



Today, we're beginning a new series called Life on Purpose. One of the things that every one of us desires in life is a purpose bigger than ourselves. Maybe you're wondering, "What is my purpose?" or asking, "Does the Bible have anything to say about how I should live my life?" The answer is "yes," and God has given us a great example in Esther. She was thrown into quite a predicament. Nevertheless, her life shone through as a woman of God who lived with a purpose bigger than herself.

SCRIPTURE: Esther 1-3

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most? How would you summarize the theme or big idea of the sermon?
2. Take some time to reflect on your last 5-10 years. Could you have imagined then that you'd be where you are today? Why does it take time to see and understand God's activity in our lives? Do you think Esther understood the "why" behind what was happening in her life in chapters 1-3?

Life is an unfolding story of assumptions, dreams, and unforeseen plot twists – plenty of which we would go back and do over or skip if we had the chance.

We don't know much about Esther's life before she shows up on the scene as a character in someone else's story: King Xerxes and Queen Vashti. We know that Esther was a daughter who lost her parents at a young age and was raised by her cousin Mordecai in Susa, the capital city of Persia. Nevertheless, she indeed had dreams of her own. Maybe we won't be raised to the same heights as Esther, but God still has a pivotal purpose for our lives.

3. Read Acts 17:26, Romans 8:28, and Ephesians 1:11. What do these verses say about God's sovereignty? How can they help give us a sense of purpose in life, whether it's exciting, mundane, or challenging?

Acts 17:26, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."

- God has determined our time in history, how long we will live, and where we will live.

Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

- God works everything in our lives for good and according to His purpose. Even when we don't understand it – He can redeem it.

Ephesians 1:11, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,"

- Nothing can thwart God's will for our lives. Neither our mistakes nor the bad decisions of others can impede what God has planned for us.

Author Dorothy Sayers has this to say to those among us who feel like our lives are "ordinary" when she refers to what the church should be speaking to the Christian carpenter: "What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth."

Fulfilling the purpose that God has for us is no "small" or "ordinary" thing when it's done for His glory.

4. In these opening chapters, we see Esther exercise discernment and take advice from others. Why is it important to exercise discernment regarding the voices in your life? How has God used people (good or bad) to help mold you into who you are today?

Discernment:

1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."

Influence:

Proverbs 11:14, "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

Proverbs 12:15, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice."

Proverbs 15:22, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."

5. Throughout the Bible, we see women honored – even when the culture of their day disregarded them. How do we see this take place in Scripture? Which woman in the Bible inspires you the most?

Josh Manley, Honor Women Life Our Lord Does

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/honor-women-like-our-lord-does>

“The Scriptures brim with narratives that underscore the essential and exalted place women hold in God’s economy. From Rebekah, whose Abraham-like faith compelled her to leave her home for a place and people she did not know (Genesis 24), to Ruth the Moabite widow, whose conversion to Yahweh led her to become part of the Messianic line, the Bible’s story cannot be told apart from the lives of faithful women.”

“In the ancient world, women were far more vulnerable than today, in part because they did not enjoy the same legal rights as men. Yet in that very context, Scripture celebrates women by repeatedly placing them in the stream of God’s redemptive plan, where their fidelity to God often throws into relief the disobedience of fallen men. We know many of their names: Sarah, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Esther, Elizabeth, and Priscilla. Four women even appear in Christ’s genealogy, including Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary (Matthew 1:5-16).”

6. Read Esther 1:10-12 and 2:1-4. In what ways is our culture like that of Esther's day when it comes to the treatment and value of women? Read Proverbs 31:10 and 30. What do these verses have to say to both women and men?

Our culture objectifies women today, as we see in the opening pages of the Book of Esther. Women are judged on their appearance and face pressure around every turn to “look” a certain way.

Esther 1:10-12, “On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. ¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.”

Esther 2:1-4, “After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. ² Then the king's young men who attended him said, ‘Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. ³ And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. ⁴ And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.’ This pleased the king, and he did so.”

Proverbs 31:10, “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.”

Proverbs 31:30, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

This is an important question to discuss: What do these verses have to say to both women and men?

The Bible encourages women to find their identity in Christ rather than in what our culture values. Men play a role in seeing to it that women are not objectified by avoiding the trappings our culture tempts men with, which exploit women. Furthermore, men should stand up against any way women are objectified or stripped of their dignity.

7. What's one personal takeaway from this study you can focus on applying in your life this week?