

# STAND UP: HOW TO FIGHT INJUSTICE



## ***God chooses to work through ordinary people.***

We live in a world of injustice.

- ▶ Over twenty million people are victims of human trafficking.
- ▶ One in nine people in the world suffer from chronic malnourishment.
- ▶ Racism abounds on all fronts.

We've seen great injustice played out on the world stage, but we also know injustice on a personal level. It's easy to ask: "Where is God in the midst of the injustice I see?"

We may even desire to do something about what we see, but other questions threaten to shut down our best intentions: "Who am I? What could I possibly do to make a difference?"

The Book of Esther gives us insight into these questions. In a time of great injustice against their own Jewish people, Mordecai and Esther rose to the occasion and took a stand. It was potentially a costly stand, but it was the right one. As we look at their lives, we see a model for how we can live for Christ as we stand up for others.

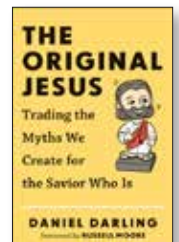
Perhaps you feel the tug on your heart toward the work of justice, but you don't know how you can make a difference. This study will prepare us to first get on our knees in prayer, and then, trusting the hand of God, we can roll up our sleeves and get involved. The same God who worked through Mordecai and Esther is working in the world today, calling ordinary people to an extraordinary mission—His mission.

Let's discover how God is calling us to stand up and work for justice.



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## **Stand Up: How to Fight Injustice**

Session 1 **Be Ready to Stand** *Esther 2:5-10,15-17*

Session 2 **Stand with Conviction** *Esther 2:21-3:6*

Session 3 **Stand Down** *Esther 4:1-3,10-16*

Session 4 **Stand with Humility** *Esther 5:1-14*

Session 5 **Stand Up and Speak** *Esther 7:1-10*

Session 6 **Keep Standing** *Esther 8:1-8; 9:20-22*

# 1

## BE READY TO STAND



*When have you been at just the right place at just the right time?*

**QUESTION #1**

*God is always at work behind the scenes.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

History often turns on seemingly small events.

- ▶ What if Richard Nixon had listened to advisors and rested before his televised debate with John Kennedy in 1960?
- ▶ What if Gerald Ford had not accidentally misstated his response to a foreign policy question in his final debate with Jimmy Carter in 1976?

Our lives also often turn on seemingly small events. A lot of people chalk up these moments to “coincidence,” but could it be more than that? Christians often can look back at certain moments in their lives and see that, although they may not have been aware of it at the time, God had His hand on them and their circumstances.

Esther could attest to that. Esther was a young Jewish girl in a strange land, and God was at work in her life, putting her in the right place at the right time. She may not have been aware of it at the time, but God was working behind the scenes to put her in a place of power and significance.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***Esther 2:5-7***

**<sup>5</sup> In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. <sup>6</sup> He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile. <sup>7</sup> Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.**

Esther was a Jewish girl who had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. Living in a strange land under a despot, King Ahasuerus, she was forced to participate in the king's unseemly beauty pageant. She had few choices and few options. Yet, as her story unfolds, we witness her dramatic rise to power.

How did a Jewish girl end up in this foreign place? In 586 BC, the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem, just as the prophets had predicted. God was fulfilling His promised judgment on the rebellious nation of Judah. Then, in 539, the Persians defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jewish exiles to return home. (See Ezra 1:1-4.) Many Jewish exiles made the return trip, but others like Mordecai and Esther chose to stay in Persia.

Before we go any further with the events in Esther's and Mordecai's lives, note that God was active in what was happening. For some, that statement may seem surprising because, unlike any other Bible book, nothing about God is mentioned in the Book of Esther. Neither His law nor His covenant is mentioned—not even His name! However, the lack of any theological language does not mean God was distant or inactive. God was working to keep His promises to save His people and He was using the unlikeliest of people in the process.

***What about Esther's circumstances catches your attention?***

**QUESTION #2**

So, as we move through the Book of Esther and see the challenges both Esther and Mordecai faced, we'll be reminded that while it is easy to believe God in the abstract, it can be far more difficult to see His hand in the struggles of life. But God has placed each of us where we are in this moment in history to speak up and speak out, to spread the good news of His deliverance, and to stand for Him wherever possible.

## ***Esther 2:8-10***

**<sup>8</sup> When the king's command and edict became public knowledge and when many young women were gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai's supervision, Esther was taken to the palace, into the supervision of Hegai, keeper of the women. <sup>9</sup> The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked female servants to her from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem's best quarters.<sup>10</sup> Esther did not reveal her ethnicity or her family background, because Mordecai had ordered her not to make them known.**

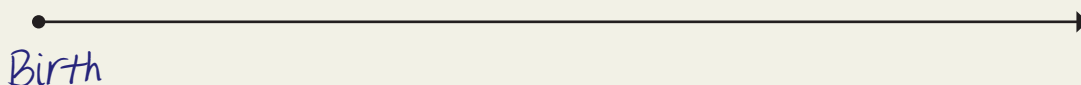
The Book of Esther begins with the account of Queen Vashti's treatment of the king and her subsequent loss of position. (See 1:1-22.) But now the king was without a queen, and he set out to change that by choosing from a large number of eligible young women. Hundreds of women were uprooted from their families and communities to live in relative isolation in the king's harem—and that included Esther.

***When have you found yourself completely outside your comfort zone?***

**QUESTION #3**

## GOD-INCIDENCES

Use the timeline below to mark significant moments in your life. Label them with a simple title: birth, school change, first job, big car accident, and so on. Then write a brief description below of how you can now see God's hands in those events.



"Nothing is a surprise to God; nothing is a setback to His plans; nothing can thwart His purposes; and nothing is beyond His control!"

— JONI EARECKSON TADA



Esther gained the favor of Hegai, the overseer of the king's harem. Out of hundreds of young women, why did Esther get noticed? Verse 7 tells us she was physically attractive, but surely other aspects of her character also caused Hegai to be pleased with her.

Let's not overlook the "silent" hand of God at work. The whole theme of Esther is the invisible hand of God in using flawed men and women at just the right moment to save His people. It was God who endowed Esther with her attractive character and physical traits, and it was God who allowed Esther to gain extraordinary favor in that moment for purposes she didn't yet fully understand.

Have you ever found yourself in a place you didn't expect to be? It happens to all of us in one way or another.

- ▶ A job transfer to another state.
- ▶ A "surprise" pregnancy and birth of child number three.
- ▶ A middle school Bible study group has a new leader—you.

We've all been there, but we shouldn't see these simply as unexpected circumstances; these are unexpected opportunities! Nothing that happens in life is a surprise to God. We can either be caught off guard by new challenges, or we can see them as God's divine appointments—opportunities He has given us. At first, we may not know where this new "adventure" will lead, but we certainly can trust the One who is with us the whole time.

When we seek to please God—no matter where we find ourselves—He will open doors we could never imagine. The opportunity is there to honor Him in our circumstances and do great things for Him.



## **Esther 2:15-17**

**<sup>15</sup> Esther was the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had adopted her as his own daughter. When her turn came to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king’s eunuch, keeper of the women, suggested. Esther gained favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her. <sup>16</sup> She was taken to King Ahasuerus in the palace in the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. <sup>17</sup> The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.**

Four years transpired between the time Ahasuerus dethroned Vashti and he made Esther his new queen. During a portion of that time, hundreds of women waited with uncertainty. *When will my turn come? Will I please the king? Will I become the queen?* Esther perhaps felt that same uncertainty, moving along the track from an orphaned Jewish slave to participant in Ahasuerus’s harem to queen of Persia. Yet, of all the young women in Persia, Esther was perhaps the least likely to end up in the palace. She was Jewish with no family name or connections that might propel her to power. And yet she was now the queen—placed in a position of influence and given the resources to serve God’s people in ways she was not yet aware. God was at work, moving to fulfill His many promises to preserve His people.

God even works in less than ideal situations. We can’t deny that King Ahasuerus used sinful practices in seeking a new queen. Esther participated in a process that didn’t honor God’s design for sexuality and marriage. It is important to remember that the Bible records many historical events while not endorsing the obvious sinful behavior in those events. Yet, God always works—even in a fallen, sinful world.

Esther surely didn’t realize its full impact, but God was behind her story, putting her in a place of influence. Her position would not just benefit her; it would benefit her own people, the Jews. And ultimately, we would all benefit, for Jesus’ family lineage came from the very people she helped to save.

***How do we navigate the tension between the messiness of Esther’s story thus far and God’s sovereign plan?***

### **QUESTION #4**

***Where has God positioned you right now to be a person of influence?***

### **QUESTION #5**

## LIVE IT OUT

God is at work—even behind the scenes. What will you do with that truth? Choose one of the following applications.

- ▶ **Look back.** Reflect on your walk with Christ. What events has God used in your past to bring you to Him—or bring you closer to Him? Consider those events that may have even seemed minor or inconsequential at the time. Thank God for His faithful work in your life.
- ▶ **Make a list.** List the gifts, skills, or attributes God has given you. Ask God to show you how you can use those to honor Him, even in unfavorable situations.
- ▶ **Encourage others.** You may know someone facing circumstances beyond his or her control. Offer your support and encouragement. Help the person see that God is present—and He is at work even if it is not yet evident.

Your personal history is no doubt filled with many forks in the road where things could have been otherwise. But it's good to know that we have a God who works things out for our good—and His glory!

My thoughts

