

You Were
MADE FOR THIS
MOMENT

*HOW THE STORY OF ESTHER INSPIRES US TO
STEP UP AND STAND OUT FOR GOD*

STUDY GUIDE PLUS STREAMING VIDEO
FIVE SESSIONS

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Resources

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Introduction

Winter casts a cold shadow. The days are short. The nights are long. The sun seems shy, hidden behind the grayness of the days. Warmth has packed her bags and migrated to the tropics. Beach weather would be nice. But that's clearly not going to happen anytime soon.

Winter brings danger. Blizzards. Ice storms. Broken pipes and slippery sidewalks. Caution is the theme. Come springtime, and you will run barefoot through the meadow and plunge into the pond. But now? It's best to button up, zip up, stay in, and stay safe.

Is it winter where you are? Are you trapped in a perpetual gloom? Has life not turned out the way you thought it would? Maybe your finances fizzled. Or your health never recovered. Or a friend never returned. A Siberian cold has settled over your life.

This study was born in winter—a pandemic that locked down the world. Church doors closed. Students were stuck at home. Masks hid smiles. And in the midst of this trial, an ancient sin threatened to undo us: *racism*. An officer's knee on the neck of a black man activated a subterranean anger. A volcano of rage spewed into the streets of most countries.

Many have wondered if this winter season would pass. Perhaps *you* have wondered if its lingering effects would ever

end. If so, God has a six-letter word of encouragement for you: E-S-T-H-E-R. The book that bears her name was written to be read in wintertime. It was crafted for those who feel outnumbered by foes, outmaneuvered by fate, and outdone by fear.

It's almost as if God, in his kind providence, heard all our prayers and said, "Follow me. I want you to see what I can do." He escorts us now to the front row of a grand theater and invites us to take a seat. He nods at the symphony conductor, and all at once the music begins, the curtain opens, and we are eyewitnesses to a masterpiece of divine drama.

The characters of this drama comprise a complex and colorful crew. There is Xerxes, the clueless brute of a king. Haman, the egotistical and bloodthirsty right-hand man who plots to exterminate the entire race of the Jewish people. Mordecai, a Jewish man himself, who realizes he cannot compromise and must take a stand. Esther, our main character, gorgeous and gutsy.

And God . . . well, where is God in this story? Even though the fate of the Jewish people—his chosen people—is at stake, at no point do we read "God said," or "God chose," or "God decreed." There is no mention of the temple or the name *Yahweh* or *Elohim*, the Hebrew nouns for God. Why the seeming silence from the Almighty?

Certainly, God has been known to intervene dramatically in Scripture. By his hand the Red Sea opened, the manna fell from heaven, a virgin gave birth, and a tomb gave life. Yet for every divine shout there are a million *whispers*. The book of Esther relates the story of our whispering God, who in unseen ways superintends all the circumstances for his people. This priceless book reminds us that God need not be loud to be strong. He need not cast a shadow to be present. He is still

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eloquent in his seeming silence . . . and active when he appears distant.

The theme of the book of Esther—and indeed, the theme of the entire Bible—is that all the injustices of the world will be turned on their head. Grand reversals are God’s trademark. When we feel as though everything is falling apart, God is working in our midst, causing everything to fall into place. He is the King of quiet providence, and he invites you and me to partner with him in his work. For each of us has a part to play in his grand drama.

The headline of the book of Esther reads: *Relief will come*. But the story also reveals that God will call us at times to walk onto the stage, step into the spotlight, and take bold risks to make that relief come to pass. He will raise us up “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). The question is not whether *God* will act . . . but whether *we* will step out in faith when he does.

How to Use This Guide

The *You Were Made for This Moment* video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small-group gathering) and also as an individual study. Each session begins with a brief opening reflection and questions to get you thinking about the topic. You will then watch a video with Max Lucado, which can be accessed via the streaming code found on the inside front cover. If you are doing the study with a group, you will then engage in some directed discussion and close with a time of prayer.

Each person doing the study in a group should have his or her own study guide, which includes video teaching notes, Bible study and group discussion questions, and between-sessions personal studies to help you reflect and apply the material to your life during the week. You are also encouraged to have a copy of the *You Were Made for This Moment* book, as reading it alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. (See the recommended reading section at the end of each session for the chapters in the book that correspond to the material you and your group are discussing.)

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the message, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only “go through the motions,” or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you’re looking for during this study.

Second, remember that the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a “safe place.” This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else’s opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to “fix” a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that’s not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, you can maximize the impact of the course with the additional between-session studies. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half hour a day on four different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even

How to Use This Guide

start) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

This study is intended to help you gain new insights into the character of God and recognize some of the ways that he might be working "behind the scenes" on your behalf. So, as you go through this study, be listening for what God is saying to you as it relates to your current season, be watching for the subtle ways that he is moving in your midst, and be ready and willing to "step into the spotlight" when he calls you to act.



SESSION ONE

Cozy in the Culture

ESTHER 1:1–2:18

WELCOME

The middle school lunchroom. Do you remember the place? Plastic trays, mystery meat, mini-milk cartons, soggy potato chips . . . and you. You're a twelve-year-old kid who has just made it through the lunch line and is now standing, tray in hand, looking over a sea of students and strangers who have already managed to group together at the tables. The question overwhelms you. Perhaps it even kept you up the night before. *Where will I sit?*

All you want as a twelve-year-old is to *belong*. And at that age, to belong means to *fit in*. You don't want to stand out from the crowd, or be perceived as a loner, or have people think you are in any way strange or different. You want to fit in . . . even if it means compromising.

Fortunately, for most of us these middle school years are long behind us. But unfortunately, this "*where will I sit?*" feeling doesn't end with the eighth grade. The desire to fit in, and doing whatever it takes to do so, lingers well into our adulthood.

In this first session, we are introduced to Esther and Mordecai, the stars of our play. Eventually, they will also prove to be the heroes of our tale. But they don't start off that way. When we first meet them, they are fully assimilated into the Persian culture that their families have been a part of for three generations. They have Persian names, work for the Persian government, and live in the Persian city of Susa, one of the kingdom's main hubs.

As Israelites, Esther and Mordecai had been called to be a holy people who were set apart for God. As Christ followers, we are called to be the same. We are, as Peter said, to see ourselves as “foreigners and exiles” in this world (1 Peter 2:11). Life isn't supposed to feel too cozy. After all, Jesus has called us to do uncomfortable things—such as believe in him when those around us do not, and love our neighbor when our neighbor is hard to love, and share his grace and hope with others even when we are afraid of how they may react.

As we turn the pages of Esther, we find that Esther and Mordecai had a great call on their lives—a seemingly impossible task set before them—and that they rose to the occasion. But we can't forget they started out a bit skittish and hesitant. Yet this fact should give each of us hope, for if God can use them to do great things in spite of their desire to compromise and conform to the culture, then he can certainly use us to do great things as well.

SHARE

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves.

Then, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- What do you already know about the book of Esther? How do you respond to the idea that Esther and Mordecai didn't start off as all that heroic?

— or —

- In what season of life does this study find you? The gloom of winter? The hope of springtime? Something in between? Explain your response.

READ

Ask one person to read the following passage, and then discuss the questions that follow.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

What does it mean to conform to the pattern of this world?

How does conforming to the pattern of this world prevent us from knowing God's will?

WATCH

Play the video segment for session one (see the streaming video access provided on the inside front cover of this study guide). As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or points that stand out to you.

God has given us a role to play in the grand drama we call life. There will be times when he will call us to step onto the stage to perform the part that he has designed for us.

Mordecai and Esther were members of the Jewish race—the exiled descendants of the people of Israel. There are many words we could use to describe the Israelites, but above all they were to be *holy*. Biblically, this meant they were to be set apart.

Cozy in the Culture

Mordecai was three generations removed from the first Jerusalem exiles. He had begun to assimilate to the Persian culture and blend in rather than stand out. He had gone clandestine with his convictions and deferred his theology to the bureaucracy.

The compulsion to compromise affects us all. Everything around us says “conform.” Our society permits all beliefs except an exclusive belief. It says it’s okay to do whatever you want as long as you accept what everyone else does.

To believe in Jesus as the only redeemer is to incur the disdain of Persia. This is why we must remember our *true* identity. Our eternal citizenship is not the one printed on our passport. We are subjects of a different King.

We have the same mandate as the Israelites—to be caretakers of God’s promise. The message of Jesus has been entrusted to us, and we have the hope the world needs.

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. How would you describe Xerxes based on what you have heard about him so far?

2. How would you summarize the events that led to Esther finding herself in the position of becoming the next queen of Persia?

3. Read Leviticus 19:2 and Deuteronomy 18:9. What does *holiness* mean in these contexts? What was God calling his people to represent in the world?

4. Review Esther 2:5–11. What clues are we given in this passage that reveal both Mordecai and Esther were conforming to the Persian culture?

5. Thank about a time you were tempted to assimilate to fit in with the culture. Share that experience. How did it affect you? How did it affect your faith?

6. As Christ followers, we are all called to be holy, or set apart, for God. What does holiness look like as a follower of Jesus?

RESPOND

Use the space below to describe someone whose life indicates he or she is working toward holiness. How do you know this about that person? What do you admire about him or her?

PRAY

Close your time in prayer. Ask God to help you see any ways that you might be conforming to the culture around you, and ask him to empower you to start taking bold risks for him. Write down any prayer requests the group has, and pray for those needs during the coming week.



BETWEEN-SESSIONS

Personal Study

If you haven't already started reading the *You Were Made for This Moment* book by Max Lucado, now is a great time to begin. This week, read chapters 1–3 before doing this personal study. The questions and exercises provided in this section are designed to help you receive the greatest benefit from reading the book as you apply it to your own life. There will be time for you to share your reflections at the beginning of the next session.

DAY 1: HOLY WHAT?

We often associate the word *holiness* with perfection—almost like a halo around someone's head. This can make the call to be holy feel like a very tall order. However, in Hebrew the word translated *holy* is *qadosh*, which can simply mean “set apart.” When we view it that way, the call is not to be perfect but to remain faithful to the path that God has set for us, which at times will set us apart from the culture. In this way, each of us can work to be holy. As Christ followers, it is not our own goodness or good deeds that make us holy, but rather the

work of Christ on the cross. Keep these thoughts in mind as you read the following passages.

¹ *The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*

² *“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

³ *I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-3).*

¹ *The LORD said to Moses,* ² *“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.*

³ *“Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.*

⁴ *“Do not turn to idols or make metal gods for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.*

⁵ *“When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf” (Leviticus 19:1-5).*

℣ What comes to mind when you hear the word *holy*? Where do you think this belief or association came from?

2. What promises did God make to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3?

3. What instructions did God give to the Israelites that would set them apart?

4. What do these verses tell you about what it means to be holy and chosen by God?

Prayer: *God, I know that you are holy and that your holiness cannot be matched. But I also know that through Christ, you have made me holy. I am a part of your family, not because of any good deeds I've done, but because of the work Christ did on my behalf. You have called me to be set apart. Help me become more holy. Refine me, guide me, and teach me so I look more like you each day. Thank you for choosing me as yours.*

DAY 2: CAST OF CHARACTERS

In this session, we were introduced to three of the main characters that will be featured in our story: Esther, Mordecai, and King Xerxes. Even though the book of Esther is an ancient story

from the Old Testament, we can easily relate to these characters, their flaws, their courage, and their trials. King Xerxes had incredible wealth and incredible power, yet he was self-involved and insecure. Esther and Mordecai were members of the Jewish race, set apart by God, and yet had fully assimilated into Persian culture. They even had names that honored Persian gods! Read the following passages that describe these characters and then answer the questions below.

² At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, ³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

⁴ For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. ⁵ When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa (Esther 1:2-5).

⁵ Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, ⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. ⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died (Esther 2:5-7).

⁸ *Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. ⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.*

¹⁰ *Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so (Esther 2:8–10).*

1. When you think about yourself and people in the Bible, do you feel similar to them, different from them, or somewhere in between? Explain your answer.

2. According to Esther 1:2–5, and based on what you learned in this session, what do you know about Xerxes? How are you different from him? How might you be similar to him?

3. According to Esther 2:5–10, what do you know about Mordecai and Esther? How are you different from them? How are you similar to them?

4. Why do you think God allowed flawed characters like Xerxes, Mordecai, and Esther to be in the Bible? What does this say about God and how he feels about you?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word. I know that every story in this book has a purpose. When I read about Mordecai, Esther, and Xerxes, I find hope in the fact that you can use anyone, no matter his or her own shortcomings. This gives me hope that you can use me too. I am flawed. I am a sinner in need of grace. But in Christ, I have that grace. And in Christ, I can be used for a greater purpose. Thank you, Lord, for making this possible.*

DAY 3: HIDDEN IDENTITY

Esther and Mordecai had chosen to create a world of hidden identity. They were now several generations removed from the first Jerusalem exiles, so it's fair to say they had at least partly forgotten their roots. Of course, while it's easy to judge them for hiding the fact they were members of God's chosen people, it can be just as easy for us to deny our own upbringing, family, or faith. If something threatens our ability to belong, we tend to compromise. It's instinctual . . . but it isn't holy. God called the Israelites to be set apart, and he has called us to be set apart in Christ. Keep this in mind as you read the following passages.

¹ *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:1–5).*

¹³ *Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13–16).*

1. Why do you think the desire to fit in with others is so strong?

2. How does Paul describe in Ephesians 2:1–5 your way of life before you met Christ?

3. Peter urges you in 1 Peter 1:13–16 not to conform to the “evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.” What are some ways that you have seen God transform your life and move you toward his holiness? How has this work he has done helped you not to compromise your values or fall into the trap of conforming to the world’s standards?

4. In what areas of your life do you struggle with conforming? How do these verses encourage you to ground yourself in Christ rather than feel the need to conform?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me not to conform to the ways of this world. Renew my mind so that I may be transformed and know what is your good, pleasing, and perfect will. I was once dead in my sins and transgressions and satisfied the desires of my flesh, but you met me in that moment. You did not bestow wrath on me, because you are rich in mercy. Now I am dead to my transgressions and alive in Christ! I am so grateful for the work you have done within me.*

DAY 4: MADE FOR THIS MOMENT

It likely was difficult for Esther to believe there was a greater purpose for her becoming queen. For all she knew at this point, she had simply won a beauty contest. She didn’t know

that she had been made for such a moment as this. (She will shortly!) In the same way, it can hard for us to believe that we've been made for this particular time in our lives—that we've been placed here in this moment by God. Perhaps life feels like winter to us. It's difficult and dreary. Or maybe it's simply boring and mundane, and a sense of godly purpose is far from our everyday lives. But God has created each of us to live for such a time as this, as the following passage relates.

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . ⁹ you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:4–5, 9–10).

1. Do you ever doubt if there is a greater purpose for your life? Why or why not?

2. What words does Peter use in this passage to describe God's people?

3. What have you been chosen for collectively as a follower of Christ?

4. Is it easy or difficult for you to believe that you are “chosen,” a part of a “royal priesthood,” and “God’s special possession”? Explain your response.

Prayer: *God, I know you have chosen me as your child. Because of your mercy, you have made me holy, even though I am not deserving of holiness. I confess it is hard for me to accept your mercy and your love. I feel as if I need to earn it . . . yet I know I fall short. Help me to believe in today’s passage. Help me to embrace and accept your mercy and love so I can live as if I am truly your special possession, treasured by you, full of your grace. Help me to believe this about myself so I can extend this same grace and mercy to others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

For next week, read chapters 4–5 from *You Were Made for This Moment*. Use the space below to note any key points or questions that you want to share at your next group meeting.