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KEEP STANDING



What are some of your favorite ways to celebrate?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Don't become complacent—maintain vigilance.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Your parents probably celebrated some fairly large milestones in your life. Your first words. Your first steps. Your first day of school. Your graduation from high school or college.

And why not celebrate? These events—small victories, perhaps—show that you were growing up. But your parents were not content with that. Even as they celebrated, they worked with you so that your words became sentences, your baby steps developed into walking and running; and your daily trips to school led to an education and perhaps a diploma.

As we celebrate each milestone, we continue moving forward to reach the next milestone—and another reason to celebrate.

During Ahasuerus's reign in Persia, the Jewish people achieved a great victory through the prayers and efforts of Mordecai and Esther. One great victory, yes, but their work was not complete. They had addressed one injustice, but another still loomed ahead. There was no time to settle into complacency! We see in the lives of Esther and Mordecai great examples of persistence against injustice.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Esther 8:1-2

¹ That same day King Ahasuerus awarded Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai entered the king's presence because Esther had revealed her relationship to Mordecai. ² The king removed his signet ring he had recovered from Haman and gave it to Mordecai, and Esther put him in charge of Haman's estate.

Honor came to two people in two ways on the same day.

- 1. Esther.** On the same day Haman was executed, King Ahasuerus granted to Queen Esther all of Haman's estate and fortune. It was customary for the property of criminals to be seized by the crown. As the king, Ahasuerus could have taken these new spoils and enriched himself, but he generously gave them to his wife, the queen. Esther wisely delegated the management of this newfound estate to Mordecai.
- 2. Mordecai.** The king had taken his signet ring from Haman in dishonor; now he gave it to Mordecai in great honor. Mordecai would essentially be the prime minister of Persia. The king chose a man of great faithfulness and personal integrity to replace one who was neither.

Surely Mordecai, the faithful Jew, knew the ultimate Source of any honor he received. "Exaltation does not come from the east, the west, or the desert, for God is the Judge: He brings down one and exalts another" (Ps. 75:6-7).

Will we be honored as Mordecai and Esther were—with public acclaim and material wealth—when we stand against injustice? Some falsely teach this, but we should never assume or even expect this kind of *quid pro quo* from God. What we see in this passage is not prescriptive for all of us, but descriptive of how God worked in this particular instance. While Scripture does portray the lives of those like Mordecai and

What rewards should we anticipate for standing against injustice?

QUESTION #2

Esther who received honor and wealth in that moment, we also find in God's Word descriptions of those who suffered and even died for their faithfulness and integrity.

The Bible doesn't promise material rewards or escape from trouble, but it points to the life to come when Christ will make all things new.

- ▶ "The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:16-17).
- ▶ "For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Our story does end well, but it is not tied to a robust bank balance or public awards. What God has waiting for us far surpasses earthly glories, as we live forever with Christ. Mordecai became prime minister of Persia, but those who are in Christ will live and reign forever in the coming kingdom of God. (See 2 Tim. 2:11-12.)

Esther 8:3-8

³ Then Esther addressed the king again. She fell at his feet, wept, and begged him to revoke the evil of Haman the Agagite and his plot he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ The king extended the gold scepter toward Esther, so she got up and stood before the king. ⁵ She said, "If it pleases the king and I have found favor before him, if the matter seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a royal edict be written. Let it revoke the documents the scheming Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. ⁶ For how could I bear to see the disaster that would come on my people? How could I bear to see the destruction of my relatives?"



Esther and Mordecai had cause to celebrate. Haman had been executed. Mordecai held a powerful position and Esther had great wealth. However, they could not rest until all their people were safe.

Haman was dead, but his edict was very much alive. The king could not simply overturn his previous decree. He could, however, propose a new law that would counteract the previous one. Esther again risked the king's ire by asking for help for her people.

Their boldness paid off. Permission still stood to kill the Jews, but the Jews were now given the right to protect themselves. If anyone held animosity toward the Jews, he would think twice because (1) genocide had been changed to a fight; and (2) the king and his Jewish queen stood on the other side!

Our work can be ongoing of standing in the gap for others and seeking justice for them, but Esther and Mordecai remind us that:

- ▶ **We must persevere in our work of justice.** It's not enough to make a few statements on social media. It's not enough to vote every four years.
- ▶ **We must continually intercede before our King.** As Esther went before the king and interceded for her people, we should do the same before the throne of God.
- ▶ **Consider our own motivations.** Esther and Mordecai sought to use their platform to serve God's people for many years. (See Esth. 10:3.) We must do likewise.

Esther 9:20-22

²⁰ **Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all of King Ahasuerus's provinces, both near and far.**

²¹ **He ordered them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar every year ²² because during those days the Jews gained relief from their enemies. That was the month when their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday. They were to be days of feasting, rejoicing, and of sending gifts to one another and to the poor.**

How would you describe the role of persistence in the Christian life?

QUESTION #3

Once Mordecai sealed the new decree in the king's names, the Jews were able to defend themselves. They stood up to everyone who hated them, and as a result "not a single person could withstand them; fear of them fell on every nationality" (v. 2). The Jews were fighting for their own protection.

Once the fighting stopped, the Jews could finally celebrate their freedom. This celebration became known as the Feast of Purim. *Purim* is the plural form of *Pur*, the Hebrew word for the lot that was cast before Haman to determine which day he would carry out his massacre of the Jewish people. (See 3:7.) But what was intended for destruction became just the opposite, and the Jews still celebrate today.

Mordecai and Esther's story is our story, for out of the Jewish people came our Savior. Although Christians do not celebrate Purim, we do have a celebration of deliverance; through the Lord's Supper, we remember the deliverance Christ brought to us through His death. Once alienated from God, we are all—Jew and Gentile—now invited to dine at the King's table. "For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14).

We still have much to do for the kingdom. Our work will not be complete until Christ returns—but we have much to celebrate! We will have opportunities to stand up for others in the face of injustice. Through our words, actions, and prayers, people can find hope no matter what injustice they face.

Let's keep standing for others—and let's keep celebrating! God is at work.

How can our group do a better job of celebrating God's victories in our lives?

QUESTION #4

What principles have stood out to you throughout this study from the Book of Esther?

QUESTION #5

STANDING STRONG

Evaluate your life in light of the story of Esther and Mordecai and answer the following questions.

What is one example of a time where you struggled to maintain a stand for what is right?

What could you have done that would have made a difference?

Check the Bible passage below that resonates most with you for maintaining vigilance and strength in spite of difficulties or opposition:

___ "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go" (Gen. 28:15).

___ "I will strengthen you; I will help you" (Is. 41:10).

___ "I will never leave you or abandon you" (Heb. 13:5).

___ Other _____

How can you incorporate this verse into your daily life?

"Our motto must continue to be perseverance.
And ultimately I trust the Almighty
will crown our efforts with success!"

—WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

LIVE IT OUT

How do you celebrate God's work and remain vigilant for yourself and others? Choose one of the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Express thanks.** Reflect on how God has rescued you from death through Jesus Christ. Pray and give thanks to God for the victory you have in Christ.
- ▶ **Stay vigilant.** If you have previously committed to helping an organization fight injustice, stick with it. Continue to look for ways you can help and make a difference.
- ▶ **Celebrate together.** Plan an event when your group can celebrate together the work of God in your lives. Use this event as an opportunity to invite others to participate and learn why you are celebrating.



Everyone loves a celebration, but we must remain vigilant lest our gains be lost. There's no room for complacency for the child of God; we must keep standing!

My thoughts



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COMING IN SUMMER

Why Are We Here?

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

June 3	Session 1	Why Are We Even Here?	Genesis 1:1-5,26-31
June 10	Session 2	Why Are We in This Mess?	Genesis 3:1-7,14-19
June 17	Session 3	Why Can't We Fix It? Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Galatians 3:10-12,19a,24-25	
June 24	Session 4	Why Did Jesus Come?	Luke 1:68-79
July 1	Session 5	What Should We Do Now?	Acts 2:37-47
July 8	Session 6	What Will We Do Next?	Revelation 21:1-8

Tithing: An Obedient Response to a Gracious God

July 15	Tithing: An Obedient Response to a Gracious God	Malachi 3:7-12
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Nehemiah: Building a Life of Service

July 22	Session 1	Pray	Nehemiah 1:1-11
July 29	Session 2	Plan	Nehemiah 2:1-8,17-18
August 5	Session 3	Persist	Nehemiah 4:1-3,6-9,14-18
August 12	Session 4	Protect	Nehemiah 5:1-13
August 19	Session 5	Prioritize	Nehemiah 6:1-3,15-16; 8:1-3,5-8
August 26	Session 6	Praise	Nehemiah 8:9-12; 12:27-31a

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GOD IS ...

STAND UP: HOW TO FIGHT INJUSTICE

Spring 2018

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God Is ...

The first question we often ask a person is, “What is your name?” Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed different aspects of His holy character, and several names captured the essence of His character. These names give us a glimpse into the infinite character of our loving God, and we will discover who He is in our lives.

Ken Hemphill lives in Greenville, South Carolina, and is the National Strategist for Empowering Kingdom Growth.



Stand Up: How to Fight Injustice

We live in a world of injustice, but how do we respond? Do we just passively accept what happens to us and around us? The Book of Esther offers a different approach. In a time of great injustice against their own people, Mordecai and Esther rose to the occasion and took a stand. As we look at their lives, we see a model for how we can live for Christ as we stand up for others.

Daniel Darling serves as Vice-President of Communications for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Coming Next Quarter

Why Are We Here? looks at the foundational why questions that every philosophy, worldview, and culture attempts to answer. This study looks at the biblical answers to those questions. The study is written by Ken Braddy, manager of Adult Ongoing Bible Studies at LifeWay Christian Resources.

Nehemiah: Building a Life of Service is a six-week study written by Sam Rainer, senior pastor of West Bradenton Baptist Church in Bradenton, Florida. The study looks at the life of Nehemiah.