



Last week we began a new series called "Life on Purpose," where we are studying the life of Esther and how she lived a life of purpose before God. Last week we talked about how we're molded by the relationships in our lives. Today, the title of our study is "Matured for Moments." We can all look back at moments in our past that we didn't necessarily enjoy, but now, we can see how God was molding us. To live a life of purpose, we must realize that God is shaping us through everything we're walking through today for moments still to come.

SCRIPTURE: Esther 4

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?
2. Describe a time in your life when God didn't seem present, but in hindsight, you see how He worked behind the scenes. How do we see this taking place in the Book of Esther?

Leaders: Consider leading by example with a story from your own life.

In the Book of Esther, there's no mention of God. There's no prophet speaking on behalf of God. There are no dreams or visions, and there's no "word from the Lord" to be interpreted. Even though God's name isn't referenced on any page in the Book of Esther – His fingerprints are everywhere – when you look from 30,000 feet. We can imagine that Esther didn't see herself playing the actual role of Jewish girl becomes queen of Persia and plays a pivotal role in rescuing her people from a murderous plot, but that's precisely what happened.

3. How did Mordecai initially respond to the king's edict? Why are we more likely to try and hide our grief than share it with others? What guidance do we receive in Galatians 6:2 when it comes to sharing our burdens with others?

Mordecai's initial response to hearing the king's edict against the Jews by tearing his clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes. We're also told that he went into the city and cried out with a "loud and bitter cry." Galatians 6:2 reminds us that we're called to share one another's burdens, which means we're to come up under the load and help lift. First, we must be open about our burdens.

4. How would you explain the apparent change in Mordecai's disposition between verse 1 and verse 14? How about the noticeable change in Esther between verses 11 and 16? How do you typically respond to circumstances that require a significant step of faith?

As stated in question 3, Mordecai's initial response to the edict is as dramatic as you would imagine, given the circumstances. Mordecai is devastated when he first hears the news. However, a few verses later, we see his faith rise to the top and take the wheel when he says, "relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place." We would do well to remember that biblical characters aren't robots; they respond just as we would likely react to various situations. Here, Mordecai is overwhelmed by the news and responds to the shock in a human way – with sadness and tears. Eventually, and relatively soon, his faith grounds his emotions.

Like Mordecai, Esther goes through her emotional reactions to the bad news. When she received word from Mordecai that she would need to go before the king and plead her case on behalf of her people, the reality of the situation stirred fear in her heart. She knows that going to the king without being summoned by him could lead to her death. And she hadn't been called to come before the king in 30 days. It seems that her initial response to the news is a hope that relief will come without her taking any personal risk. However, after listening to Mordecai and perhaps observing the faith of his statement, "relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews," she is emboldened to take her own step of faith. She eventually says, "I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."

Mordecai was devastated, but his faith grounded him. Esther was afraid and hoped a solution would come from somewhere else, but she eventually realized, after some encouragement from a dear friend, that she would need to take a step of faith herself.

At any given time, we're like Mordecai and Esther. Sometimes our faith quickly settles our emotions, and at other times we hope a solution will come from somewhere other than ourselves, but through some encouragement, our faith takes over, and we move forward.

5. How can living with the mindset that "God matures us for moments" help us when we face our own challenging seasons in life? How can Psalm 23 guide us as we face these moments of molding?

Living with this principle in mind will help give us hope while in the battle, but it won't make everything magically easier. We can rest assured that God is working all things together for our good – even when things don't make sense, but we still need to cling to our Good Shepherd when we're in the valley. God is with us in the middle of things – not just waiting for us at the conclusion.

6. Describe a time in your life when other people nudged you to take a step of faith as Mordecai did with Esther. Similarly, what can we learn from vs. 16-17 when facing critical moments?

No one has ever suffered from too much encouragement. Life is complicated, and there are a lot of unknowns. We've all had moments when we knew the right thing to do but didn't want to do it. In

these moments, and many others, we need brothers and sisters in Christ to throw their arms around us and speak confidence into our hearts as we see Mordecai do with Esther.

Secondly, when we face these moments, we need to follow in the footsteps of Esther and bring others on the journey with us. Notice what she does in verse 16: “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Esther recruited others to join her in a fast before she acted. While the word “pray” doesn’t appear in verse 16 we can safely assume that prayer was very much a part of the fast. Having the prayer support of others will help us move forward in faith when we’re facing big decisions.

7. Are you facing a faith decision right now that others could encourage you through?
8. What's one personal takeaway from this study you can focus on applying in your life this week?