

Overtured, Week Two: Risky Business

Passage: Esther 2 (NLT)

Big Idea: Stand firm in your faith in God even if it's risky.

Opening Illustration: What's something from this past week that made you feel out of control, was it a project or assignment at school? Is it something at home? How do you react to feeling out of control? If we are angry, then we can lose control and be like this character (show clip). In our anger, we can make hasty decisions and lose control of who we are.

(Leaders, feel free to share an example.)

There are many moments in life that are out of our control. With life changes, difficulties we weren't prepared for, and stressful relationships, we can start to wonder if God is really with us. So how can we stand firm in our faithfulness to God, even when it feels like we're under pressure?

Transition to Esther: We are in week two of our series Overtured: Standing for Justice in an Unjust World. Last week we heard about Vashti in chapter 1 as we began the book of Esther. Now we will look at these two characters: Esther and Mordecai.

Setting of Esther Chapter Two:

- God is still not mentioned in this chapter.
- Four years passed between the end of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2 in the book of Esther.

I. Hasty decisions create a risky environment. (vv. 1-9)

- King Xerxes realized he didn't have a queen anymore, and he hit the panic button.
- Eager to cheer him up, his friends devised a plan to fill his palace with beautiful, young women so the king could choose a new queen.
- Mordecai, a Jewish exile with a family history of hardship and Esther, Mordecai's cousin and adopted daughter.
- Esther didn't have options to escape Xerxes' harem roundup.
- The king's appointed commissioners took Esther from her home and placed her in a contest for the crown.
- Esther won favor with Hegai with the eunuch in charge. Esther was subjected to difficult circumstances, but did not sit idly by; she won favor.

Application Question: When life is out of our control, and you do not know what to do, we react with our emotions. Later on, we regret that hasty decision and have to endure

the consequences from that decision. Also, that hasty decision will affect others, just like it did with Esther.

How can we respond to anger so that we don't make hasty decisions? In a moment, we may react with our emotions and may regret it later. Who do you want your life and decisions to be influenced by?

Transition Statement: Esther's life was out of her control because of a hasty decision from the king. Her life will never be the same. But she chose to stand up for her faith, even though it would be risky.

II. Standing up for your faith is risky. (v. 10-20)

- Mordecai asked Esther to keep her Jewish ethnicity a secret in order to protect her. Mordecai's command was actually wisdom.
- Why did she agree with Mordecai to hide her ethnicity?
- We do not know how Esther felt about this ordeal, but we do know that she had no choice in this.
- Esther ultimately won the king's favor and became queen and another great banquet celebrated the occasion.
- We do not know how Esther felt about this ordeal, but we do know that she had no choice in this.

Application: Esther had to hide her ethnicity which included her faith on the outside. It would have been risky to say that she was actually Jewish. Yet, God still gave her favor among a cruel king and his evil desires. Have you had to hide who you really are?

Discussion Questions: When—if at all—have you been one of the only Christians in your environment? In what ways did your faith make you stand out?

Conclusion: Does standing up for our faith get risky? Yes, it does, even if that means our lives take a drastic change. Esther did suffer while experiencing the Persian lifestyle in order for the king to see her and then ultimately choose her as queen. It does not mean that Esther did not know who she was in God.

Sometimes God redeems our sufferings while we sit in them, and sometimes it happens much later. It is God's nature, though, to redeem. (Colossians 1:19-20) He promises to pick up everything broken and restore it, (Revelation 22:1-5) and He does not simply throw His creation away. (Romans 8:20-21).

Big Idea: Stand firm in our faith in God, even if it's risky.

Optional Series Closing

The book of Esther is largely silent about the morality of her situation in a way that makes readers uncomfortable. Sometimes books in the Bible force us to sit in discomfort and squirm a bit. But Scripture never puts a band-aid over distressing situations. God recorded them for a reason.

Esther, an orphaned Jewish exile, gained a unique position in Persia. Her unlikely rise to influence would be a strategic appointment to save her people. Mordecai retained his Jewish heritage and identity. His love for his people would come back at just the right time to strengthen his faith in those around him, influencing their current circumstances while simultaneously impacting generations to come.

Questions:

1. Turn to the person next to you and retell them the story in your own words.
2. Have you ever been in a situation where you've wondered what the right decision to make is? Who do you want your life and decisions to be influenced by?
3. Esther was the only Jewish person in the king's palace. When, if at all, have you been the only Christian in your environment? In what ways did your faith make you stand out?
4. How can we respond to anger so that we don't make hasty decisions?