

Overtured, Week Four: Own Your Influence

Passage: Esther 4-5:8 (NLT)

SERIES RECAP & INTRO

- Welcome to week four of **OVERTURNED**, our series in the book of Esther! By studying the characters' examples, we are learning how to stand for justice in an unjust world.
- In the first three chapters, we have so far been introduced to **1.)** Susa, our setting, a capital city in the Persian empire, and **2.)** a few main characters: Vashti, the former queen, the King, his new queen Esther, her cousin Mordecai, and **3.)** Haman.
- ***Discussion Question:** Has there been a moment this past week where you needed to make a major decision and you weren't sure what to do? How did you decide?*

BIBLE PASSAGE: ESTHER 4-5:8

- So far in the book of Esther, we haven't seen Esther exercise much power or agency; rather power and agency were taken away from her as she was forced into the king's harem.
- In Esther, we see God behind the scenes beginning to reverse this powerlessness by giving Esther an important choice to make. We also see that Mordecai is not afraid to say the hard things in love and encouragement.
- The book of Esther is teaching us that God's silence is not His absence and it is training us. So while we read, we get a chance to look for God's actions in Esther's life, and then each time we read it, we see God more and more.

I. Let Despair Lead to Discernment (ESTHER 4:1-8)

- As Esther 4 begins, Mordecai is in despair, tearing his clothes, wearing sackcloth, and crying out bitterly because of Haman's planned destruction of the Jews in Persia.
- Mordecai's grief was so great that he refused to be consoled.
- Mordecai's mourning became motivation for him to consider God's plan, seek wise next steps and advocate to help others in a time of crisis.
- Through Esther's servant, Mordecai explains the situation and seeks solutions.
- ***Application:** When we face fear, uncertainty and worry about what may happen,*

sometimes, we, like Esther, need to listen to those older and wiser than us. At times, they are there to encourage us to do the right thing even if it may be difficult.

- ***Discussion Question:** What is a wise piece of advice you have been given by someone who is either older than you, is more mature in their faith, or has lived through more sad situations and has a unique perspective?*

II. Own Your Influence (ESTHER 4:9-17)

- Esther had been in the palace for five years and kept her Jewish identity a secret all that time. Her days were spent with Persian women in a Persian culture. Mordecai asked her to remember her people, but she hardly had contact with any Jews in five years.
- The king has not called her in thirty days, and Persian law indicated that you can not approach the king or you'll be killed. Esther's initial response to Mordecai was concern was for her own life, not for her people.
- Mordecai recognized Esther's fears—but rather than soothe them, he challenged her. Esther was in a dangerous position whether she stood up or not.
- She could ignore the situation and hope it passed over, but Mordecai urged her that keeping her head down would not guarantee her safety. **Not choosing is a choice too.**
- Mordecai encouraged Esther to step into her influence as a queen in Persia.
- Esther's fear pushed her into a time of fasting, a practice that is often associated with prayer and preparation in the Old Testament. She did not rush into her conversation with the king but decided to seek God with the community around her, quite the opposite of King Xerxes' temperament.
- ***Application:** Doing the right thing is not always easy. We are often afraid like Esther to accept the risk of living faithfully. Like Esther, there are times when the question arises, "Will we take action, or stand back and play it safe?" At great risk, Esther decides to become active in her life instead of staying passive. We have that same choice when we see injustice in our lives.*
- ***Discussion Question:** Describe a time you were asked to do something overwhelming (especially something you felt God was calling you to do). Was your initial response to move forward or hold back? Why?*

III. Act with Confidence when the Time is Right (ESTHER 5:1-8)

- After three days of fasting, Esther put on her royal clothes. As she waited outside the king's chambers for the king to notice her, she wanted to make sure he saw Queen Esther.

- Her strategic clothing took full advantage of the position God had put her in. She was right where she was supposed to be—a Jewish advocate in royal robes, a woman who had extraordinary access to the king.
- King Xerxes held out his scepter and made an incredible offer: She could have anything she wanted, up to half the kingdom.
- Instead of asking for the king to save her people right away, she made a different request—two banquets with the king and Haman.
- **Application:** *Despite her fear, she remained faithful when the time came, putting her life on the line for her people. Courage does not mean there is no fear. It means moving forward even when you're afraid, trusting God has positioned you for this moment. For Esther, it was enough to seek God and do the next wise thing by being prepared spiritually, physically, and mentally.*
- **Discussion Question:** *When we are afraid, we often make rushed decisions, but we should seek to be patient and wise, even when we are uncomfortable. What's your plan for making good decisions even when a situation is uncomfortable or awkward?*
- **OUR BIG IDEA:** God invites us to use our influence for His purpose.
- ★ Esther waited on the Lord before getting involved, she counted on the Lord to open doors and His favor. She had great patience as she moved through each step of the process. It takes patience to work successfully through a difficult situation. Esther was building up her courage from the first banquet, and to the second one.
- ★ Esther teaches us how to deal with difficult situations. There will be a time when we have to make a decision to stand. To stand for justice at such a time as this is one of the greatest tests of courage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(If you didn't use the discussion questions during the lesson, you can also use those now.)

- Turn to someone in your small group and summarize what you have heard from the story in your own words.
- What is something that God is highlighting to you and why do you think so?
- What does this passage teach us about who God is? How so?
- What does this passage teach us about people? How so?