right now?

Throughout our devotions this week, we will see how God is Mordecai's refuge. As you end today's devotions, use the words of Psalm 142 as your own prayer, remembering that no matter where you are on your journey, and no matter what it may feel like in the moment, God is your refuge and your strength. You are seen and loved.

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2018:

Read Esther 3:2-11

The King commanded the people of the kingdom to pay homage to Haman. All the King's servants bowed down to Haman, but they were confused as to why Mordecai refused to bow. Day after day they asked him why he didn't bow down to Haman, but Mordecai continued to ignore the King's command. Why do you think Mordecai refused to bow down and pay homage to Haman?

Because Mordecai served at the city gate, he had access to all kinds of "insider" information. Mordecai would have become aware of the depth of Haman's true character through what he heard about Haman at the gate. Mordecai refused to honor Haman because he recognized Haman's evil ways and intent through what he learned in his position. As we read in our Scripture verses, Haman's actions speak volumes as to the kind of man he was. Haman proved his evil intentions by seeking to destroy all Jews throughout Ahasuerus' kingdom, simply because Mordecai refused to bow in Haman's presence. Clearly, Haman was not a man of God.

Here's one area where Mordecai really shines: Mordecai did not create a narrative about Haman exclusively based on his own thoughts, ideas, and opinions. As children of God and followers of Jesus, we should strive to do the same. If we create our own narratives about people solely built on our own thoughts, ideas, and opinions, it can get us into trouble, as it is a form of sinful judgment based only on what we think we see and know. The truth is, only God knows the fullness of a person's thoughts and inner behavior. Our first priority is to pray for the person and ask God to reveal the truth. Think about times in your life when you thought badly about a person, only to realize later that the person was completely different than you thought and the real circumstances were unknown to you. Write about one of those times here:

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TUESDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2018: (CONT)

What did you learn through that experience? How did it change your perspective?

What about a time you believed a person had honest and good intentions only to find out they were not what they seemed? Write about one of those times here:

To Live It Well, we need to let God be God. We go to Him for His understanding, direction, and guidance. We wait on Him to reveal the truth about people's hearts and motives, including our own. We don't want to quickly judge, and we also don't want to be naive. Mordecai was shrewd and discerning; he listened and learned at the gate. In quiet protest, he refused to bow. Read Exodus 14:14. Mordecai didn't incite others to fight against Haman and he didn't spread gossip. He simply lived out his convictions by refusing to bow. Compare your life to Mordecai's. If you realize, through prayer, that there is someone whose beliefs and behaviors you disagree with, how will you remain respectful while at the same time refusing to be influenced by their behavior? For example, maybe one of your teachers in school is teaching something completely contrary to what you believe as a follower of Christ. How do you respectfully share your beliefs? What if, at work, you realize your supervisors are not being truthful? How will you let God direct your awareness of truth? How will you respectfully share that what they are doing is wrong?

Spend time in prayer asking God for guidance and direction in the specific situations you are facing in your own life. Ask Him to help you live it well like Mordecai.

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2018:

Read Esther 3:12-4:3.

On day one of this week, we discussed how God is our refuge and our strength. In our reading today, we see evidence of this in Mordecai's life. As Haman's fury against Mordecai rages, Haman goes to the King. Haman's hatred blinds him. He expresses his displeasure with the Jewish people because their laws are different than the King's laws. Haman asks to make a decree that the entire people group be destroyed. The King gives permission for genocide against the Jews to take place. Letters were sent across the kingdom with instructions to destroy, kill and annihilate all Jews—young and old, women and children—in one day. Haman and the king sat down to drink while the city was thrown into confusion.

Picture how cold, calculated, and full of hate you must be to plan to kill an entire people group, and, with no remorse, drink and celebrate your decision. The depth of evil people are capable of without God is staggering. God is the good in us. God is the source of love that is meant to define our identities in Christ. The more we take steps to know and become like Him, the more His goodness grows in us. Read Jesus' words in Matthew 10:18.

At Jacob's Well, our vision statement is "Wherever we are on our journey we will take steps together to know and become like Jesus". Taking steps to know and become like Jesus changes us from the inside out. God's goodness begins to shine through us by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our life. If we are not taking steps to know and become like Jesus, we stop growing. Evidences of selfishness, lust, greed, jealousy, and anger begin to show up instead of love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, and self-control. How have you found this to be true in your own life? What examples can you share?

Haman did not follow God, but Mordecai knew God. God was Mordecai's refuge and strength. Haman's evil plan was birthed from the evil of his heart. In contrast, what surfaced in Mordecai was the knowledge that only God could bring good out of what was planned for the Jewish people of Susa. When Mordecai learned what Haman had done, he tore his clothes. He dressed in sackcloth and ashes. He went to the center of the city and cried out with loud and bitter cries. Mordecai knew his people's only hope was God. He publicly displayed both his despair and his pursuit of the only One who could save them.

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WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2018: (CONT)

Write Psalm 46:1 here:

Is God your refuge and strength? Do you believe He is your ever-present help in trouble? Why or why not?

Mordecai immediately went to God. Where do you typically go first when you face times of great trouble? Why?

If God is not your first response, what step can you take to start giving Him priority over your other choices?

If God is your first response, are you able to patiently wait for His response? Why or why not? If not, how can you take steps to continually bring your troubles, fears, and anxieties back to Him in prayer and then wait on him to reveal His wisdom, His plan?

Pray about what God is showing you through today's devotion.

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 22, 2018:

Read Esther 4:4-14

When Esther learned that Mordecai was in the center of the city dressed in sackcloth and ashes, she sent clothes to Mordecai. Mordecai did not accept the clothes and refused to remove the sackcloth and ashes. Why do you think he refused?

Esther asked her attendant, Hathach, to go to Mordecai and learn what had happened. Mordecai told Hathach everything. Mordecai even gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for the Jewish people's destruction. Mordecai told Hathach to command Esther to go to the King and beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. Mordecai went on to say to Esther in 4:13-14, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For 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. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

What strikes you about Mordecai's words to Esther?

Mordecai is incredibly wise. He realizes Esther's providential placement upon the throne. He sees that God, the ever-present help, is guiding and directing events in real time. He encourages Esther to step into her purpose, according to God's plan. Do you have a Mordecai in your life? Do you have someone who sees the bigger picture, who has, or is, encouraging you, speaking truth in love, in order for you to step into your purpose and calling as God's son or daughter? If so, who is that person? How could you thank him or her for how they have encouraged you?

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THURSDAY FEBRUARY 22, 2018: (CONT)

Maybe you realize that you don't have a Mordecai in your life. Take time to pray and ask God to send someone into your life who will speak truth in love and encourage you on your journey as God's son or daughter.

Do you realize that you can be a Mordecai for someone else, too? Do you pray for the people around you, that they'll embrace their callings as sons and daughters of God? Do you encourage those you love and care about to step into their purpose in this world? Why or why not?

Read John 1:12

One of the ways the Holy Spirit works in you is to help you encourage and breathe hope and life into those God has placed in your life. As children of God, our destiny is in Him. Our purpose on this earth is revealed when we give our lives to the Lord. As stewards, our lives become a gift to others—the most effective way of spreading the good news of the Gospel. God works through us to love and care for one another. We become part of something bigger than ourselves. How is God opening your eyes to this truth through this study?

Our enemy, the devil, is not very original. His tactics haven't changed much in several thousand years. The same evil that was in the hearts of people in the time of Esther is also in the hearts of people today. So, to stand up against the evil of things like genocide, human trafficking, abuse in its many forms, racism and hatred toward people God loves, along with many other injustices, we need people like Esther and Mordecai to take action. In fact, we need to *be* people like Esther and Mordecai. We each can be a person who stands against evil and injustice in Jesus' name.

In 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to live out his destiny as God's son. Read Paul's words in 1 Timothy 11-12. Pray Paul's words to Timothy back to God as your own:

“*God, help me pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness. Help me fight the good fight of faith. Help me take hold of the eternal life to which you called me when I gave my life to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*”

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2018:

Read Esther 10:1-3

Without revealing too much more of the story this week, through these last verses of Esther we see God's faithfulness to Mordecai. Esther 10:3 says that Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus. Amazing!

In this verse, it also says that Mordecai was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers. Mordecai rose to his place in the kingdom for two reasons. According to Esther 10:3, what were those two reasons?

Reason # 1- Mordecai sought

Reason #2- Mordecai spoke

Take time to meditate on your own life, in comparison to Mordecai's. Ask yourself these questions:

How do I seek the welfare of others? (Give some examples.)

How do I speak peace to the people in my life? (Give some examples.)

If you realize that your life is very self-focused and inward-looking, take a step to put someone else's needs above your own. For example, if you are a student, choose to care for another student who needs a friend, or serve a member of your family in a way that would surprise them.

If you realize you are not a person who speaks peace, ask God to help you discover why you don't, and how you can begin. Remember, the words we speak come from the heart. It is important to get to the root: If all we do is change our words, we will fail. Read Luke 6:43-45. What step could you take to unearth the reason for your struggle with words? Pray for the Holy Spirit to grow real love and peace in your heart instead of discord and strife. Pray for God to soften your heart and make you a person of peace like Mordecai.

A Place to Journal and Take Prayer Requests:

If you have a family, share in doing this week's devotional together or use portions of the small group questions to generate family interaction.



WEEK 5

FEBRUARY 24 & 25, 2018

“QUEEN ESTHER”

ESTHER 4:1-5:8

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, 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. ²He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³And 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. ⁴When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for

their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. ⁹And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days." ¹²And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. ¹³Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴For 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. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" ¹⁵Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"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, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

^{5:1}On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, in front of the king’s quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace.

²And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. ³And the king said to her, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.” ⁴And Esther said,

“If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king.” ⁵Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked.” So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. ⁶And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, “What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ⁷Then Esther answered, “My wish and my request is: ⁸If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.”

ESTHER 4:1-5:8

WEEKEND MESSAGE NOTES:

If you were unable to be present at the weekend service, please watch the message online at <http://jacobsowellchurch.church/resources/messages-devos/>





GROUPS MATERIAL

OPEN WITH PRAYER

1. In Esther chapter 4, Esther learns the truth of the decree that has been issued against the Jews in Susa. Instead of protecting herself, Esther decides to risk her life and go before the King. She lays down her life in order to plead for all of the Jewish people in the Kingdom. Esther laid down her life for God's purposes and plans. Her life became a gift for the Jewish people. Do you believe your life becomes a gift when you lay it down in service for God? Why or why not? Discuss as group.
2. Read Matthew 20:28. Jesus gave His life as a gift for each of us. When we in return give our lives in service to Him, we live it well. We become the light of Christ to the people around us. Our words and actions represent Him in every encounter. We become a gift. Read and discuss Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16.
3. Have someone in your group read Esther 4:15-5:8 out loud. Living it well requires us to take step after step of faith. It means reminding ourselves the truth of who we are as God's child as we struggle with anxiety, doubt, and fear. How does Esther's courage inspire you? Share as a group.
4. Esther could have asked for anything she wanted from the King. What would you be tempted to ask for if you were Esther? Talk as a group. Esther could also have tried to play it safe and stay hidden in the shadows of the story. Instead, she took a huge risk and surrendered her own life for the sake of something bigger than herself. What keeps us from taking these kinds of risks today?
5. At Jacob's Well, we are adding onto our church so that more and more people have a chance to experience the transformative work of Christ. What has God done in you and in your family since He brought you to Jacob's Well? What has He done in the lives of people you know in our church? Discuss as a group.
6. At Jacob's Well, our Serve commitment exists to move all of us from a place of existing only for ourselves to a place of unity and strength for God's bigger purposes and plans. Do you serve at Jacob's Well? Why or why not? If you serve, how have you seen God work in you and through you through your service?

GROUPS MATERIAL (CONT)

7. Have you signed up to be a part of Builders for Christ this summer? If not, what is holding you back? What if your group signed up to serve together this summer? Discuss the possibility of each of you taking vacation at the same time, signing up to serve a week together. If this is not possible for your group, talk about the possibility of committing to serve one evening a week to clean the kitchen, the construction site or to serve as security volunteers.
8. During Living It Well, some people in our church will surrender their lives to Christ for the first time. Some will begin to serve and share their faith for the first time. Some will begin to give financially. Some will expand what they have been giving to a tithe and some will begin to give above their tithe. Spend time in prayer for God's will for each of us as individuals as well as a congregation.

MONDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2018:

Read Esther 4

Self-preservation is a natural instinct for each of us. When faced with overwhelming odds, our immediate reaction is to protect ourselves at all costs. It is how we are biologically and psychologically wired. For example, maybe at school you witness bullying. You know that if you step into the mess you will become a target too, so you shrink back and the bullying continues. Perhaps at work there is an opportunity to present a project in front of your peers. You realize that if you put yourself out there, it could back fire and you could be ridiculed for your work. You decide to stay hidden because it feels safer. Can you think of a specific example from your own experience? Write it here:

In chapter 4, Esther learns the truth of the decree that has been issued against the Jews in Susa. The reality of what Mordecai asks her to do in response to the decree puts Esther's life at risk. What is Esther's reply to Mordecai in verse 11?

Imagine the fear, anxiety, and dread that rises in Esther in that moment. Instantly, her life stands at a crossroads. With no preparation, Esther faces a life-and-death decision. Remaining quiet subjects every Jew in the kingdom to death; stepping forward before the King might mean sudden death for her. As she explains to Mordecai the truth of what she is facing, what is his response?

Esther realizes her only hope is God. Esther asks Mordecai and all the Jews to refrain from eating or drinking for three days and three nights. After the three days are over, Esther tells Mordecai she will go before the King. What are her exact words in verse 16?

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MONDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2018: (CONT)

Instead of protecting herself, Esther decides to risk her life and go before the King. She lays down her life in order to plead on behalf of all the Jewish people in the Kingdom. Think about Esther's choice. She laid down her life for God's purposes and plans. Her life became a gift for the Jewish people. Do you believe your life becomes a gift when you lay it down in service for God? Why or why not?

Read Matthew 20:28

Jesus gave His life as a gift for each of us. When you, in return, give your life in service to Him, you live it well. This means, whether we are at home, school, work or wherever, we become the light of Christ to the people around us. Our words and actions represent Him in every encounter. We become a gift. End your day in meditation over Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16.

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 27, 2018:

Read Esther 5:1-2

Imagine how Esther must have felt as she put on her royal robes. If it were you, what would be running through your mind?

Now, imagine walking toward the King's hall, each step heavy with anxiety. You have no idea what will happen in the next few moments. Will the King welcome you, or will he be furious with your disobedience? Remember, the reason you are Queen is because he was furious with Vashti's disobedience. Will he feel the same about you? Regardless of what the King's actions might be, Esther trusts God. She knows that no matter what happens, she is following Him. Esther sees her life as not her own: she is living it well.

How does Esther's courage inspire you?

When King Ahasuerus sees Esther in the hall, he holds out his golden scepter. Esther touches the scepter and her life is spared. Relief must have rushed over Esther in that moment. The truth is though, standing before the King was only the first step in the complex journey to save the Jewish people from genocide. Esther had to continue on in faith, opening up her home for a banquet for Haman and the King.

Think about your own journey with God. Sometimes taking the first step of faith only leads to taking another step of faith quickly thereafter. This can seem overwhelming, and too much for us. For example, perhaps you pray and work through the fear of accepting a position of leadership. You say yes to the position only to realize the increased stack of work in front of you. Living it well will mean taking step after step of faith. It will mean reminding yourself of the truth of who you are as God's child, as you struggle forward in anxiety, doubt, and fear. These can be some of the most difficult places to trust God: in the realization that there is always a next step, and potentially many more next steps. If we say yes to God now, we commit to continuing to say yes to Him as he guides us into our calling and purpose.

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TUESDAY FEBRUARY 27, 2018: (CONT)

Write out Romans 8:15 in the space below:

End your time in prayer.

Heavenly Father,

“*I am your child, redeemed by Jesus Christ. I am forgiven. I am loved. I am equipped by the power of Your Holy Spirit to face any challenge before me. Help me believe! Help me understand who I am in You so that I can live my life well. Give me the courage and the strength to step forward in faith and follow hard after You! For I did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Help me continually remember to cry out “Abba! Father!” looking to You for your purposes and plans for my life.*

In Jesus’ Name I pray, Amen.”

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2018:

Read Esther 5:3

“And the king said to her, ‘What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.’” We will talk more about what Esther asks for tomorrow, but today, let’s immerse ourselves in what she did not ask for. The King offered her up to half his kingdom. Picture what that would mean if she accepted his offer. Write out your thoughts here:

Esther could have had anything she wanted. What would you be tempted to ask for if you were Esther?

As individuals, we can become very focused on ourselves, wishing for material wants and personal comfort instead of seeing the needs of the people around us or around the world. As a church, we could also be tempted. First, we could be tempted to play it safe, to stay inside the walls we of our building, caring only for ourselves, similar to the temptation Esther faced when Mordecai first told her about the King’s decree. Second, we could be tempted to build and grow our church for selfish reasons. We could wish for more and more for ourselves, similar to the temptation Esther encountered when the King offered her half his kingdom. Esther kept her priorities in order: she kept the plight of an entire people group, the Jewish people, before her. She didn’t waver as she stood in front of the King. As individuals and as a church, we want to put others’ needs before our own, just like Esther.

Read Brandon’s recent testimony at his baptism at Jacob’s Well:

I’m in sobriety. Every time I’ve ever gone to prison, I have only found hope after confessing my sins. Today in my recovery program I use my higher power, God, every day. I don’t think if I didn’t have God as a higher power, I’d be able to stay clean with my former life. I used to carry out acts for the devil on a daily basis. At one point, I even thought I traded my soul to the devil. I know today that Christ Jesus is my higher power and I’m going to continue to go to Him every day. I’ve studied different religions while in prison, and I know who my true God is. I feel being baptized as an adult will wash away what’s left of my former life and let me continue my walk with our Father.

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WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2018: (CONT)

At Jacob’s Well, we are working toward an exciting building addition with Builders for Christ not for ourselves, but so that more and more people have a chance to experience the transformative work of Christ. We need more space not because we want to be a bigger church, but so that the growing number of people God brings through our doors can experience healing through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Brandon’s testimony is one example of why we do what we do as a church. We want every person to meet Jesus! This is why our Care ministry provides support groups such as Celebrate Recovery, GriefShare, DivorceCare, and Pure Design. This is why our Care ministry also offers care classes and provides marriage mentors. We need space as a church for more and more people to know and become like Jesus through these and all our ministry areas.

We want to continue to come alongside families, teaching more kids on the weekends and in youth group on Wednesday nights. We want more seats in our auditoriums so more people can experience worship on the weekends. We want more and more people to connect to God through the steps and guidance each message gives, to equip and support each one of us to live out our walk with Jesus each and every day. Our hope is that no one is alone as they take steps to know and become like Jesus. We need more space and more group leaders so our church community can provide a healthy group life experience for everyone.

What has God done in you and in your family since He brought you to Jacob’s Well? What has done in the lives of people you know here? As you end your day, pray prayers of thanksgiving for how God has worked in your life and in the lives of those you know. Pray for all the lives God still wants to change through His church, Jacob’s Well. Worship Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPCBz2YSGo4>



THURSDAY MARCH 1, 2018:

Read Esther 5:4.

"And Esther said, 'If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king.'"

Esther knew her life was meant for a greater purpose. Instead of asking for the world, Esther asked the king and Haman to come to a feast. She thought about the lives at stake, and she lay down the thoughts of her own life for the lives of her fellow Jews.

At Jacob's Well, our Serve commitment exists to move all of us from a place of existing only for ourselves to a place of unity and strength for God's bigger purposes and plans. This is similar to what Esther realized as she spoke to Mordecai and the King.

Do you serve in a volunteer capacity at Jacob's Well? Why or why not?

Have you signed up to be a part of the Builders for Christ project at Jacob's Well this summer? If not, what is holding you back?

Each of us exists for a greater purpose. If we are all about ourselves, our own needs, desires and wants, we miss the bigger picture. We become small. We live as owners rather than stewards. On the other hand, when we realize our purpose, as God's children, to change and grow over time by the Holy Spirit, to know and become like Jesus, our eyes are opened to the world around us: We realize how God is calling us to care, love and serve the people He has placed in our family, school, work place, and neighborhood. Our eyes are opened to the reality of what it means to live as good and faithful stewards of the lives God has entrusted to us. We begin to understand how God wants us to engage in our everyday lives in love for the people around us, as well as how He is calling us to live as vital parts of His church. How has God created you to serve? Where has He called you, where is He currently calling you, to get actively involved?

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THURSDAY MARCH 1, 2018: (CONT)

Visualize what it would look like for all of us to work together at the same time with the gifts He has given each of us individually. Think of how we, the Church of Jesus, could come together beautifully to serve our community, region, nation and world. God wants to work in us and through us each day. He calls us to engage in the gifts He has given us. If you don't know your spiritual gifts, attend a Discover You class and learn about your gifts and strengths. Step into service in the church. Serve with our Care ministry, as a group leader, or with youth on Wednesdays. Serve in JW Kids on the weekends, with the prayer or communion teams, with media, sound, or worship. Serve with our Guest Services teams as a greeter, usher, connections or coffee volunteer. Our church needs all of us working together in love and service so that every person God brings to Jacob's Well has an opportunity to take steps to know and become like Jesus.

One real, tangible, immediate way we can all participate in God's work together is to get involved in the summer 2018 building project with BFC. Consider every person God still wants to bring to our church. Let's all work together so we have a place ready and waiting for them in the future. Take a minute to think about the people who sacrificially gave and worked to care for you as you took steps to attend Jacob's Well. Think about the people who worked, giving their time, their labor, their sweat, their prayers, through the first two building projects, to open up the space you currently enjoy. Pray about where you sense God leading you to get involved.

Take a step into Serve, wherever God is calling you. Sign up to serve in the church and sign up to serve this summer. For this summer, give a week of your vacation time and serve alongside the Builders for Christ teams, or give one night a week this summer as a security or cleaning volunteer.

There are so many opportunities to get involved! Take a step and you won't regret it. Contact Laura Garry for more information at (715) 833-2050 or lgarry@jacobswellchurch.church. Let's all learn to Live it Well individually and as a church. Let's follow Esther's example and look to our Heavenly Father for His purposes and plans, not just for our lives, but for His church at Jacob's Well and the people he loves in our whole region of Western Wisconsin.

FRIDAY MARCH 2, 2018:

Read Esther 5:5-8

Esther does not immediately reveal her nationality and she does not directly reveal her request to the king and Haman. Why do you think she remains silent?

Our first thought might be that Esther is afraid. This would certainly be understandable! But we can see through her earlier decisions and the way she carries herself that Esther was not guided by fear, but wisdom. Look back at Esther 2:10. Esther followed Mordecai's direction, respecting his wishes and understanding that he knew best. We see Esther's wisdom in 2:13-16, too, as she first goes before the king. Esther asks for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch, suggests. Esther knew that Hegai would know best, so she trusts him. Her quiet wisdom continues in the verses we are reading this week.

Esther is wise, patient and self-controlled. She knows God's plan is continuing to unfold. Next week in our reading, we will see Esther fully emerge from obscurity, her continued quiet courage creating a level of security for the Jewish people so they could remain steadfast until the time of Nehemiah.

Live It Well is a call to stewardship born from being a follower of Jesus. As individuals and a church, we want to create a place of safety and security for the people in our community. Wherever they are on their journeys, we want them to come to Jacob's Well and take steps to know and become like Jesus.

As we come together in group life and worship, God encourages us along the journey. God creates courage in us to be people who step out of the shadows and into the mess of the world. He gives us strength by the power of His Holy Spirit to bring His hope, light and love to the world around us. Living it Well is our opportunity to join God as He leads us to invest, in unprecedented ways, to see more and more people take steps to know and become like Christ in the Chippewa Valley, Western Wisconsin and around the world.

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FRIDAY MARCH 2, 2018: (CONT)

Think about Esther and her commitment to the Lord. As you do, sit quietly with God. Take a few deep breaths and settle into silence.

1. Choose a very simple prayer to express your openness and desire for God. Pray about Esther's example and what God might be calling you to do to further His Kingdom through the work of His church Jacob's Well. (Example: Abba, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, I belong to You as Esther. Help me know your will for me as an individual and as a part of your church Jacob's Well.)
2. Close your eyes and offer this prayer to Jesus, allowing His will and love full access in your being.
3. When you become distracted, offer again your simple prayer back to God.

This is an exciting time in our church! Through Living It Well, some people in our church will surrender their lives to Christ for the first time. Some will begin to serve and share their faith for the first time. Some will begin to give financially. Some will expand what they have been giving to a tithe and some will begin to give above their tithe. As you consider where you are on your journey, ask God to help you discern the commitment He is asking you to make. Ask for the courage and strength to follow God in whatever next step He is calling you too. Thank Him for His deep love! Thank Him for the opportunity we have as a community of believers to make a difference in our world. Pray the words of Psalm 63:1-3 out loud as your own several times, trusting God will lead you to what commitment He wants from you as an individual and family as part of the family of Jacob's Well. Pray for everyone in our church as we each seek God for His will.

A Place to Journal and Take Prayer Requests:

If you have a family, share in doing this week's devotional together or use portions of the small group questions to generate family interaction.



WEEK 6

MARCH 3 & 4, 2018

"HAMAN"

ESTHER 5:9–7:10

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE

⁹And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai.¹⁰Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh.¹¹And Haman 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.¹²Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king."¹³Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."¹⁴Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

6:1 On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.²And it was found written how Mordecai had

told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.³And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."⁴And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him.⁵And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in."⁶So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?"⁷And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor,⁸let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set.⁹And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before

him: “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.”¹⁰ Then the king said to Haman, “Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned.”¹¹ So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.”

¹²Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered.

¹³And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.”

¹⁴While they were yet talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared.

^{7:1}So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ²And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ³Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, 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. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.”

⁵Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” ⁶And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

⁷And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. ⁸And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face. ⁹Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

ESTHER 5:9–7:10



GROUPS MATERIAL

1. What typically directs your happiness and mood? Is it derived from your circumstances and what is happening around you? Is it determined by how people react and respond to you at home, work and school? Is it the amount in your bank account or posts you see on Facebook and Twitter? What is it for you?
2. Have someone read Esther 5:9-14 to your group. If we don't understand our worth as God's children, we will live insecure. We will search the world for our value and we will live by what it tells us. Haman's insecurity ultimately drove him to murder and genocide. What does your insecurity drive you to? For example, do you follow your peers in behavior you know is wrong? Do you hide the truth of who you are and what you struggle with, instead of asking for the help you need? How do you allow the world to determine your significance? Share together.
3. Take turns reading Esther Chapter 6 to your group. While Haman is at work organizing Mordecai's destruction, God is at work orchestrating an observance for Mordecai's honor. Can you think of a time in your life where people were working against you, but God brought you blessings despite their plans? What were the circumstances? How did God work for your good despite the situation? Share as a group.
4. Have someone read Esther 7:1-5. The king and Haman enjoyed wine while Esther waited to share her petition. Ponder how patient Esther has been. Think of how patiently she waited on God for the right time to reveal the truth of her identity as well as the plot to kill the Jews in Susa. Share about a time you waited patiently for God's plans. What were the circumstances? How would things have been different if you had forced your plans before God was ready to reveal His? Discuss.
5. Instead of asking for something selfish or lavishly grandiose, Esther graciously asked for her life and for the lives of her people. How do you see wisdom in Esther? What inspires you about her character? What is God teaching you through Esther and her story? Talk as a group.
6. Through the Nehemiah and/or Esther series, how have you taken steps toward knowing and becoming like Jesus? How have you taken steps toward living this life well? Maybe there are steps you wanted to take or knew you needed to take, but as you reflect on your journey you realize you have neglected to move forward in those ways. Why do you think this is true? What stops you from taking steps forward in these areas? Pray for one another.

GROUPS MATERIAL (CONT)

7. Have someone read Esther 7:7-9. Ponder the irony of Haman dying on the very gallows he built for Mordecai. Has there been a time in your life in which your choices brought upon you the very punishment you sought for someone else? What example comes to mind?
8. Spend time praying about the future of our church. What does God want to do with the land He worked to give us? How does He want to continue to help others, bringing His love, light and life to our community through His church, Jacob's Well? What does He want us to do? As a group, ask God about His will. Ask Him what He desires for our community. Pray that we would be humble together as a church. Pray that we would remain resolute in seeking His will above all else. Pray that we would Live It Well.

WEEKEND MESSAGE NOTES:

If you were unable to be present at the weekend service, please watch the message online at <http://jacobswellchurch.church/resources/messages-devos/>



MONDAY MARCH 5, 2018:

Read Esther 5:9-14

What typically directs your happiness and mood? Is your mood driven by your circumstances and what is happening around you? Is it determined by how people react and respond to you at home, work and school? Is it the dollar amount in your bank account or posts you see on Facebook and Twitter? What is it for you?

Haman leaves Esther's first banquet happy and in high spirits. When he encounters Mordecai, and Mordecai does not rise or show fear in his presence, Haman's mood immediately changes. He is filled with rage; he went from cheerfulness to rage in just a few seconds. Haman reacts poorly, with a wrong perception and focus, in a way allowing his circumstances and the responses of people around him to determine his happiness and attitude.

As followers of Jesus, it is important that we move from overly reactive and emotional responses, toward a life grounded and secure in Christ. This doesn't mean we deny our troubles and pain. Rather, as we walk through the struggles and sorrows of life, we do so with the knowledge that God is with us and that He is guiding us. This gives us, over time, a deepened ability to trust in God, to retain some measure of peace and faithfulness even during difficult times. When we are in constant flux, allowing our moods to be directed by the constantly-fluctuating ups and downs we experience each day, we can easily begin to live as disillusioned owners of our lives—angry, frustrated and overwhelmed. Instead, to live as good and faithful stewards of the lives we've been given, we look to God to be our source of our strength and even joy. If we do, our lives can become more flexible, more adaptable in the ups and downs of reality, holding on to God, the true Owner of our lives.

Read Philippians 4:6-7

What does the Apostle Paul tell us to do?

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MONDAY MARCH 5, 2018: (CONT)

Haman's belief in who he was became shaken when Mordecai didn't bow. Haman lived unsettled and conflicted. He did not understand the depth of God's love and what it means to live as God's child. He had everything, but he lived small. He allowed Mordecai's behavior to infuriate him. Even though Haman had wealth, power and position, the truth is, he had nothing of true value. He couldn't even enjoy what he did have. He didn't have peace. He was not content. He needed to boast to friends and family, trying to prove his worth through his wealth, power and position. He was incredibly insecure and it showed through his behavior.

If we don't understand our worth as God's child, we will live insecure in some form, too. We will search the world for our value and we will live by what the world tells us. Haman's insecurity ultimately drove him to murder and genocide. On your journey right now, what does your insecurity drive you to? For example, do you follow your peers in behavior you know is wrong? Do you hide the truth of who you are and what you struggle with, instead of asking for the help you need? (Hebrews 4:15-16) Do you allow the opinions of the world to determine your significance?

As followers of Christ, we must look to God and His Word for the truth of our worth. If we are not grounded in our identity in Him, we will lose our way. We will feel rejected, abandoned, forsaken and alone. In a moment, one person's reaction can create a cloud of anger. We can move from joy to rage in two seconds flat. Pray 1 John 3:1-2 as you end your quiet time. Talk to God about what He is showing you.

TUESDAY MARCH 6, 2018:

Read Esther 6

Right when Haman orders gallows to be built, God gives the king insomnia. While Haman is at work organizing Mordecai's destruction, God is at work orchestrating an observance for Mordecai's honor. Can you think of a time in your life where people were working against you, but God was working for you at the same time and brought you blessing despite their plans? What were the circumstances? How did God work for your good despite the situation?

Haman and the king were not humble men. They demanded their own way. They did not seek God for His will. They lived as owners. They allowed insecurity and pride to be their guides. Clamoring for peace, the king looked to his book of chronicles for relief, while Haman looked to the death of Mordecai and the Jews to sooth his pride-inflicted wounds.

In the middle of it all, Mordecai remained humble before God. He did not demand his way. He lived as a good and faithful steward. He dressed in sackcloth and ashes, seeking God for His will. He did not despair when he was not honored after revealing Bigthan and Teresh's plot to kill the king. Instead, Mordecai was patient for God's plans to unfold in God's timing.

Write out these Proverbs here:

Proverbs 11:2

Proverbs 29:23

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TUESDAY MARCH 6, 2018: (CONT)

Imagine Haman's reaction when he realizes that his plan, arranged for the man the king wanted to honor, ends up being for Mordecai's benefit instead of his own. Pride can bring about the most humbling of circumstances. On the other hand, if we remain humble before God, He will raise us up at the right time. Read James 4:10. As individuals and as a church, we want to be people who seek God for His will. We don't want to think more of ourselves than we should. We don't want to be prideful. We don't want to force our agenda onto God. We want to seek Him for His plans and timing like Esther and Mordecai did.

Think about the 96 acres of land next door to our current property. We purchased those 96 acres last fall and we've been praying, gathering ideas and dreaming about what God would have us do with that land. We could push forward with what we think God would want. We could force our will and push our agenda. But as stewards, we choose to seek Him for His will. He is the owner. We want His plans to prevail because God's plans are the best plans.

Spend time praying about the future of our church. In humility, seek God for His plans for us. What does He want to do with the land He has given us? How does He want us to help others, bringing His love, light and life to our community? What does He want us to do? Talk to God about His will. Ask Him what He desires for the land that would work for the common good of our community. Pray that we would be humble as a church body. Pray that we would remain resolute in seeking His will. Pray that we would Live It Well.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 7, 2018:

After Haman's humiliating experience parading Mordecai around on the king's horse, he runs home to tell his advisers and his wife Zeresh what happened to him. While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrive and hurry Haman away to the banquet Esther prepared for him and the king.

Read Esther 7:1-5

The king and Haman enjoyed wine while Esther waits to share her petition. Ponder how patient Esther has been. Think of how patiently she waited on God for the right time to reveal the truth of her identity as well as the plot to kill the Jews in Susa. Share about a time in your life in which you waited patiently for God's plans. What were the circumstances? How would things have been different if you forced your plans to happen before God was ready to reveal His?

Once again, the king offers Esther up to half his kingdom. In response, Esther graciously asks for her life and for the lives of her people. How do you see wisdom in Esther in this account? What inspires you about her strength of character? What is God teaching you through the example of Esther and her story?

Not only do we want to reflect on what God is teaching us through the Esther series, but during the services this weekend, we want to actively remember all God has done and continues to do in our lives as individuals and as an entire church. If you were with us for the Nehemiah series last year, pull out your Nehemiah study guide and thumb through it, reminding yourself of the steps God led you to take throughout that series. Through the Nehemiah and/or Esther series, how have you taken next steps toward knowing and becoming like Jesus? How have you taken steps toward living this life well?

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WEDNESDAY MARCH 7, 2018: (CONT)

Maybe there are steps you wanted to take or knew you needed to take in certain areas of your life, but as you reflect on your journey, you realize you have neglected to move forward in those ways. Why do you think this is true? What might be stopping you from taking steps forward in those areas?

“Wherever we are on our journey, we will take steps together to know and become like Jesus.” As you end your day today, contemplate where you are on your journey right now. Spend time in prayer. Ask God to help you understand your next steps to live your life well in Him. Pray about your commitment to Him and to His church. It may seem counterintuitive, but sometimes, in a posture of humility, the best way to move forward is to think less of ourselves. Apply this to those areas of life where your own self-focus, your own plans and desires, have overtaken God’s vision for you. If you take a step into sacrificially giving, serving and caring for others, you will tend to grow out of your selfishness, sin, and the feeling of disconnection it brings. What is your next step? What is God revealing to you through Live It Well?

THURSDAY MARCH 8, 2018:

Esther 7:5-6

"Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, 'Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?' And Esther said, 'A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!' Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen."

Haman had incredible potential for good. Instead, he chose to live unwise and small. He cared more for himself than he did for anyone else. In this moment in Esther 7:5-6, everything Haman is, and all he has done, comes to light in full force right before his eyes. Scripture says that Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

As God's children, we too have incredible opportunity to do good, right where we are, right where we live and work. As we surrender our lives to Him, He begins to change us from the inside out. Our immediate response may be born out of old selfishness and sin, but when we surrender to God, His Spirit leads us in a new direction. Jesus does not expect us to be perfect. He desires that we live in relationship with Him. As we read His Word and talk with Him in prayer, we let go of our selfish and sinful inclinations. We tell Him the truth of what we believe, feel and desire. In return, He works in us by the power of His Holy Spirit to change us to know and become like Him. How have you seen this to be true in your own life? What examples can you share of times God changed the trajectory of your heart by the power of His Spirit at work in you? Maybe you wanted to embarrass someone at school because they embarrassed you, but instead you showed grace and compassion. Perhaps at work you desired the worst for a colleague, but through prayer you realized you needed to come alongside them in peace. Write your example here:

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THURSDAY MARCH 8, 2018: (CONT)

It is so much better for our hearts to be changed through God's Word and prayer than for our prideful misperceptions and petty plans to blow up in front of our very eyes.

Read Esther 7:7-9

What happened to Haman?

Ponder the irony of Haman dying on the very gallows he built for Mordecai. Has there been a time in your life when your choices brought upon you the very punishment you sought for someone else? Perhaps at school you neglected to bring forth the truth in a situation because you wanted someone you despised to take the fall, but in the end, you were punished and felt worse for not revealing the truth. Maybe at work you took credit for someone else's work only to later discover the results were not favorable. What example comes to mind?

Someday we will stand before God. As we do, He will walk us through the details of our lives. We will see the choices we made for good and for evil. Read Mark 7:15-23. What actions are springing from your inner being? What changes do you need God to make in you?

Dream about the day when you will stand before God and reflect on the life you lived. Pray about the changes you desire God to make in you. Ask Him for help. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in your heart, mind and soul. Ask Jesus for His wisdom to know and become like Him. Thank God that we are on a journey with Him until that day we stand before Him and then live in His presence for all eternity. Thank Him for His Spirit at work in us now, preparing us for the continuation of the life to come. Thank Him that we are not alone and praise Him for His love.

FRIDAY MARCH 9, 2018:

Is your life a means to an end for your own self, or is your life an instrument for the glory of God? Read Esther 4:14. Esther could have remained silent. She could have enjoyed a life of luxury and pleasure as queen, letting go of her true calling to step out in faith and follow God. God's hand guided the entire story, and as He unfolded His plan, one of its most significant components was Esther and Mordecai's choice to respond by putting God first, which ultimately led to the Jewish people in Susa being saved.

God doesn't need us to accomplish His work, but He invites us to participate, to respond in faith and trust and then to take action according to what God reveals. As we put Him first, He turns our hearts toward Him and works through our lives to accomplish His purposes and to bring people into relationship with Him. Yesterday, we considered what it will be like to stand before God with our choices revealed in His presence. Today, reflect on what it will be like to stand together in joy for eternity with others whose lives God touched through you!

God touches lives through our loving actions, He works through our merciful words, and He works through our giving. During Live It Well, we each have an opportunity to honor God and His provision for us by bringing to Him a regular portion of what He has financially given to us. During the Nehemiah series last year, we learned about the idea of "first fruits." As our church grows to make room for more people from our area, how has God invited us to participate? Will we make a commitment to perhaps increase our offerings to a full tithe (or 10% of our income)? How do you feel about the call to give a full tithe? What excites you about this opportunity? What might be keeping you from making this kind of commitment?

This coming weekend at Jacob's Well, March 10-11, is a time for us to rejoice in what God is doing in each of us and in our church! It will be a time for commitment and recommitment. If you were not here during Live It Well last winter, it is possible you have not had the opportunity to take a step into financial giving. This weekend is an opportunity to respond by committing to God's call for all of us at Jacob's Well as a church community. Maybe you did commit financially to the Live It Well plan, but you have not been able to fulfill your commitment. During the services this weekend, it is okay to make changes to your pledge. We are with you. As a church, we want each person to follow God and what He is leading them to do. It won't be the same for everyone. It might be that you committed an amount to Live It Well that

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FRIDAY MARCH 9, 2018: (CONT)

you realize now actually underestimated what God was going to do to benefit your finances. Maybe this weekend you feel God leading you to increase your gift above your normal tithes and offerings. Wherever you are on your journey, take a step to commit to God's plan for you in this area. What is He asking you to do through the Live It Well initiative at Jacob's Well?

Over the last few weeks, you have had the opportunity to pick up a commitment card during the weekend services. Pull out the card and place it in front of you as you end your quiet time today. Pray and seek God for His will. Pray that He would continue to teach you how to live as a steward, and that you would grow in your understanding of your life as an investment in others. In the space below, write out a prayer of surrender and desire to follow Him. Fill out your card as He directs, trusting Him with your life just like Esther and Mordecai did.

Heavenly Father,

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A Place to Journal and Take Prayer Requests:

If you have a family, share in doing this week's devotional together or use portions of the small group questions to generate family interaction.



WEEK 7

MARCH 10 & 11, 2018

“LEGACY & TRUST”

ESTHER 8:1-10:3

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE

On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. ²And the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. ³Then Esther spoke again to the king. She 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. ⁴When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king. ⁵And she said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. ⁶For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?" ⁷Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he intended to lay hands on the Jews. ⁸But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of

the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked."

⁹The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day. And an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. ¹⁰And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's signet ring. Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud, ¹¹saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, ¹²on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. ¹³A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. ¹⁴So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king's service,

rode out hurriedly, urged by the king’s command. And the decree was issued in Susa the citadel.

¹⁵Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. ¹⁶The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. ¹⁷And in every province and in every city, wherever the king’s command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

⁹¹Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king’s command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. ²The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples. ³All the officials of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal agents also helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴For Mordecai was great in the king’s house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces, for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful. ⁵The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, ⁷and also killed Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha ⁸and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha ⁹and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰the ten sons of Haman the son of Hamme-

datha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on the plunder.

¹¹That very day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was reported to the king. ¹²And the king said to Queen Esther, “In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and also the ten sons of Haman. What then have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces! Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled.” ¹³And Esther said, “If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day’s edict. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows.” ¹⁴So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. ¹⁵The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed 300 men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder.

¹⁶Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king’s provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid no hands on the plunder. ¹⁷This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁸But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁹Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the rural towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another.

²⁰And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹obliging them to keep

the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, ²²as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

²³So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. ²⁵But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. ²⁶Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them, ²⁷the 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, ²⁸that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and

city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.

²⁹Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. ³⁰Letters were sent to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, in words of peace and truth, ³¹that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther obligated them, and as they had obligated themselves and their offspring, with regard to their fasts and their lamenting. ³²The command of Esther confirmed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.

^{10:1}King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. ²And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? ³For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

ESTHER 8:1-10:3

WEEKEND MESSAGE NOTES:

If you were unable to be present at the weekend service, please watch the message online at <http://jacobswellchurch.church/resources/messages-devos/>





GROUPS MATERIAL

1. Open with prayer, led by your group leader or by several of you.
2. Read Corrie ten Boom's poem, "Life is but a Weaving", from Wednesday's devotion this week. If your life does not seem to be going in the direction you planned, talk about how God might be at work in ways you can't see. How do you trust God in the difficult times?
3. Read Esther chapters 8 and 9, taking turns as a group, for those who are comfortable doing so.
4. Esther asks the king's permission to carry out the edict another day. She also asks that Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles. In answer to any thought we may have had that Esther did not have much real power beyond her beauty, the Scriptures continue to paint the picture of a woman who was clever and shrewd. Esther was not just a pretty face. Esther was a survivor and a risk-taker. She fought for her people to prevail. How is this different from the Esther you have thought about before? What about the truth of who Esther was inspires you personally?
5. Just as the Jewish people struck down all their enemies together in Susa, as followers of Christ we can fight against evil and injustice in our world today. Take a few minutes to talk about out the different forms of evil that people experience in our world. Here are a few examples of evil: human trafficking, racism and slavery, drug addiction, families broken by sin and selfishness, widespread poverty and disease... How do you see God working against these evils through you as individual people? How about through all of us together as His church body at Jacob's Well?
6. Have a volunteer read Esther 10:1-3 aloud. God desires that we be compassionate and loving, and that we live as instruments for His peace. He also desires that we seek Him courageously and boldly for the good He wants done in the world and that we then follow through by doing it. As we end our series on Esther, think about your legacy, our legacy. Compare Haman's legacy to Esther's and Mordecai's. As a group, take turns sharing about the individual legacy you hope to leave. Share about one goal you will put in place as a result of this Esther series that will move you toward that legacy you desire.
7. What reality do you want the people of our community, region, nation and world to experience because of the work God has done, is doing, and will do through His church Jacob's Well? What will our legacy be?

GROUPS MATERIAL (CONT)

8. Take time to pray about the legacies you dream of for yourselves and for Jacob's Well. Pray about specific steps you can take to turn those dreams into reality. Thank God for His love and for His work in us and in His church.
9. As this study ends, plan one area of service to complete as a group: Sign up to serve together on the Builders for Christ project at Jacob's Well this summer. Sign up to serve together in one of the ministries of Jacob's Well. Sign up to serve together through one of our Jacob's Well Ministry Partners: APPLE, Good News Jail and Prison Ministry, Fierce Freedom/Justice Run, Hope Gospel Mission, International Justice Mission, Hope Village, Teen Challenge, Builders for Christ, Lead Team, or 513 Free. Get creative! Share ideas and talk as a group about what you can do together to Live It Well.



LIST OF JACOB'S WELL'S SHARE MINISTRY PARTNERS

Ministry Partners

APPLE
 Good News Jail & Prison Ministry
 Fierce Freedom/Justice Run
 Hope Gospel
 International Justice Mission
 Hope Village
 Teen Challenge
 Builders for Christ
 Lead Team
 513 Free

Career Student Ministers

Drapers–Fellowship of Christian Athletes
 Christians–UWEC/InterVarsity
 Jenna Stromberger–UWEC/InterVarsity
 Wiegels–Navigators
 Hunts–Asia

CARELINK

Salvation Army EC/CF

Denominational Missions

MN/WI Baptist Convention
 International Missions Board
 North American Mission Board

Disaster Relief

MN/WI Baptist Convention

Church Plants

Shift Church, Gainesville, FL–Engedals
 Table Community Church,
 Greer, SC–Hogans
 MN/WI Baptist Convention & NAMB
 Twin Cities Metro–Gerardo Antivero
 Church Planting Catalyst

Campus & Mission Interns

Crotty–Youth With A Mission
 Carlson–Evangelical Alliance/France
 Jonet–UWEC/CRU
 Kenedy–UWEC/CRU
 Veldhuizen–UWEC/CRU
 Hoffman–EFCA/Middle East
 Suennen–UWEC/CRU
 Engstrom–UWEC/CRU

Short Term Trips

Just Us Run
 Mikayla Otto–Navigators
 Brooke Volpone–Youth With A Mission
 Sarah Kuipers–Pioneers/Czech Rep
 Thomas Schuler–CRU/Peru
 Maddy Mortimer–Navigators
 Molly Mortimer–Navigators/Japan
 NPH Honduras–Parisi Family
 Andrew Stokka– Youth With A Mission
 Nate Engen–Agua Viva/Honduras
 Ellie Jibben Huebner–Teach Beyond

MONDAY MARCH 12, 2018**Read Esther 8:1-14**

That same day, the King executes Haman. In addition to Haman's execution, Esther explains how she is related to Mordecai and the king gives Mordecai his signet ring, retrieved from the body of Haman. Mordecai is then appointed over Haman's estate.

It was not all celebration, though. In verse 3 we see Esther falling at the king's feet, weeping and begging for him to put an end to Haman's evil plan. Esther knows the lives of the Jews in Susa are still in danger because of Haman's prior decree against them, so she asks the king if a new order can be written that would overrule Haman's previous legislation. While Haman has been executed, his decree against the Jews is still in effect, because no document that has already been sealed by the king's signet ring may be revoked. However, the king gives permission for a new, additional decree to be written, and Mordecai's new order is quickly sent to the satraps, governors and nobles of all 127 provinces, stretching all the way from India to Cush.

This new edict allows the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves. The Jewish people are now able to defend against anyone who attacks them, and to destroy, kill and annihilate as necessary. This sounds so violent, but there is history here we must understand. The Amalekites attacked Israel when the Israelites fled Egypt. Read Exodus 17:8-16. For this reason, the people of Israel, from generation to generation, remained at war against the Amalekites. In fact, in Deuteronomy 25:19, God told Israel to blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul was ordered to put an end to the Amalekites, but Saul did not follow God's instructions.

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-23

Saul's attack on Amalek resulted in the death of most—but not all—of King Agag's people. Haman the Agagite was not only an individual enemy against the Jewish people, but he was leading the continued attack against the people of Israel that had begun long before the time of Esther. Haman was doing the work of the evil one who is set against the people of God. So, it was imperative that Haman's family, along with those who supported the genocide, were exposed and put to death, a violent but culturally common punishment for evil on that scale.

As we end our series on Esther, think about your legacy, our legacy. Compare Haman's legacy to Esther's and Mordecai's. Haman left a legacy of destruction. On the other hand, Esther and Mordecai saved the Jewish people and stopped further bloodshed by putting their enemies to death. They left a legacy of hope for the Jewish people. Today, we also fight a great enemy.

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MONDAY MARCH 12, 2018: (CONT)

Read Ephesians 6:12 and 1 Peter 5:8

When we rise up as people and as a church to fight against evils and injustices in the world, we can leave a legacy of hope just like Esther and Mordecai did.

Christ came to set us free. He is the hope of the world! When we believe in Jesus, He lives in us by the power of His Holy Spirit. When we share the love of Christ, caring for people wherever they are on their journeys, Jesus receives the glory, honor, worship and praise He deserves. Lives are changed for now and eternity.

As you end your time today, write an epitaph of what you hope will be true of you when your life on earth comes to an end. Ask God to help your life become meaningful in Him and His purposes. Seek Him for His will for you. How does He want to work through you to share His love and hope to people in our world? Tomorrow we will focus on the legacy we want to leave as a church. Today, reflect on your own legacy.

TUESDAY MARCH 13, 2018

Read Esther 8:15-9:10

The Jewish people celebrated the good news! There was joy and gladness among them. Their lives had been spared. The tables were turned and the Jewish people now had the upper hand over those who hated them. The Jewish people struck down all their enemies, killing 500 men in Susa.

Just as the Jewish people rose up to strike down all their enemies together in Susa, as followers of Christ we can fight against evil and injustice in the world today. Take a few minutes to write down some of the different forms of evil that people experience in our world. Remember to not list specific individual people or people groups. Here are a few examples of evil: human trafficking, racism and slavery, drug addiction, families broken by sin and selfishness, widespread poverty and disease, etc.

It isn't possible for one individual to fight the evils of this world alone. But when we come together as followers of Christ, and work His way, aligned with His will, God works through us to accomplish even more than what we think we're capable of. As a congregation, our church provides a place of security and safety for the people of our community. We also live out our church vision not for our own benefit, but so that people all over our region, along with us, can take steps together to know and become like Jesus. As we prepare to grow our campus through the summer 2018 BFC building project, God is expanding our walls not for us, but for others, for the common good: We believe God will guide an increasing number of people He loves into our connected, relational community, and that He wants us to have enough space for them and an environment where it's clearly safe for people to come as they are and meet our merciful Savior. All those God leads here will have an opportunity to learn with us what it means to know and become like Christ.

As we connect to God and allow Him to change us from the inside out, His love expands far beyond our church walls. As our lives change, God works through us to change lives. This can impact our families, schools, workplaces, communities, region, nation and world. We become people who serve, with Jesus as our example, and the results are bigger than we could ask for or imagine.

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TUESDAY MARCH 13, 2018: (CONT)

One way God works to care for our community, region, nation and world is through our Jacob's Well Ministry Partners: APPLE, Good News Jail and Prison Ministry, Fierce Freedom/Justice Run, Hope Gospel, International Justice Mission, Hope Village, Teen Challenge, Builders for Christ, Lead Team, and 513 Free. As you think about all the ministry work that happens inside our walls and in our community, region, nation and world, what legacy do you dream of for our church?

What legacy do you dream of for the next generations of Jacob's Well?

What reality do you want the people of our community, region, nation and world to experience because of the work God has done, is doing, and will do through His church Jacob's Well? What will our legacy be?

Take time to pray about the legacy you dream of for our church. Pray about how God is calling you to Live It Well. Sign up to serve on the Builders for Christ building project at Jacob's Well this summer. Sign up to serve in one of the ongoing volunteer ministries of Jacob's Well. Sign up to serve with one of our Jacob's Well Ministry Partners.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 14, 2018

Read Esther 9:11-19

We can surmise, through Esther 9:12, that the king is surprised by the will of the Jews in Susa. His question, "What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces?" has him wondering what is going on in the rest of his kingdom.

Esther asks the king's permission to carry out the edict another day. She also asks that Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles. In answer to any thought we may have had that Esther did not have much real power beyond her beauty, the Scriptures continue to paint the picture of a woman who was clever and shrewd. Esther was not just a pretty face. Esther was a survivor and a risk-taker. She fought for her people to prevail.

How is this different from the Esther you have thought about before?

What inspires you about this Esther?

Read Romans 13:1-7

God can surprise us in the ways he uses unexpected people, including those He places or allows into positions of authority, to accomplish His purposes. In this case, God put Esther on the throne so He could work through her to bring forth order and justice for the Jewish people in Susa. She followed Him and the Jews in Susa were saved.

God desires that we be compassionate and loving, and that we live as instruments for His peace. He also desires that we seek Him courageously and boldly for the good He wants done in the world and that we then follow through by doing it. How have you seen this to be true in your relationship with Him? For example, maybe you felt His Spirit leading you to share your faith in an unlikely situation. Perhaps He led you to serve in an area you knew was impossible for you, but your dependence upon Him worked in ways you had not imagined.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6

Sometimes God leads us in ways we do not expect, leading us to important moments when it is vital to keep trusting the work He is doing in us and through us. It might not make sense at the time, but over time we can and will see His Hand move in astonishing ways.

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WEDNESDAY MARCH 14, 2018: (CONT)

As we end our series, ponder the reality of what Esther and Mordecai's lives must have been like. Esther, a Jewish orphan, had been taken in by her cousin, Mordecai, who himself had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar. Both Esther and Mordecai were far from their homeland. They could have allowed despair to overtake them, but they trusted God. As a young woman, Esther was taken without her consent into the harem of a pagan king. Esther had no idea about her future. Eventually, after months of beauty treatments, the king realized he was attracted to Esther more than any of the other women in the harem. Esther was crowned queen and most likely experienced a privileged, straightforward life in the palace. Reality quickly rose to the surface, as Mordecai challenged Esther to embrace the truth that maybe God had chosen her and placed her in that position to save the Jews. Esther chose to follow God, trusting that He was at work in all the chaos, difficulty and heartache of what unfolded. That is our challenge too!



Corrie ten Boom and her family helped Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II and, by all accounts, saved nearly 800 lives. Born in Haarlem, Netherlands, in 1892, she grew up in a devoutly religious family. During World War II, she and her family harbored hundreds of Jews to protect them from arrest by Nazi authorities. Betrayed by a fellow Dutch citizen, her entire family was imprisoned. Corrie survived and started a worldwide ministry, later telling her story in a book entitled *The Hiding Place*. As you end your time today, read the poem "Life is but a Weaving" by Corrie ten Boom. Talk to God about your own journey as you reflect on Esther, Mordecai, and the words of Corrie's poem.

"Life is but a Weaving" (the Tapestry Poem)

*My life is but a weaving Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors He weaveth steadily.*

*Of't times He weaveth sorrow; And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper and I the underside.*

*Not 'til the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas and reveal the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned*

*He knows, He loves, He cares; nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him.*

THURSDAY MARCH 15, 2018

Read Esther 9:20-32

Mordecai recorded everything that happened, and then he sent letters to all the Jews in the kingdom. He commanded them, through the Festival of Purim, to celebrate and remember how the Jews achieved freedom from their enemies. He told them to celebrate and remember how God had turned their sorrow to joy.

Purim means "lots" in ancient Persian. The holiday was named Purim since Haman had thrown lots (similar to other forms of divination and superstition used to determine fate) to determine when he would carry out his diabolical scheme against the Jews. Haman believed in casting lots to discern the hand of fate, but the Jewish people believed in God's invisible, but mighty, hand at work for their good.

As this series ends, we know that each of us have had, and will have, significant times of celebration during our journeys with God, just like the Jewish people in Susa experienced. We see God's invisible hand at work for our good, too.

Share about an especially significant and celebration-worthy time you experienced on your journey with God:

How do you continue to remember and celebrate this significant time in your life?

What about the other significant steps you've taken on your journey with God? Reflect on all God has done and continues to do as you walk with Him, taking steps to know and become like Jesus.

It is important that we remember and regularly take time to celebrate what God has done in us and in our church. Did you know that Purim is still celebrated in Israel today? Hundreds of years have passed since the Jews were saved from Haman's wicked plan, yet his protection and provision are still worthy of praise and celebration.

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THURSDAY MARCH 15, 2018: (CONT)

The span of most of our individual lives will be less than 100 years, but what God does in us and through us during our lifetimes will establish and leave a legacy well after we are physically gone. We celebrate to remember what God has done for us, but we also celebrate in hope that those in the next generations will also know the love, the goodness, and the saving power of our God.

Take time to write out your story. Write out what God has done and is doing in you and through the physical life He gave you. If you realize you have been so focused on yourself that you have missed God at work, spend time writing out a prayer of purpose, committing to clear goals for the future. Copy your testimony and/or prayer and hand it down to the next generations of your family. If you would be willing, share your letter and/or prayer with the Builders for Christ volunteers this summer. Print it out and leave it in the food tent for them to read, or plan to come and share it with one of the groups over a lunch or dinner time. Let them hear what God is doing in His people here. Let's all celebrate the goodness of God. Let's consistently pause to celebrate with our families, friends and other important people in our lives. Let's celebrate with Builders for Christ and all the gracious and generous people who will sacrifice their personal and family time this summer to come join us as we raise up more building space for God to continue to do what only He can do!

FRIDAY MARCH 16, 2018

Read Esther 10:1-3

On Monday of this week, we took time write an epitaph of what we hope will be said of us when our lives on this earth come to an end. Esther 10:1-3 shares a description of Mordecai and the life he lived.

Write Esther 10:3 here:

Every person is invited to be a vital part of God’s work. He invites us to join Him, to live as stewards and to choose to acknowledge Him as the owner of our lives. God does not force His will on us. Remember what Mordecai told Esther in Esther 4:14, “For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place...” Mordecai knew that God would save the Jews one way or another, even if Esther did not follow His call and take the steps she did.

As we spend our last day in this series together, how is God inviting you into His work? How is He inviting you to work for the greater good of people, like Mordecai and Esther did so long ago?

Pray about the ways God wants to work in you to change you to be more like Jesus. Pray about how God wants to work through you to love and care for your family, the people you go to school with, and/or the people you spend time with at work each day. Pray about how God is calling you to serve in His church alongside Builder’s for Christ this summer, in volunteering in our ongoing ministries, and by volunteering with our ministry partners. As God’s children, we have the privilege of experiencing His love; we want to share His love with others.

What next steps is God leading you to take as we end our Esther series? How is God calling you to Live It Well?

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FRIDAY MARCH 16, 2018: (CONT)

Write out a prayer on a notecard or slip of paper that you can place in your Bible to help you remember and celebrate His love and His calling for you to live your life well in Him.

Heavenly Father,

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A Place to Journal and Take Prayer Requests:

If you have a family, share in doing this week's devotional together or use portions of the small group questions to generate family interaction.

LIVE *it* **WELL**

one life. one story to tell.

