

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a person's hand resting on a tablet device. The person is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt. The background is a blurred office or study environment.

SESSION 4

STAND WITH HUMILITY

The Point

Humility ultimately wins the day.

The Passage

Esther 5:1-14

The Bible Meets Life

“Fight fire with fire” can actually be an effective tactic in putting out literal fires, but it is a lousy way to handle conflict. In fact, such tactics can worsen a situation. We’ve surely seen stories of road rage escalating between two people. The Bible calls us to live with kindness and humility, even in dealing with conflict. Esther modeled just such Christlike behavior in her plan to expose injustice.

The Setting

Events in the Book of Esther occurred during King Ahasuerus’s reign (486-465 BC). After Mordecai informed Esther of Haman’s plot to destroy the Jews, Esther instructed her people to abstain from food and liquids for three days. After that period of fasting and prayer, she would approach the king on her people’s behalf. Esther acted courageously for she knew she faced the death penalty if the king did not extend to her his gold scepter.

What does the Bible say?

Esther 5:1-14 (CSB)

¹ On the third day, Esther dressed in her royal clothing and stood in the inner courtyard of the palace facing it. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the royal courtroom, facing its entrance. ² As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, she gained favor in his eyes. The king extended the gold scepter in his hand toward Esther, and she approached and touched the tip of the scepter. ³ “What is it, Queen Esther?” the king asked her. “Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be given to you.” ⁴ “If it pleases the king,” Esther replied, “may the king and Haman come today to the banquet I have prepared for them.” ⁵ The king said, “Hurry, and get Haman so we can do as Esther has requested.” So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. ⁶ While drinking the wine, the king asked Esther, “Whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be done.” ⁷ Esther answered, “This is my petition and my request: ⁸ If I have found favor in the eyes of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and perform my request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet I will prepare for them. Tomorrow I will do what the king has asked.”

⁹ That day Haman left full of joy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai at the King’s Gate, and Mordecai didn’t rise or tremble in fear at his presence, Haman was filled with rage toward Mordecai. ¹⁰ Yet Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh to join him. ¹¹ Then Haman described for them his glorious wealth and his many sons. He told them all how the king had honored him and promoted him in rank over the other officials and the royal staff. ¹² “What’s more,” Haman added, “Queen Esther invited no one but me to join the king at the banquet she had prepared. I am invited again tomorrow to join her with the king. ¹³ Still, none of this satisfies me since I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King’s Gate all the time.” ¹⁴ His wife Zeresh and all his friends told him, “Have them build a gallows seventy-five feet tall. Ask the king in the morning to hang Mordecai on it. Then go to the banquet with the king and enjoy yourself.” The advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows constructed.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



LEADER PACK: Bring your group’s attention to **Pack Item #7**, “Stand Up” poster, to briefly recap the topics of the past three sessions.

DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 105 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “**What’s your typical game plan for navigating high-stakes situations?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

TIP: Use the term “*guest*” (as opposed to “*visitor*”) to describe first-time attendees. This term conveys honor and a sense of welcome.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 106): It was the email I regret sending. I was seething. After a meeting where I felt my opinions were not taken seriously, I fired off an angry email to a coworker. I blasted him for what I considered to be rude behavior and demanded that he apologize. I didn’t seek out advice, nor did I review my words to make sure they were appropriate. I didn’t even pray before hitting “send.”

Thankfully, the recipient of my bitter missive was far more gracious than I was, and we cleared up our differences. Still, the email sowed stress in our relationship that never fully recovered. Even now, years later, I cringe at the memory of sending that email in the heat of the moment.

SAY: “Esther faced a far more serious injustice than hurt feelings. We learn from her careful, deliberate process that fighting injustice takes wisdom, patience, and humility.”

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point** on page 106 of the PSG: “**Humility ultimately wins the day.**”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer.

STAND UP: HOW TO FIGHT INJUSTICE

- ▶ **BE READY TO STAND**
Esther 2:5-10, 15-17
- ▶ **STAND WITH CONVICTION**
Esther 2:21-3:6
- ▶ **STAND DOWN**
Esther 4:1-3, 10-16
- ▶ **STAND WITH HUMILITY**
Esther 5:1-14
- ▶ **STAND UP AND SPEAK**
Esther 7:1-10
- ▶ **KEEP STANDING**
Esther 8:1-8; 9:20-22

PACK ITEM:
Pack Item #7
“Stand Up” poster
PLAYLIST PICK:
“Make Us One”
By Jesus Culture

Esther 5:1-8 Commentary

Verses 1-2: Esther heroically approached the king on the third day. This time reference indicates Esther acted after the Jews had completed their three-day fast. Esther did not have to wait long to learn the consequences of her bold action. As soon as King Ahasuerus perceived Esther's presence, she won his favor. King Ahasuerus held out to her his gold scepter. This rod was the king's official staff or baton. It symbolized his authority. When a king extended his scepter to a visitor or dignitary, it signaled his approval and allowed the individual to approach the throne. Recognizing that she gained the king's approval, Esther approached his throne. Following Persian protocol, she touched the tip of the scepter as a demonstration of respect and honor for the king. Esther had successfully passed the first danger. What could have resulted in her death had become an opportunity to help deliver her people.

Verses 3-4: Ahasuerus recognized Esther had an important matter on her mind or she would not have risked her life to approach him unbidden. Thus he initiated the conversation by asking, "What is it, Queen Esther?" Without giving the queen time to respond, the king continued by offering "even to half the kingdom." This expression evidently was a formality or an example of cultural courtesy. It indicated that he favorably received her. It expressed the king's generosity but was not meant to be taken literally. Esther's response must have puzzled Ahasuerus. She invited Ahasuerus and Haman to a banquet she had prepared for them that day. Esther did not want to make her request there in the court in the guards' presence. In that time and culture banquets provided a socially accepted place for discussing serious issues.

Verses 5-6: As the drama continues, Ahasuerus and Haman attended Esther's banquet. In ancient Near Eastern culture, participants in a banquet did not engage in serious discussions until they had finished eating. Important issues received attention in the more relaxed atmosphere following the meal. Thus while drinking the wine after dining, Ahasuerus informed Esther that she could have whatever she requested, "even to half the kingdom," again indicating the king's favorable reception of Esther.

Verses 7-8: Esther again delayed giving the king a direct answer. Instead she invited Ahasuerus and Haman to another banquet to be held the next day. Why did Esther delay in revealing her petition? Scholars have offered various suggestions. Ancient Near Eastern protocol and custom no doubt played a role in the queen's actions. More importantly, however, Esther must have relied on wisdom from God to know when to make her request known to the king. The queen must have sensed that the time was not yet right. And because we know the end of the story, we know God was at work in this waiting time—giving Haman time to construct his gallows and allowing a sleepless Ahasuerus to hear the record of Mordecai's saving the king's life. Esther acted with sensitivity to God's timing.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Esther 5:9-14 (CSB)

⁹ That day Haman left full of joy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai at the King’s Gate, and Mordecai didn’t rise or tremble in fear at his presence, Haman was filled with rage toward Mordecai. ¹⁰ Yet Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh to join him. ¹¹ Then Haman described for them his glorious wealth and his many sons. He told them all how the king had honored him and promoted him in rank over the other officials and the royal staff. ¹² “What’s more,” Haman added, “Queen Esther invited no one but me to join the king at the banquet she had prepared. I am invited again tomorrow to join her with the king. ¹³ Still, none of this satisfies me since I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King’s Gate all the time.” ¹⁴ His wife Zeresh and all his friends told him, “Have them build a gallows seventy-five feet tall. Ask the king in the morning to hang Mordecai on it. Then go to the banquet with the king and enjoy yourself.” The advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows constructed.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Esther 5:9-12.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 109): Haman presents quite a contrast to the humility of Esther. You can just feel the spring in Haman’s step as he bounded away from the palace and headed home. He had been invited to a special feast by the queen herself to an exclusive dinner with the king.

- » But then Haman walked past the King’s Gate; there sat Mordecai, refusing to show any fear or respect to Haman. Haman’s excitement quickly changed to rage and anger. In this moment, verse 10 records the only positive quality we see in Haman’s life: “Haman controlled himself.”
- » At home with family and friends, Haman boasted. He broke the news of his promotion and his special invitation to join the king at Esther’s banquet.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 109 of the PSG: **“Why is pride so dangerous?”**

Esther 5:9-14 Commentary

Verse 9: This portion of the narrative focuses on Haman and reveals that pride brings no genuine satisfaction. Haman departed from the first banquet “full of joy and in good spirits.” He was on top of his world. He had just experienced a private feast with the king and queen. His immediate exaltation knew no bounds. He regarded himself as privileged and elite. The Hebrew expression rendered “in good spirits” literally means “good of heart.” In Hebrew thought the heart represented the totality of an individual’s inner being or nature. The Hebrews regarded the heart as the center of a human being’s emotion, thought, and will. In the context of verse 9, “good” does not designate a moral quality but rather a happy attitude. Thus to be “good of heart” basically means to be happy. Haman was in good spirits because he viewed his invitation to the banquet as an honor the queen was conferring on him.

Haman’s happiness, however, depended on external circumstances and soon evaporated. As soon as he left the palace and saw Mordecai refusing to honor him, Haman’s emotions abruptly changed. Mordecai “didn’t rise or tremble in fear” when he saw Haman. Not only did Mordecai refuse to bow down to Haman (Esther 3:2), but he also declined to rise in Haman’s presence. Furthermore Mordecai didn’t express fear when he encountered Haman. Esther’s cousin refused to show Haman the respect this official felt he deserved. The verb rendered “tremble in fear” also means “to quiver” or “to be in terror.” Mordecai demonstrated confidence, even defiance, in his attitude toward this individual who had struck a bargain with the king to slaughter the Jews.

Thus Haman “was filled with rage.” We have already encountered this expression in the discussion of Esther 3:5 in Session 2. The phrase “was filled” suggests Haman allowed his anger to control him. Such anger not only can destroy others, but also can destroy us.

Verse 10: At this point Haman evidently displayed some degree of self-control over his anger. The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb translated “controlled himself” is “to hold” or “to be strong.” A noun derived from this verb means “channel” or “streambed.” Thus Haman temporarily succeeded in holding in his rage. Perhaps he was already contemplating ways he might get revenge. Haman returned to his house where he gathered his wife and friends so he could announce to them the great honor the king had bestowed on him. Haman’s wife is here introduced as Zeres, a Persian name possibly meaning “having disheveled hair” or “golden.”

Verse 11: After assembling his wife and friends, Haman boasted to them about “his glorious wealth” and “his many sons” and his promotion in rank. The Hebrew phrase related to his wealth can more

Esther 5:9-14 Commentary *(Continued)*

literally be rendered “the glory of his wealth.” The term “glory” comes from a root meaning “to be heavy.” The concept is that something is weighty in the sense of being impressive. While the Old Testament sometimes views riches as the blessing of the Lord (Psalm 112:1-3), it also recognizes they can lead to depending on oneself rather than depending on Him (Hosea 12:8). Thus we are counseled not to boast in riches, but rather to boast in knowing *Yahweh* (Jeremiah 9:23-24). As Haman would soon discover, wealth cannot redeem a person (Psalm 49:6-7). Haman also had ten sons (Esther 9:12). Among the Persians, fathering a large number of sons demonstrated manliness. Thus at least from his own perspective, Haman eclipsed his associates economically, socially, and politically. His priorities clearly consisted of possessions, position, and power.

Verse 12: Haman’s arrogance knew no bounds, not only because of reasons he cited in verse 11, but also because Queen Esther had invited no one else to attend the banquet with her and the king. And Haman had received such an invitation not once, but twice! With his pride, however, Haman was setting himself up for a great downfall. His boasting only highlighted the humiliation he was about to receive (see Proverbs 16:18; 29:23).

Verse 13: Even with so much apparently going his way, Haman expressed dissatisfaction. Mordecai still refused to give Haman the honor to which this Agagite felt entitled. Haman’s egotistical attitude is clearly evident.

Verse 14: Observing Haman’s dissatisfaction, his wife and friends counseled him to build a gallows and request the king “to hang Mordecai on it.” After taking this action, Haman could then enjoy the banquet. The Hebrew term rendered “gallows” basically means “tree.” Thus it came to also designate timber, plank, stick, and gallows. Probably Haman erected a sharpened pole on which the dead body was to be impaled and exhibited. The height of the gallows—seventy-five feet—calls attention to the public nature of the intended execution. Furthermore, this extreme height fits consistently with Haman’s arrogant desire for revenge. Haman desired not only that Mordecai be put to death, but also that he be publicly humiliated.

Haman approved the advice he received and had the gallows constructed. Little did this official realize that in seeking to destroy the man he perceived as his enemy, he was in reality destroying himself. Haman would eventually be hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai (7:10). Whereas Mordecai would stand with humility, Haman would hang in humiliation.



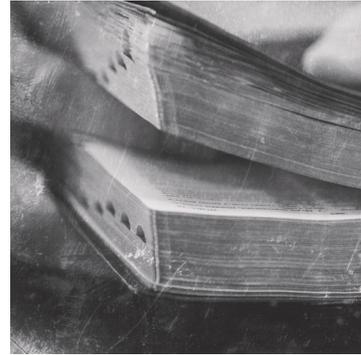
5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Using your cell phone, display the timer and lead your group to see if they can sit quietly for one full minute. Afterward, ask: "How did it feel to wait?" Allow time for responses. Explain that Esther was waiting for just the right time to discuss the plight of her people. No one *likes* waiting, but if we're seeking God while we wait, we benefit greatly.



SAY: "We have daily opportunities to act with pride or humility. Which will you choose?"

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 112 of the PSG.

- » **Confess.** Reflect on your own tendencies toward selfishness, bitterness, or the desire to seek power at others' expense. Confess and give these sinful attitudes and actions to God. Trust Him and thank Him for His forgiveness.
- » **Memorize.** Read Proverbs 11:2 each day this week and post this verse somewhere you will see it often. Make it your goal to commit it to memory.
- » **Reconcile.** If pride in the past has caused a problem in a relationship or stirred up enmity toward another person, prayerfully consider moving toward reconciliation. Ask the Lord to help you forgive and/or ask for forgiveness.

Wrap It Up

SAY: "Anger and bitterness may be among our initial responses when we encounter injustice. However, we can choose to stand up for others with wisdom and humility as Esther did. **Humility doesn't back down, but it takes a firm stance with a Christlike attitude that makes a difference.**"



Additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra