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THE BOOK OF ESTHER

AN EXCERPT FROM THE
COURAGE FOR LIFE™

Study Bible
FOR WOMEN




new living
TRANSLATION.

This is a presentation of the Old Testament book of Esther from the *Courage For Life Study Bible for Women*, together with an introduction to this Bible.

Courage For Life is designed for spiritual transformation and offers a baked-in pathway for growth. With wide margins and a Bible study on every page of Bible text, it is perfect for personal inductive study, for small group use, and even for journaling or note-taking. Through this guided study you'll find yourself growing in your knowledge of God's Word and its transformative power in your life.

The full *Courage For Life Study Bible for Women* (but not this Esther excerpt) is equipped with the Filament Bible app. Filament gives you the ability to go further in your Bible study, with easy access to curated online content that's relevant to what you're reading.

Read more about Filament at filamentbibles.com

The background is an abstract composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes. The top half is dominated by warm, vibrant orange and red tones. The middle section features a bright, almost white glow, suggesting a light source or a break in the clouds. The bottom half transitions into deep, rich blues and teals. Scattered throughout the composition are numerous small, bright yellow dots, which appear to be floating or falling, adding a sense of movement and hope. The overall effect is one of emotional intensity and visual richness.

COURAGE FOR LIFE

THE BOOK OF
ESTHER

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COURAGE FOR LIFE™

Study Bible
FOR WOMEN

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURAGE FOR LIFE STUDY BIBLE FOR WOMEN

The book you are holding in your hands is completely unique and one of the most fascinating books of all time. It's a refuge in troubled times, a storehouse of wise counsel for everyday living, and the greatest source of encouragement, hope, and inspiration you will ever possess. The Bible is actually a library of books—sixty-six in all—written over a span of more than 1,500 years. The authors of these books were historians, poets, farmers, prophets, and preachers who were inspired by God to write down real-life events and eternal truths that continue to challenge and encourage us on our journey with God.

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, starts with an overview of the beginning of the universe, focusing on the creation of our world and of the life that exists here. The last book, Revelation, ends with a vision of a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1).

The Bible is God's story, and along the way it chronicles the lives of those who, like you and me, were on a courageous journey—a walk with the Creator, who seeks to reveal himself to his creation. The lessons God's Word teaches us can be summed up in this way:

- We were made by a loving God who wants us to know him personally.
- We rebelled against God, desiring to go our own way.
- Our rebellion separated us from God and brought us under the penalty of righteous judgment.
- God seeks us out while we are in our rebellious state and calls us to return to him.
- We can be restored to a right relationship with our loving God and receive forgiveness for our sins, the gift of abundant life here on earth, and the blessings of eternal life in heaven—but only if we choose to repent of our sins, believe the Good News about Jesus, trust in him alone for salvation, and make him Lord of our lives.

This restoration with our Creator comes in an amazing way—God showed his great love for us by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to be our sacrificial Savior. This plan is revealed throughout Scripture. The first promise of this restoration can be found in Genesis 3:15, right after the fall of Adam and Eve. The first mention of a sacrifice to cover the effects of sin is six verses later (Gen 3:21). Everywhere we look in Scripture, we see God's redemptive plan in action.

If at some point in your life you realized your need for Jesus and surrendered your life to him, God accepted you as his daughter and now speaks to your heart and soul in response to your commitment to him. When you surrendered to Jesus, he gave you a new heart, one that mirrors his. You then began the courageous journey of faith, which you will be on until you pass from this world and enter the presence of God.

When you believe in Jesus, the Spirit of God resides within you, shaping you into the vessel he desires you to be as a potter shapes a piece of clay (see Isa 29:16; 64:8; Jer 18:2-6 to learn more). Studying the Bible is one way to invite the Holy Spirit to help us know God and to bring us closer to him. This action is a discipline. It does not come naturally or easily. But if you neglect this discipline, you will experience only slow spiritual growth full of roadblocks. However, when you study and gain

an understanding of God’s Word—learning who God is and how he wants you to live your life—you will begin to exchange stagnant, slow-paced spiritual growth for growth that brings glory to God and produces transformation in your life.

As we journey together, discovering God’s truth for ourselves, remember that studying the Bible is different from reading the Bible. Studying means giving greater attention to what you’re reading. In doing so, you’ll discover ancient cultures that will fascinate you, confront ideas that will challenge and transform you, read some of the greatest poetry ever written, and come to know the Creator of the universe up close and personally. You will see just how great God’s love for you truly is. Studying the Bible will usher you into the adventure of a lifetime, and your submission to its truth will change your life forever.

But Bible study is not just for your own moral and spiritual development, as important as that is. Jesus told his disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone” (Mark 16:15). To obey this command, you must be prepared. And Bible study is one of the primary ways you can ready yourself to share God’s truth with others. The apostle Paul tells us, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives” (2 Tim 3:16).

The Need for Courage

So now you realize that studying the Bible is essential to having a thriving relationship with your loving God. But where does courage fit into the equation? Why would you need to be courageous to learn what God wants to say to you through the Scriptures?

Because God’s Word is life-changing, you will most certainly encounter resistance as you study the Bible and apply its truth to your life. Therefore, you will need to embrace your God-given courage during the process.

According to the author of the book of Hebrews, “our God is a devouring fire” (Heb 12:29), a jealous God who calls everyone to worship him and him alone. And though God told Moses on Mount Sinai, “No one may see me and live” (Exod 33:20), he lovingly invites all people to enter an intimate relationship with him through his Son, Jesus, and to grow in their relationship with him by studying his Word. Therefore, we need great courage to come before God and meet him face-to-face in the Bible. Thankfully, Jesus allows us to enter God’s presence, and the Holy Spirit is our guide.

One of the primary reasons we need courage is that the Bible functions as a mirror to our hearts and souls. When we read God’s Word, we see our real selves, without all our masks and pretenses—a sight that, if we’re honest, can be somewhat startling at times. It takes courage to face our true selves, yet this is a vital step toward fully embracing the abundant life God has planned for us.

The NT book of James clearly articulates this truth: “For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it” (Jas 1:23-25).

You need courage to face the person the Bible reveals you to be. It takes courage to embrace the transformative process to become the person God created you to be. It will take courage to *do* what the Word says instead of merely *hearing* it. And without taking these courageous steps, you will never fully experience the abundant blessings God so graciously has in store for you. But first, let’s learn what I believe to be the best method of studying the Bible.

The Inductive Bible Study Method

I believe the best way to study the Bible is *inductively*. Studying inductively simply means asking investigative questions of the text to discover its intended meaning. When you approach God’s Word inductively, you begin with the Bible text, apply established Bible study steps, and discover truths that can either confirm or change the way you think. In other words, you begin with God’s Word and learn the truth communicated there. Then you can apply God’s truth to what you are experiencing—not the other way around.

It’s all about asking the right questions.

When you ask questions of each verse of Scripture (such as “Whom was the message originally delivered to?” “When was the message first given?” or “What did the message mean to its original audience?”), you begin to put the verse in its proper context and prepare yourself to discover a more accurate understanding of God’s intended meaning.

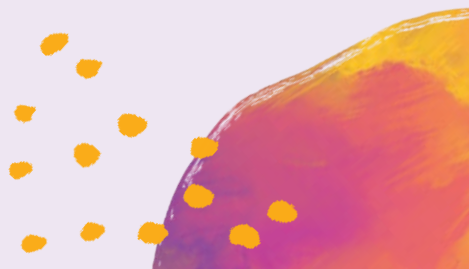
Four Basic Bible Study Steps

Four basic steps allow you to study the Bible inductively so you can accurately interpret and apply God’s Word. These four basic steps are important for studying Scripture with courage and confidence. In time, these steps will become as natural to you as breathing. Just remember P-O-I-A:

1. **Pray:** As you approach God’s Word, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth.
2. **Observe:** Ask, “What does the Bible text say?”
3. **Interpret:** Ask, “What does the Bible text mean?”
4. **Apply:** Ask, “As I reflect on what I’ve read in God’s Word, what do I need to do?”

As Christ’s disciple, you should include these steps in your daily reading habits. And as you put these Bible study steps into practice, God will transform you into the image of Christ, our King.

In this study Bible, I want you to focus on individuals and events that demonstrate courage in action. To that end, you will encounter practical teaching about courage on each page as you read through the books of the Bible. Make it your practice to read through each book as you would any other book—straight through and in large chunks, rather than reading verses at random. When you are studying the Bible, I recommend that you commit to focusing on one book at a time. Keep in mind that the authors recorded what God revealed to them, so you are entering a specific point within God’s story each time you open God’s Word. Fun fact: Chapter and verse numbers were not added to the Bible until hundreds of years after the books were written. Although they weren’t in the original manuscripts, these numbers do serve as helpful tools for locating specific content.



HOW TO USE THE *COURAGE FOR LIFE STUDY BIBLE FOR WOMEN*

I wrote the feature content of this Bible—the section and book introductions, the Listen to the Word statements, the Courageous Women of Faith profiles, and the inductive Bible studies—to provide you with practical guidance as you pray, observe, interpret, and apply (P-O-I-A) God’s Word.



INTRODUCTIONS

At the beginning of both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT), you will discover informative introductions that give you a basic understanding of each and help you see how each collection of books reveals God’s great love and faithfulness. At the beginning of each Bible book, you will find introductions that answer six important questions: Who is the author? Who is the audience? When was it written? Where did the events take place? What was happening? Why was it written? and How should we read this book? These questions will help you put each book in its proper historical and literary context.



LISTEN TO THE WORD

In the top right-hand corner of many pages, you will find a Listen to the Word feature that encourages you to listen to the Courage For Life audio Bible and replace the lies that this world wants you to believe with truths from God’s Word. The Courage For Life audio Bible can be accessed by scanning the Filament icon at the top of each page. See the instructions on page A9 to begin using Filament today!



COURAGEOUS WOMEN OF FAITH

Throughout this Bible, you will find eighty-two inspiring features about courageous women of faith. These are the stories of women who appear in the Bible, women of previous historical periods, and women of the twenty-first century. You might discover that you have different beliefs or opinions from some of the women in these features. That’s okay—so do I! Every woman remains a work in progress on this side of eternity, with blind spots and shortcomings alongside her strengths and successes. No matter what we may agree or disagree on, the lives and testimonies of these eighty-two women have inspired me to embrace an unshakable and fearless faith in God. I pray that their testimonies will also ignite within you a courageous faith that boldly pursues the abundant life God desires for you.



BIBLE STUDIES

At the bottom of each Scripture page, you will find a study that guides you through the four basic steps of inductive Bible study—Pray, Observe, Interpret, and Apply (P-O-I-A)—and encourages you to apply God’s truth to your life. As you begin each study, you will encounter a prayer that begins with “Abba Father.” I encourage you to read the prayer aloud as you prepare to do each study.

The term “Abba Father” is significant because it is a term of endearment that expresses deep affection and confidence in God, who is a loving, protective, and trustworthy Father who will be with us forever. It is an Aramaic term used to address one’s earthly father, and it overflows with the intimacy and warmth of a happy relationship between father and child. I chose to begin each prayer with “Abba Father” in response to a powerful testimony from a dear friend of one of our editors. She had been deeply wounded by a broken relationship with her earthly father, and she found it difficult to trust God as her heavenly Father. As she discovered this very personal name, Abba, that Jesus used to address our heavenly Father as he prayed just before dying on the cross (Mark 14:36; see also Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), she began to sense the depth of God’s love for her. When she added this term to her prayers, she started to feel the goodness and trustworthiness of her heavenly Father. While the scars from her human father ran deep, the healing power of her heavenly Father completely covered each wound. She began her prayers in this way to communicate her deep devotion and gratitude for her loving Creator and Redeemer.

In honor of God’s character and the testimony of courageous faith from the friend of our editor, I have provided these opening prayers as a way for you to confidently call upon God as you study and apply his Word.

Before you begin studying the Bible, I want to share with you a little about the ministry of Courage For Life and how the Seven Steps to COURAGE that you will encounter throughout this Bible came into being.

About Courage For Life

I founded Courage For Life in 2014 to provide resources that help individuals strengthen their relationship with the Lord and embrace their God-given courage for life. My greatest desire is to see everyone experience the life God intended for them. Therefore, our vision is to multiply those who live courageously and inspire them to pass it on to others who will also embrace their God-given Courage For Life!

At Courage For Life, we believe Jesus transforms lives and that anyone can discover the truth about life, love, themselves, others, and God through the study and application of Scripture. We accept that the Bible reveals truth, making God’s Word a source of authority for our lives and a unique resource for all individuals to know God and receive courage from him.

We recognize that God gives courage by strengthening individuals with the truth of his Word and that he empowers them by the work of the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge that we are all stewards of our God-given courage. It is our responsibility to offer our abilities, personalities, responsibilities, resources, giftedness, training, relationships, and experiences—in other words, our entire lives—back to God for his purposes. Therefore, I, the Courage For Life team and board, and our many volunteers and supporters desire to show all people that they not only have value but also can discover truth, experience life transformation, and embrace their God-given courage while stewarding these assets for God’s glory.

About the Seven Steps to COURAGE

On June 19, 2012, I began a journey with God that ultimately led me to create the Seven Steps to COURAGE. With the help of my life coach and spiritual mentor, Robbie Goss, I set aside my fears and embraced my God-given courage. Through proven techniques and exercises, I learned how to act more than react, experience the power of making fearless decisions, and find joy in the journey of healthy choices.

The Seven Steps to COURAGE are grounded in biblical principles. When we faithfully implement these life-changing steps, the exercise produces amazing results. Each step strengthens our courage muscles and, ultimately, brings us into a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. And it’s this relationship, above all others, that enables us to walk with courage, live in grace, and find true joy in the miraculous journey of life. To learn more about Courage For Life and the Seven Steps to COURAGE, check out the book *Courage For Life* by Ann White.



seven steps to **COURAGE**

NOTE: THE STUDY AT THE BOTTOM OF EVERY BIBLE PAGE GUIDES YOU TO APPLY TWO OF THESE STEPS TO COURAGE IN RESPONSE TO THE READING.

Get ready to unpack the Seven Steps to **COURAGE** you will find throughout this study Bible as you read, study, and apply God's Word to your life!

The Seven Steps to **COURAGE**

- C COMMIT** to Change
- O OVERCOME** Obstacles
- U UNCOVER** Your True Self
- R REPLACE** Worldly Lies with Scriptural Truth
- A ACCEPT** the Things You Cannot Change
- G GRASP** God's Love for You
- E EMBRACE** a Life of Grace

Together, let's begin the journey of a lifetime—the journey to a more confident, courageous, faith-filled you!



The King's Banquet

1 These events happened in the days of King Xerxes,* who reigned over 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia.* ²At that time Xerxes ruled his empire from his royal throne at the fortress of Susa. ³In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. He invited all the military officers of Persia and Media as well as the princes and nobles of the provinces. ⁴The celebration lasted 180 days—a tremendous display of the opulent wealth of his empire and the pomp and splendor of his majesty.

⁵When it was all over, the king gave a banquet for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were in the fortress of Susa. It lasted for seven days and was held in the courtyard of the palace garden. ⁶The courtyard was beautifully decorated with white cotton curtains and blue hangings, which were fastened with white linen cords and purple ribbons to silver rings embedded in marble pillars. Gold and silver couches stood on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other costly stones.

⁷Drinks were served in gold goblets of many designs, and there was an abundance of royal wine, reflecting the king's generosity. ⁸By edict of the king, no limits were placed on the drinking, for the king had instructed all his palace officials to serve each man as much as he wanted.

⁹At the same time, Queen Vashti gave a

banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

Queen Vashti Deposed

¹⁰On the seventh day of the feast, when King Xerxes was in high spirits because of the wine, he told the seven eunuchs who attended him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas—¹¹to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman. ¹²But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.

¹³He immediately consulted with his wise advisers, who knew all the Persian laws and customs, for he always asked their advice. ¹⁴The names of these men were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan—seven nobles of Persia and Media. They met with the king regularly and held the highest positions in the empire.

¹⁵“What must be done to Queen Vashti?” the king demanded. “What penalty does the law provide for a queen who refuses to obey the king's orders, properly sent through his eunuchs?”

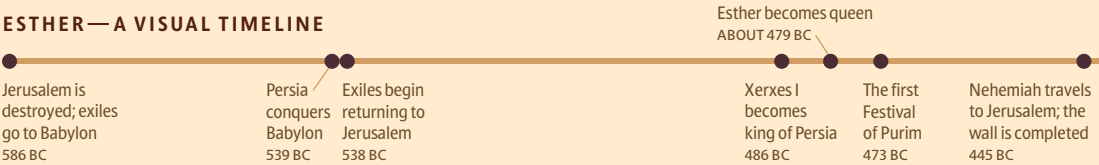
¹⁶Memucan answered the king and his nobles, “Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also every noble and citizen throughout your empire. ¹⁷Women everywhere will begin to despise their

listen to the Word

Listen to Esther 2, and reject the worldly lie that you should turn down opportunities unless you believe you are completely qualified to accomplish them. Replace it with the truth that God is the one who qualifies you. So when God presents you with an opportunity, you can have the courage to confidently say yes (see also Ps 139:13-16; Heb 13:21).

1:1a Hebrew *Ahasuerus*, another name for Xerxes; also throughout the book of Esther. Xerxes reigned 486–465 B.C.
1:1b Hebrew to *Cush*.

ESTHER — A VISUAL TIMELINE



your decisions matter 1:1-15

PRAY • Abba Father, you are all-knowing. Give me wisdom to make decisions that please you.

OBSERVE • King Xerxes gave an extravagant banquet for all the people. On the seventh day of the feast, Xerxes told the eunuchs to bring Queen Vashti to him so he could show her off to his nobles. But Vashti refused the request. Xerxes then asked his wise advisers what they thought her punishment should be for disobeying the king's orders.

INTERPRET • It is unclear whether Queen Vashti's actions were rebellious or right, good or bad. Nevertheless, her decision not to appear before the king had long-term consequences. Like Vashti, how often do we experience unforeseen consequences for our decisions? We must continually seek the Lord and ask him for wisdom to discern the right way to go (Jas 1:5). We should always remember to pray before we act.

APPLY • *Uncover your true self:* Do you pray before making decisions (Esth 1:12)? Journal a prayer asking God for wisdom regarding a decision you need to make. • *Commit to change:* Read James 1:5. In the margin, make a commitment to pray about each decision before taking action.

What other *COURAGE* steps will help you to make wise decisions that please the Lord?

husbands when they learn that Queen Vashti has refused to appear before the king. ¹⁸Before this day is out, the wives of all the king's nobles throughout Persia and Media will hear what the queen did and will start treating their husbands the same way. There will be no end to their contempt and anger.

¹⁹"So if it please the king, we suggest that you issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that the king should choose another queen more worthy than she. ²⁰When this decree is published throughout the king's vast empire, husbands everywhere, whatever their rank, will receive proper respect from their wives!"

²¹The king and his nobles thought this made good sense, so he followed Memucan's counsel. ²²He sent letters to all parts of the empire, to each province in its own script and language, proclaiming that every man should be the ruler of his own home and should say whatever he pleases.*

Esther Becomes Queen

2 But after Xerxes' anger had subsided, he began thinking about Vashti and what she had done and the decree he had made. ²So his personal attendants suggested, "Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king. ³Let the king appoint agents in each province to bring these beautiful young women into the royal harem at the fortress of Susa. Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, will see that they are all given beauty treatments. ⁴After that, the young woman who most pleases the king will be made queen instead of Vashti."

1:22 Or *and should speak in the language of his own people.* of Jehoiachin.

This advice was very appealing to the king, so he put the plan into effect.

⁵At that time there was a Jewish man in the fortress of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendant of Kish and Shimei. ⁶His family* had been among those who, with King Jehoiachin* of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. ⁷This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter.

⁸As a result of the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa and placed in Hegai's care. ⁹Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

¹⁰Esther had not told anyone of her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had directed her not to do so. ¹¹Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her.

¹²Before each young woman was taken to the king's bed, she was given the prescribed twelve months of beauty treatments—six months with oil of myrrh, followed by six months with special perfumes and ointments. ¹³When it was time for her to go to the king's palace, she was given her choice of whatever clothing or jewelry she wanted to take from the harem. ¹⁴That evening she was taken to

2:6a Hebrew *He*. 2:6b Hebrew *Jecooniah*, a variant spelling of Jehoiachin.

God works in mysterious ways 1:16–2:9

PRAY • Abba Father, you work in mysterious ways. Please help me to trust that your ways are best.

OBSERVE • King Xerxes followed the nobles' advice and banished Queen Vashti because she had refused his request to appear before him. Later, Xerxes regretted his decree, and the nobles advised him to search the kingdom for beautiful virgins. The king would choose a new queen from those young women. As a result of the king's search, Esther, a Jewish orphan, was brought to the king's harem.

INTERPRET • God is always working to fulfill his plans and purposes. God was working behind the scenes through the imperfect decisions of Xerxes and his nobles to accomplish his perfect plan. God's ways are often mysterious. While we may never understand them, we can trust that he will work things out for our good and his glory (Rom 8:28-29). But we must always remember that he will do this according to his timetable, not ours.

APPLY • *Accept the things you cannot change:* You may not be able to change your circumstances (Esth 2:8). How will you show your confidence that God will work all things together for good? • *Overcome obstacles:* Read Romans 8:28-29. What worries hinder you from trusting that God is at work? Journal a prayer giving your worries to him.

How does knowing that God is working behind the scenes fill your heart with **COURAGE**?

Esther

TRUST GOD AND LIVE COURAGEOUSLY

Esther enters the biblical narrative about one hundred years after the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon as a punishment for their continual rejection of God. But before Esther was born, the Persian Empire had conquered the Babylonian Empire, and God had raised up a Persian king who gave the Jews freedom to return to their homeland. However, many Jewish families chose to remain in Persia. Esther's family was one of them.

Esther, an orphan, was raised by her cousin Mordecai in the Persian city of Susa during the rule of King Xerxes. After Queen Vashti was deposed, King Xerxes issued a decree forcing many beautiful virgin girls to become part of his harem. Esther was one of those girls, but Mordecai asked her not to reveal her Jewish ancestry. God's favor was on Esther, and she was later chosen by King Xerxes to become his next queen.

Esther was a wise and courageous queen. After her coronation, she won Xerxes's confidence by informing him of an assassination plot and gave the credit to Mordecai. But shortly thereafter, one of the king's chief advisers, Haman, let his personal hatred of Mordecai inspire a murderous plot to destroy all the Jews.

When Mordecai and the Jewish community learned of their impending destruction, they mourned. At Mordecai's insistence, Esther agreed to approach the king, reveal her Jewish identity, and beg for their lives. The Jews in Susa fasted and prayed for Esther, knowing that approaching the king uninvited could result in her death. In response to Esther's courage, God turned Haman's evil plans back onto him. In an ironic twist, Haman was executed instead of Mordecai, and the day the Jews were supposed to be annihilated became a day of celebration for them.

Courage is not the absence of fear or difficulty; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Courage is being willing to pursue God-given opportunities despite your fears or the difficulty of your circumstances. Esther had a choice: trust God and have the courage to reveal her Jewish identity to the king, or allow her fears to dictate her actions. She chose wisely.

Will you stop making fear-based decisions and live courageously by trusting God? What opportunities has God placed before you that require you to trust him to work on your behalf?

Esther's courageous story can be found in the book of Esther.

the king's private rooms, and the next morning she was brought to the second harem,* where the king's wives lived. There she would be under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would never go to the king again unless he had especially enjoyed her and requested her by name.

¹⁵Esther was the daughter of Abihail, who was Mordecai's uncle. (Mordecai had adopted his younger cousin Esther.) When it was Esther's turn to go to the king, she accepted the advice of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. She asked for nothing except what he suggested, and she was admired by everyone who saw her.

¹⁶Esther was taken to King Xerxes at the royal palace in early winter* of the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷And the king loved Esther more than any of the other young women. He was so delighted with her that he set the royal crown on her head and declared her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone.

¹⁹Even after all the young women had been transferred to the second harem* and Mordecai had become a palace official,* ²⁰Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home.

Mordecai's Loyalty to the King

²¹One day as Mordecai was on duty at the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs,

Bigthana* and Teresh—who were guards at the door of the king's private quarters—became angry at King Xerxes and plotted to assassinate him. ²²But Mordecai heard about the plot and gave the information to Queen Esther. She then told the king about it and gave Mordecai credit for the report. ²³When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was all recorded in *The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign*.

Haman's Plot against the Jews

3 Some time later King Xerxes promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. ²All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect.

³Then the palace officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" ⁴They spoke to him day after day, but still he refused to comply with the order. So they spoke to Haman about this to see if he would tolerate Mordecai's conduct, since Mordecai had told them he was a Jew.

⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage. ⁶He had learned of Mordecai's nationality, so he decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the entire empire of Xerxes.

⁷So in the month of April,* during the

2:14 Or to another part of the harem. 2:16 Hebrew in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth. A number of dates in the book of Esther can be cross-checked with dates in surviving Persian records and related accurately to our modern calendar. This month of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar occurred within the months of December 479 B.C. and January 478 B.C. 2:19a The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. 2:19b Hebrew and Mordecai was sitting in the gate of the king. 2:21 Hebrew Bigthan, compare 6:2. 3:7a Hebrew in the first month, the month of Nisan. This month of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar occurred within the months of April and May 474 B.C.; also see note on 2:16.

faithfulness in persecution 3:1-7

PRAY • Abba Father, you are the one true God. Help me to live faithfully for you despite persecution.

OBSERVE • Xerxes promoted Haman over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. By the king's order, all the officials bowed before Haman to show respect, but Mordecai refused. When Mordecai continued this noncompliance, Haman became very angry. Because he knew Mordecai was a Jew, Haman decided to retaliate by destroying all the Jews in the empire.

INTERPRET • As an Agagite (3:1), Haman was likely a descendant of ancient enemies of the Jews (see 1 Sam 15:7-8, 32-33). This and the fact that Jews bowed in worship only to God (Dan 3) are likely reasons that Mordecai would not bow to Haman. By refusing to do so, Mordecai risked his position and his life. But he would not compromise his faith. Despite the risk of persecution, we are called to live faithfully for Jesus and rejoice in the privilege of suffering for him (1 Pet 4:12-14).

APPLY • *Accept the things you cannot change:* You cannot change the actions of others. Journal how you will choose to live faithfully for the Lord no matter what others say or do (Esth 3:5). • *Commit to change:* Read 1 Peter 4:12-19, and journal your commitment to live boldly for Jesus despite the risk of persecution.

Describe how Mordecai's example gives you **COURAGE** to live boldly for Christ.

⁸Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. ⁹So Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai's message.

¹⁰Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: ¹¹"All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days." ¹²So Hathach* gave Esther's message to Mordecai.

¹³Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. ¹⁴If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

¹⁵Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶"Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." ¹⁷So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther's Request to the King

5 On the third day of the fast, Esther put on her royal robes and entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance. ²When he saw Queen Esther standing

there in the inner court, he welcomed her and held out the gold scepter to her. So Esther approached and touched the end of the scepter.

³Then the king asked her, "What do you want, Queen Esther? What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"

⁴And Esther replied, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet I have prepared for the king."

⁵The king turned to his attendants and said, "Tell Haman to come quickly to a banquet, as Esther has requested." So the king and Haman went to Esther's banquet.

⁶And while they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "Now tell me what you really want. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"

⁷Esther replied, "This is my request and deepest wish. ⁸If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request and do what I ask, please come with Haman tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for you. Then I will explain what this is all about."

Haman's Plan to Kill Mordecai

⁹Haman was a happy man as he left the banquet! But when he saw Mordecai sitting at the palace gate, not standing up or trembling nervously before him, Haman became furious. ¹⁰However, he restrained himself and went on home.

Then Haman gathered together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, ¹¹and boasted to them about his great wealth and his many children. He bragged about the honors the king had given him and how he had been promoted over all the other nobles and officials.

¹²Then Haman added, "And that's not

4:12 As in Greek version; Hebrew reads *they*.

for such a time as this 4:1-17

PRAY • Abba Father, your ways are best. Give me the courage to put your will and purposes above my own.

OBSERVE • Mordecai gave Hathach, Queen Esther's attendant, a copy of the decree that called for the death of the Jews and asked him to tell Esther to beg the king for mercy on behalf of her people. Esther hesitated, since the king had not summoned her and could put her to death for approaching him uninvited. But Mordecai challenged her, saying that perhaps she was made queen "for just such a time as this" (4:14).

INTERPRET • Mordecai realized that God might have put Esther in her royal position to thwart the plans of Haman. In the same way, God has placed each of us in our jobs, families, and communities to fulfill his purposes. Nothing about our lives or circumstances is random. We have a gospel assignment (Matt 28:18-20). Let's make sure we surrender our lives each day to God's purposes so we don't miss it.

APPLY • *Commit to change:*

What is God calling you to do in your current situation (Esth 4:14)? Journal a prayer of surrender to the Lord, and commit to doing what he calls you to do. • **Overcome obstacles:** In the margin, list the fears that hinder you from surrendering to God's will for your life (4:16). How will you overcome them?

As you seek God's will, what other **COURAGE** steps will you take?

all! Queen Esther invited only me and the king himself to the banquet she prepared for us. And she has invited me to dine with her and the king again tomorrow!"¹³ Then he added, "But this is all worth nothing as long as I see Mordecai the Jew just sitting there at the palace gate."

¹⁴So Haman's wife, Zeresh, and all his friends suggested, "Set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet* tall, and in the morning ask the king to impale Mordecai on it. When this is done, you can go on your merry way to the banquet with the king." This pleased Haman, and he ordered the pole set up.

The King Honors Mordecai

6 That night the king had trouble sleeping, so he ordered an attendant to bring the book of the history of his reign so it could be read to him.² In those records he discovered an account of how Mordecai had exposed the plot of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the eunuchs who guarded the door to the king's private quarters. They had plotted to assassinate King Xerxes.

³"What reward or recognition did we ever give Mordecai for this?" the king asked.

His attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him."

⁴"Who is that in the outer court?" the king inquired. As it happened, Haman had just arrived in the outer court of the palace to ask the king to impale Mordecai on the pole he had prepared.

⁵So the attendants replied to the king, "Haman is out in the court."

"Bring him in," the king ordered. "So Haman came in, and the king said, "What should I do to honor a man who truly pleases me?"

Haman thought to himself, "Whom

would the king wish to honor more than me?"⁷ So he replied, "If the king wishes to honor someone,⁸ he should bring out one of the king's own royal robes, as well as a horse that the king himself has ridden—one with a royal emblem on its head.⁹ Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. And let him see that the man whom the king wishes to honor is dressed in the king's robes and led through the city square on the king's horse. Have the official shout as they go, 'This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!'"

¹⁰"Excellent!" the king said to Haman. "Quick! Take the robes and my horse, and do just as you have said for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the gate of the palace. Leave out nothing you have suggested!"

¹¹So Haman took the robes and put them on Mordecai, placed him on the king's own horse, and led him through the city square, shouting, "This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!"¹² Afterward Mordecai returned to the palace gate, but Haman hurried home dejected and completely humiliated.

¹³When Haman told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends what had happened, his wise advisers and his wife said, "Since Mordecai—this man who has humiliated you—is of Jewish birth, you will never succeed in your plans against him. It will be fatal to continue opposing him."

¹⁴While they were still talking, the king's eunuchs arrived and quickly took Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

The King Executes Haman

7 So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet.² On this second occasion, while they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther,

listen to the Word

Listen to Esther 5, and reject the worldly lie that it is acceptable to harbor bitterness or react with anger toward difficult people. Replace it with the truth that when you deal with difficult people, you should ask God to open their hearts to him and to you (see also Prov 16:7; 21:1; Heb 12:15).

5:14 Hebrew 50 cubits [23 meters].

the ruler of history 6:1-14

PRAY • Abba Father, you rule and reign over the earth. I surrender my life to you, trusting that you are in control.

OBSERVE • While Haman was plotting Mordecai's execution, King Xerxes was having trouble sleeping and asked for the history of his reign to be read to him. As his attendant read the records, Xerxes discovered that Mordecai had exposed an assassination plot but had not been honored or rewarded. In an epic plot twist, Xerxes ordered Haman to put royal robes on Mordecai and lead him through the city square.

INTERPRET • In the ordinary events of life—even a king's sleepless night—God accomplishes his purposes. Regardless of how difficult our circumstances appear or how out of control the actions of our government may seem, our God rules and reigns over the large and small affairs of earth. When we are tempted to worry, let's instead worship and trust our divine King, knowing that he is in control.

APPLY • *Uncover your true self:* Do you worry about your circumstances or distrust God's sovereignty over your life (6:1)? Journal a prayer surrendering your situation to the Lord. • *Overcome obstacles:* Read Psalm 23. In the margin, list the fears that keep you from trusting God, and describe how you will overcome them. Name additional *COURAGE* steps you will take as you seek to trust the Lord.

“Tell me what you want, Queen Esther. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!”

³Queen Esther replied, “If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, I ask that my life and the lives of my people will be spared. ⁴For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I could remain quiet, for that would be too trivial a matter to warrant disturbing the king.”

⁵“Who would do such a thing?” King Xerxes demanded. “Who would be so presumptuous as to touch you?”

⁶Esther replied, “This wicked Haman is our adversary and our enemy.” Haman grew pale with fright before the king and queen. ⁷Then the king jumped to his feet in a rage and went out into the palace garden.

Haman, however, stayed behind to plead for his life with Queen Esther, for he knew that the king intended to kill him. ⁸In despair he fell on the couch where Queen Esther was reclining, just as the king was returning from the palace garden.

The king exclaimed, “Will he even assault the queen right here in the palace, before my very eyes?” And as soon as the king spoke, his attendants covered Haman’s face, signaling his doom.

⁹Then Harbona, one of the king’s eunuchs, said, “Haman has set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet* tall in his own courtyard. He intended to use it to impale Mordecai, the man who saved the king from assassination.”

“Then impale Haman on it!” the king ordered. ¹⁰So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai, and the king’s anger subsided.

7:9 Hebrew 50 cubits [23 meters]. 8:9a Hebrew on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan, of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar. This day was June 25, 474 B.C.; also see note on 2:16.

A Decree to Help the Jews

8 On that same day King Xerxes gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Then Mordecai was brought before the king, for Esther had told the king how they were related. ²The king took off his signet ring—which he had taken back from Haman—and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed Mordecai to be in charge of Haman’s property.

³Then Esther went again before the king, falling down at his feet and begging him with tears to stop the evil plot devised by Haman the Agagite against the Jews. ⁴Again the king held out the gold scepter to Esther. So she rose and stood before him.

⁵Esther said, “If it please the king, and if I have found favor with him, and if he thinks it is right, and if I am pleasing to him, let there be a decree that reverses the orders of Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, who ordered that Jews throughout all the king’s provinces should be destroyed. ⁶For how can I endure to see my people and my family slaughtered and destroyed?”

⁷Then King Xerxes said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, “I have given Esther the property of Haman, and he has been impaled on a pole because he tried to destroy the Jews. ⁸Now go ahead and send a message to the Jews in the king’s name, telling them whatever you want, and seal it with the king’s signet ring. But remember that whatever has already been written in the king’s name and sealed with his signet ring can never be revoked.”

⁹So on June 25* the king’s secretaries were summoned, and a decree was written exactly as Mordecai dictated. It was sent to the Jews and to the highest officers,

worth the risk 7:1-10

PRAY • Abba Father, you are sovereign over life and death. Give me the courage to obey you no matter the cost.

OBSERVE • While King Xerxes and Haman were at Queen Esther’s second banquet, Esther revealed that her life and the lives of her people were in danger and begged to be spared. Xerxes demanded to know who was responsible, and Esther told him that Haman was behind the plot. The king then ordered Haman’s execution.

INTERPRET • When Queen Esther asked for the lives of her people to be spared, she did not know how King Xerxes would react or whether he would value Haman’s life over her own. Given Queen Vashti’s fate, Esther may have wondered what the consequences would be for her boldness. Yet she determined that doing what was right was worth the risk, no matter the cost. While following Jesus can come at a high cost, living for him is always worth it.

APPLY • *Uncover your true self:* Are you willing to risk losing your job, your friendships, or even your life to follow the Lord and do what pleases him (7:3)? Ask God to give you courage to live for him. • *Grasp God’s love for you:* Read Isaiah 53:5, and journal how Jesus’ willingness to give up his life for you inspires you to take risks for him.

List other *COURAGE* steps you will take no matter the cost.

Queen Elizabeth II

A COMMITMENT TO SELFLESS SERVICE

Queen Elizabeth II was born on April 21, 1926. She joined public service at the age of fourteen and married Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at the age of twenty-one. In a 1947 radio broadcast, given on her twenty-first birthday, Elizabeth pledged to all the people of the British Commonwealth that she would devote her entire life to serving her people—regardless of how long or short her life would be. She famously ended the address by asking God to help her keep her vow.

In February 1952, Elizabeth's father, King George VI, died. She immediately became queen, assuming the throne at the age of twenty-five. In her first Christmas broadcast as queen, Elizabeth asked her people to pray for her, particularly that God would give her wisdom and strength to serve both him and her people faithfully all the days of her life.

Throughout her long reign, Queen Elizabeth II spoke about her personal faith in Christ. She strove to live her life according to the standards of Christ's teachings, knowing that she was accountable to God for the responsibilities he gave her.

Queen Elizabeth II embodied a life of service. She did not live merely to do as she pleased but gave herself wholeheartedly to Christ in a life of selfless service through her role as a global leader (Mark 10:43-45). In God's kindness, he helped the queen keep the vow she made to her people on her twenty-first birthday by empowering her to faithfully reign for an astonishing seventy years—making her the longest-serving female head of state in world history.

If you are a born-again Christ follower, you, like Queen Elizabeth II, belong to God's royal family and are called to embody the virtue of selfless service. Would you consider courageously giving yourself to God to accomplish his purposes in the world? How will you begin living a life of selfless service for God's Kingdom today?

Learn more about Queen Elizabeth II's courageous story in The Faith of Queen Elizabeth: The Poise, Grace, and Quiet Strength behind the Crown by Dudley Delffs.

the governors, and the nobles of all the 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia.* The decree was written in the scripts and languages of all the peoples of the empire, including that of the Jews. ¹⁰The decree was written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with the king's signet ring. Mordecai sent the dispatches by swift messengers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king's service.

¹¹The king's decree gave the Jews in every city authority to unite to defend their lives. They were allowed to kill, slaughter, and annihilate anyone of any nationality or province who might attack them or their children and wives, and to take the property of their enemies. ¹²The day chosen for this event throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes was March 7 of the next year.*

¹³A copy of this decree was to be issued as law in every province and proclaimed to all peoples, so that the Jews would be ready to take revenge on their enemies on the appointed day. ¹⁴So urged on by the king's command, the messengers rode out swiftly on fast horses bred for the king's service. The same decree was also proclaimed in the fortress of Susa.

¹⁵Then Mordecai left the king's presence, wearing the royal robe of blue and white, the great crown of gold, and an outer cloak of fine linen and purple. And the people of Susa celebrated the new decree. ¹⁶The Jews were filled with joy and gladness and were honored everywhere. ¹⁷In every province and city, wherever the king's decree arrived, the Jews rejoiced and had a great celebration and declared a public festival and holiday. And many of the people of the land became Jews them-

selves, for they feared what the Jews might do to them.

The Victory of the Jews

9 So on March 7* the two decrees of the king were put into effect. On that day, the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but quite the opposite happened. It was the Jews who overpowered their enemies. ²The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the king's provinces to attack anyone who tried to harm them. But no one could make a stand against them, for everyone was afraid of them. ³And all the nobles of the provinces, the highest officers, the governors, and the royal officials helped the Jews for fear of Mordecai. ⁴For Mordecai had been promoted in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces as he became more and more powerful.

⁵So the Jews went ahead on the appointed day and struck down their enemies with the sword. They killed and annihilated their enemies and did as they pleased with those who hated them. ⁶In the fortress of Susa itself, the Jews killed 500 men. ⁷They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vairzatha—¹⁰the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not take any plunder.

¹¹That very day, when the king was informed of the number of people killed in the fortress of Susa, ¹²he called for Queen Esther. He said, "The Jews have killed 500 men in the fortress of Susa alone, as well as Haman's ten sons. If they have done that here, what has happened in the rest of the provinces? But now, what more do you want? It will be granted to you; tell me and I will do it."

8:9b Hebrew to Cush. **8:12** Hebrew the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar. The date selected was March 7, 473 B.C.; also see note on 2:16. **9:1** Hebrew on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar. This day was March 7, 473 B.C.; also see note on 2:16.

God is our deliverer 8:1–9:19

PRAY • Abba Father, you are my deliverer. Help me to trust you and not give in to fear and worry.

OBSERVE • Since the king's original decree could not be revoked, a new decree was written to lessen the harm it would do. The second decree permitted the Jewish people to defend themselves and to plunder the property of anyone who attacked them. Swift messengers were sent to inform the Jews of the new decree so they could be ready on the appointed day. On March 7, the Jews overpowered their enemies, and there was a great celebration.

INTERPRET • If Haman's plan had succeeded, the Jews would have been destroyed—and Jesus, our deliverer, might never have been born. But God chose Esther to be queen so that through her he could save his people and accomplish his plan of deliverance. Just as God delivered the Jewish people from total annihilation, there is no sin, situation, or suffering that God cannot deliver us from.

APPLY • *Overcome obstacles:*

In your journal, describe the sins, situations, and suffering you need deliverance from (9:2). Write a prayer asking God to deliver you. • *Grasp God's love for you:* Read Psalm 40:17. In the margin, describe how knowing that God is your deliverer helps you understand his love for you.

What additional **COURAGE** steps will you take because you know that God is your deliverer?

appointed time, decreed by both Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther. (The people decided to observe this festival, just as they had decided for themselves and their descendants to establish the times of fasting and mourning.)³² So the command of Esther confirmed the practices of Purim, and it was all written down in the records.

The Greatness of Xerxes and Mordecai
10 King Xerxes imposed a tribute throughout his empire, even to the

distant coastlands.² His great achievements and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Media and Persia*.³ Mordecai the Jew became the prime minister, with authority next to that of King Xerxes himself. He was very great among the Jews, who held him in high esteem, because he continued to work for the good of his people and to speak up for the welfare of all their descendants.

seek the good of others 10:1-3

PRAY • Abba Father, you have so richly blessed me. Help me to seek the good of others, putting them above myself.

OBSERVE • King Xerxes promoted Mordecai to the office of prime minister, making him the second-highest-ranking person in the Persian Empire. He continued to be a voice for the Jews through his position within the Persian government and was well respected by everyone. Mordecai's achievements were even recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Media and Persia*.

INTERPRET • Mordecai did not boast about himself, as Haman did, but continually looked out for the good of others and was honored as a result. As we work our jobs, take care of our families, and enjoy friendships in our communities, we should be inspired by the example of Mordecai and always seek the good of others. As we read God's Word daily and pray for humility, the Holy Spirit will give us the strength to put others first (Phil 2:3-4).

APPLY • *Uncover your true self*: Do you seek the good of others (Esth 10:3)? Journal a prayer asking God to help you be intentional in looking out for the good of others. • *Overcome obstacles*: Read Philippians 2:3-4. In the margin, describe the attitudes you need to overcome to seek the good of others and put them above yourself.

List other *COURAGE* steps the book of Esther inspires you to take.



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