

# 4

## *Stand with Humility*



*What's your typical game plan for navigating high-stakes situations?*

**QUESTION 1**

*Humility ultimately wins the day.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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.

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. Grace-filled approaches build bridges that can lead to change, but hasty moves almost always lead to worse outcomes.

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# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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## **Esther 5:1-8 (CSB)**

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> “What is it, Queen Esther?” the king asked her. “Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be given to you.” <sup>4</sup> “If it pleases the king,” Esther replied, “may the king and Haman come today to the banquet I have prepared for them.” <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> Esther answered, “This is my petition and my request: <sup>8</sup> 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.”

Esther had made her decision. She would use whatever influence she had as queen and approach King Ahasuerus about the impending genocide of her people. Even though Esther was willing to risk her life, she did not approach her task lightly. She and her people fasted and sought the Lord for three days before she entered the king’s presence (Esther 4:16-17).

King Ahasuerus was her husband, but he was a ruthless despot of a huge empire; approaching the king surely would have been intimidating even for Queen Esther. Additionally, anyone, even the queen, was forbidden to go into the king’s presence unless specifically invited. To go before the king unannounced could result in death. She showed wisdom in her approach and won over the most unlikely of converts with her humility.

Esther didn’t enter the king’s presence in sackcloth and ashes. She entered wearing her finest royal apparel, fit for the king. Perhaps Esther did this to remind Ahasuerus, who hadn’t seen his wife in thirty days, just how radiantly beautiful she was; she was indeed his queen. Esther won over his heart and

*What made Esther’s situation a high-stakes one?*

### QUESTION 2

Ahasuerus extended his scepter, granting her permission to enter his presence.

Esther simply could have asked the king, right then and there, to save Israel. But Esther chose to set the perfect conditions, when the king's heart was in the right place to grant her request. Why would she drag this out with a dinner—and then *another* dinner? Esther knew the value of timing and relationship-building. If she rushed her request, the opportunity for justice might be lost forever.

You may wonder why Esther chose to ask Haman to attend this feast, but I see a two-fold purpose.

- » Esther didn't want to do anything to make Haman suspicious of her plans. She had to be subtle in her approach.
- » Haman had a position of high honor in the kingdom. To have a feast without inviting him could be seen as a snub. It might have alienated the king at a time when she needed the king's favor.

If any Jews in Susa knew what Esther was doing, they also might have questioned her actions. *Why would she honor a man like Haman, who had authored their death warrant? How could she possibly honor a king who signed away their freedom?* To the average Jewish person, fearing his or her future, her actions might have even seemed offensive.

### **Esther 5:9-14** (CSB)

**<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Yet Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh to join him. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> "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. <sup>13</sup> Still, none of this satisfies me since I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate all the time." <sup>14</sup> 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.**

*What are the biggest hurdles we face when it comes to nurturing humility in our lives?*

***Why is pride so dangerous?***

**QUESTION 4**

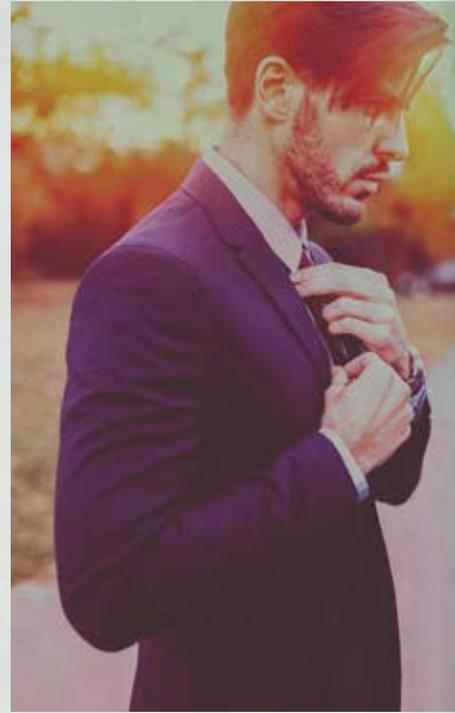
Haman presents quite a contrast to the humility of Esther. You can just feel the spring in Haman's step as he bounded away from the palace and headed home. He had been invited to a special feast by the queen herself to an exclusive dinner with the king. These kinds of invitations were exceedingly rare.

But then he 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."

It's important to stop and notice the continued courage of Mordecai, who still refused to stand or show fear before Haman; he didn't even tremble in the official's presence. Considering Haman's obvious ruthlessness, surely everyone else in the palace was fearful of him. Not Mordecai. Because Mordecai feared God, he did not fear Haman. Mordecai reminds us of the courage of the early apostles who said, when faced with persecution and death, "We must obey God rather than people" (Acts 5:29).

Mordecai and Esther lived for something—and Someone—greater than themselves, but Haman was all about Haman.

Even at home with family and friends, Haman bragged on himself. Surely they had heard it all before, but Haman regaled them with the story of his newfound status and increased wealth. He broke the news of his promotion over many other qualified people and





***What are some helpful ways you've encountered for dealing with anger and pride?***

**QUESTION 5**

his special invitation to join the king at Esther's banquet. In Haman's mind—and in the mind of his friends and family—these facts confirmed he was on the fast track going up in the kingdom of Persia.

But we see something terribly sad about Haman. Despite his wealth, power, and privilege, Haman was deeply unsatisfied. His self-worship was so pervasive that he could not find happiness until every last person acknowledged his greatness. Mordecai's refusal to bow dominated Haman's thoughts, like a pebble in his sandal. Sadly, none of the people around him would try to talk sense into him or rebuke him for the bitterness that was eating away at his heart. Instead, they encouraged his narcissism and revenge.

Haman jumped on his wife's suggestion with arrogant pride. He would build a gallows and then tell the king what to do with it. And this wasn't just any gallows. Susa already had a gallows (see Esther 2:23), but this gallows would be ridiculously high. Haman wanted death to come to his enemy in an especially garish and public way. The fact the gallows would be seventy-five feet tall may point to its construction on a hill, but Haman wanted the whole city of Susa to understand: You don't mess with Haman.

Let's remember that at this point, Haman had no idea what was about to befall him—nor did Mordecai and the Jews know how God was at work. Esther had taken action, but it didn't appear forceful; on the other hand, Haman was swimming in pride and seemed to be getting ahead. Just because justice seemed delayed, though, doesn't mean it would be denied. God was at work.

We should learn from both examples: Esther's humility and Haman's pride. We should ask Jesus daily to remove any bitterness in our hearts, break down any tendencies toward pride and narcissism, and keep us humbly content in Him. Only Christ can save us from our own self-destruction and from the coming judgment of a just and holy God. Only Christ can move us from anger to joy. Only He can truly satisfy our deepest longings.

"When arrogance comes, disgrace follows,  
but with humility comes wisdom."

PROVERBS 11:2

## STAND WITH GRACE



***Sensing God's prompting to become an advocate for people struggling with addiction, you've worked toward increasing resources for recovering addicts in your city. A recent conversation about proposed initiatives turned increasingly argumentative and malicious.***

How can you respond with humility and Christlikeness?

How could a humble reaction benefit your work?

How could a humble reaction impact your witness?

## LIVE IT OUT

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

- » **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.

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.**



*My thoughts*