

IF IT PLEASES THE KING

MAIN POINT.

Though we can't always see Him moving, we can trust God is with us and working for us.



CHRIST CONNECTION

While the situation seemed hopeless for Esther's people, the Jews, God was totally in control and had a plan to save them. Humanity's situation may have appeared hopeless because of the depth of our sin, but God always had a plan for our salvation: the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.



BEHIND THE SCENES

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Esther

GOD IS WITH US

ESTHER 3:7-10,12-13

7 In the first month, the month of Nissan, in King Ahasuerus's twelfth year, the pur—that is, the lot—was cast before Haman for each day in each month, and it fell on the twelfth month, the month Adar. 8 Then Haman informed King Ahasuerus, “There is one ethnic group, scattered throughout the peoples in every province of your kingdom, keeping themselves separate. Their laws are different from everyone else's and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. 9 If the king approves, let an order be drawn up authorizing their destruction, and I will pay 375 tons of silver to the officials for deposit in the royal treasury.” 10 The king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. . . . 12 The royal scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and the order was written exactly as Haman commanded. It was intended for the royal satraps, the governors of each of the provinces, and the officials of each ethnic group and written for each province in its own script and to each ethnic group in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the royal signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to each of the royal provinces telling the officials to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jewish people—young and old, women and children—and plunder their possessions on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month.

GOD IS WORKING FOR US

ESTHER 8:5-8,11-12,17

5 She said, “If it pleases the king and I have found favor with 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?” 7 King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, “Look, I have given Haman's estate to Esther, and he was hanged on the gallows because he attacked the Jews. 8 Write in the king's name whatever pleases you concerning the Jews, and seal it with the royal signet ring. A document written in the king's name and sealed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked.” . . . 11 The king's edict gave the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate every ethnic and provincial army hostile to them, including women and children, and to take their possessions as spoils of war. 12 This would take place on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar. . . . 17 In every province and every city where the king's command and edict reached, gladness and joy took place among the Jews. There was a celebration and a holiday. And many of the ethnic groups of the land professed themselves to be Jews because fear of the Jews had overcome them.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Though we can't always see Him moving, we can trust God is with us and working for us.

Leaders: Be encouraged that God is always working, even when we can't see Him moving (Ps. 77:19).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

GOD IS WITH US

ESTHER 3:7

"The Persian diviners, magi, and astrologers cast lots at the beginning of each new year to determine which days of the year would bring good fortune."¹⁶

ESTHER 3:13

"It should jar us how easily a plan to eliminate an entire ethnicity of people was proposed and proclaimed. Lest we think this was just a problem for the ancients, remember the genocides in Darfur, Rwanda, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Syria. And we dare not leave out the Holocaust! At the heart of each of these tragedies is one ethnic group seeking to exercise its self-perceived and self-proclaimed superiority over another. Satan is at work in all such instances, but in Haman's case there was probably a particularly hellish influence seeking to annihilate the line from which the Messiah would come."¹⁷

GOD IS WORKING FOR US

ESTHER 8:5-8

"Although God's name is never mentioned in the book, the plot of the story demonstrates to a Jewish believer that the unusual coincidences that allowed for Mordecai to report a plot against the king (2:19-23), for Esther to be chosen as queen (2:1-18), for Esther to enter the king's presence without being invited (5:1-8), for the vicious plot of Haman to be revealed (6:1-7:10), and for Mordecai to rise to power (8:1-10:3), all point to God's sovereign control over the details of history. . . . In most of the Old Testament, God boldly speaks, acts, and directs the course of history, but in a time of foreign domination by pagan nations, he works behind the scenes through the lives of both believers and unbelievers. In many eras of history, God's face is not seen, his hand is not performing great miracles, and his voice is not heard audibly; yet, he is present."¹⁸

ESTHER 8:11

"Apart from believing that God actively and sovereignly rules over our world, the book of Esther becomes a mere celebration of Mordecai's wisdom, Esther's courage, and, most of all, simple chance and luck. . . . This book was written to show that God himself acts to achieve the total defeat of his foes and the safety of his people."¹⁹

CONTEXT



Background: Esther's author is unknown, but Jewish tradition often credits Mordecai. Jews retell the narrative every year during Purim, a feast established because of the events in Esther. The book reveals much about God's providence and nature without ever mentioning His name! Initially written for Jews who stayed in Persia after the exile ended, the book tells the decade-long story of Esther, an orphan, and her cousin and guardian Mordecai, both Jews who stayed in Persia's capital city of Susa. Through God's providence, Esther gained the favor of Persia's king, Ahasuerus (Xerxes in Greek), who chose her as queen, though he didn't know she was Jewish. Persia's prime minister, Haman, despised the Jews; when Mordecai refused to bow before him, Haman crafted a plan to annihilate all Jews in Persia's empire, which included Jerusalem. Interestingly, Haman was King Agag's descendant, an Amalekite whom Saul spared, though God ordered him to destroy the entire tribe (1 Sam. 15:1-9). In Esther, we see the effects of Saul's disobedience roughly five hundred years later! But we also see that even in Persia, God wasn't absent from His people and had positioned Esther for "such a time as this" (Esth. 4:14).

THEOLOGY CONNECTION



God's Plan and Human Action

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, THOUGH WE SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE YOU'RE NOT WORKING, ESTHER'S STORY REMINDS US THAT YOU ARE ALWAYS WORKING—THROUGH HUMAN HISTORY AND THROUGH FLAWED PEOPLE. WHEN WE CAN'T SENSE YOUR MOVEMENT, HELP US TO TAKE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THIS TRUTH. HELP US TO LIVE BOLDLY BECAUSE WE TRUST IN YOUR PLANS.



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How much is Satan to blame for bad circumstances (1=Not from him; 10=Satan is totally to blame)?



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

TAKING RISKS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **DO YOU ENJOY TAKING RISKS OR DO YOU AVOID THEM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE?**
- **WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE DRAWN TO RISKY SITUATIONS?**
- **DO YOU THINK LIFE IS MEANINGFUL WITHOUT TAKING RISKS? EXPLAIN.**

Some of us love taking risks; we thrive on the adrenaline rush. Others of us would rather play life safe and stick to situations that don't threaten us in any way. The truth is that living for God is risky. Today, we'll read about a woman named Esther who risked everything for God's people.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Many of us want to know why life happens the way it does—why bad things happen, why our lives are the way they are, why we suffer. This desire to know isn't new; Adam and Eve wrestled too, and the serpent used the desire against them, baiting them with a promise that eating the fruit would give them knowledge—God's knowledge (Gen. 3:5). But God had commanded them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why? Because doing so would lead to death. Here's the truth: In our humanity, we aren't capable of understanding all things. God didn't design us to carry that weight. Instead, He designed us to walk with Him by faith, to trust in His knowledge and understanding (Prov. 3:5-6). So, what do we do when we can't see where God is leading us, when we don't understand? How can we believe God is at work, in control, and moving when we can't see evidence? We walk with Him anyway. We trust in God's vision and knowledge anyway, rather than our own. He'll never lead us to places He won't go with us. And His presence with us is all we need.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Though we can't always see Him moving, we can trust God is with us and working for us.

GOD IS WITH US

ESTHER 3:7-10,12-13

Leaders: The background for Esther is extensive but important for students to understand. We suggest sharing the Context to help set up the passage and the discussion questions.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME? WHAT ABOUT IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME? EXPLAIN.

Being in the right place at the right time is usually a blessing, like being chosen for a prize or randomly meeting someone who would become your best friend.

Sometimes, being in the right place at the right time is being able to help someone else. Or maybe you've been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe you were involved in a wreck due to someone else's reckless driving, or maybe you were blamed for something you didn't do simply because you were nearby. **Either way, we can trust God's guidance in these situations.**

WHY IS THIS CONFLICT BIGGER THAN JUST HAMAN VERSUS THE JEWS? WHO DID THE CONFLICT AFFECT?

Leaders: Review Haman's lineage. This conflict was bigger than Haman and the Jews. God promised to send a Savior to heal the world of sin through Abraham's descendants, the Jews. This conflict was one that mattered for the whole world, for us, because it was Satan's attempt at interfering with God's redemption plan. We sometimes forget that a spiritual realm exists—that Satan and forces of darkness are working against God and His people (Eph. 6:12). **But the battle is already won; it was always won because God always had a plan for our salvation through His Son!** And nothing would stop Him from accomplishing it.

THE KING ANNOUNCED THE JEWS' DESTRUCTION ON THE EVENING BEFORE PASSOVER. WHY WAS THIS SIGNIFICANT? HOW DO YOU THINK THE JEWS FELT?

Leaders: It may be helpful to quickly review Passover's origin in Exodus 12. The edict applied to Jews in the entire Persian empire, including Jerusalem. Their ancestors survived slavery in Egypt, freed by God's mighty hand; they survived wandering in the wilderness; they survived battles to acquire the promised land; then, a remnant survived exile in Babylon! Would God really allow the Jews to be annihilated? **And of all times for the edict's announcement, it fell on the evening before Passover, when the Jews celebrate deliverance from Egypt! Would God not deliver them now?** They may have wondered if God was absent, no longer honoring His covenant with Abraham: What happened to God making His people into a great nation, blessing them and all people through them? What happened to blessing those who bless His people and cursing those who curse them (Gen. 12:2-3)? **From a human perspective, evil seemed victorious. But God was using evil human action to accomplish His plan—a miraculous plan despite the awful circumstances. God's people couldn't see Him working, but He was there—behind the scenes, in every detail.**

GOD IS WORKING FOR US

ESTHER 8:5-8,11-12,17



AS A JEW, ESTHER WAS IN THE MINORITY IN PERSIA. WHEN HAVE YOU FELT THIS WAY AS A BELIEVER IN OUR CULTURE?

Esther lived in a pagan world—no temple, no public reading of God’s Word—surrounded by an unbelieving Persian culture. But God was working there even though His people couldn’t see it. **Your life is part of a bigger purpose than you can see.** God is weaving a story of redemption, which means God has you exactly where you are—in this moment in history, surrounded by this culture—for good reason. As a believer, you may sometimes feel like a minority; in many ways, you are. **God calls you to think, act, and speak differently than the world—to reflect His kingdom.** When your life is rooted in Scripture, you’ll face tension from a culture that disregards God’s commands. Live them out anyway. Wherever you are, commit to living as God’s ambassador.



DO YOU THINK GOD USES ALL THE PARTS OF OUR STORY? HOW CAN THIS HELP YOU TO HONOR HIM IN ALL SEASONS?

Leaders: Be sensitive to situations of abuse, neglect, suicidal thoughts, and so on. We **never** teach students to find the “good” in these situations instead of seeking help. Maybe you don’t love everything about your life and wish to be in another time or another place. Believing that God has a purpose for you can help you live more intentionally—to know you aren’t here by coincidence. **If you frame your life around God’s goodness and providence (that He is involved in His creation by preserving, governing, and caring for it), then wherever you are in life is a place to love Him, serve Him, and share Him with others.** You may wish for different circumstances, but you can trust God’s intentionality with the details of your life. His purpose is good: to make you like Jesus (Rom. 8:28). So, if you wish your life was different, intentionally look for God’s work. Ask Him to show you how to make the most of where you are for His kingdom.



THE NEW EDICT GAVE THE JEWS A CHANCE OF VICTORY. HOW DO WE HAVE MORE THAN A CHANCE OF VICTORY IN JESUS?

Jesus already won the victory. We have more than a chance; we have certain victory against our greatest enemy—death. While we live on earth, we still fight sin and darkness. **But we don’t live defeated lives here, expecting to enjoy victory in eternity only. God gave us victory over sin now if we walk with Him!** God didn’t just give us a chance; He reversed the curse of sin through Jesus’s sacrifice for those who believe!

WRAP-UP

WHAT WOULD CHANGE IF YOU TRUSTED GOD WAS WORKING IN THE GOOD AND BAD SITUATIONS OF YOUR LIFE?

*Leaders: Be sensitive to situations of abuse, neglect, suicidal thoughts, and so on. We sometimes think that God works only in the good circumstances of our lives and credit Satan for the bad circumstances. But this way of thinking isn’t biblical. Now, make no mistake: Satan and forces of darkness do work against God’s people (Eph. 6:12). Pain is a result of sin, which Satan helped propel in Eden, but not all unpleasant circumstances are from the evil one. Some are outcomes of our sin. Some are trials allowed by God to strengthen our faith or opportunities to live out our faith in a lost world (James 1:2-4). **Here’s the truth: Both good and bad circumstances are avenues to live boldly for God.** They don’t change who He is or what He has accomplished. In *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer said, “He has already lived in all our tomorrows as He has lived in all of our yesterdays.”²⁰ **Usually, we can look back and see God’s hand, and because He was with us in the past, we can trust He is with us now and will be with us “in all our tomorrows.”***