

Reading Through Esther

For a little while now we will take a break from Acts, so that we can resume that great book for our Summer Adventure of Faith, called ***Salt & Light***, an all-church study of Acts 8—15. Pastor Dana helped prepare the ***Salt & Light*** materials when he was Director of Prayer First for Converge Worldwide/BGC. In the meantime, let's read together one of the most enjoyable books of the Old Testament, the saga of Esther, the Queen put in place by God “for such a time as this”! This account is much different than reading a gospel (like Luke) or an epistle (like Romans, for example). It is *narrative*, in which God speaks to us through the true story of His divine protection of his people, the Jews. So, the readings will be a bit longer, because they tell the vivid, true story of Esther, scene after extraordinary scene. God bless you!

We recommend you have a notebook and pen for answering questions and recording your thoughts and insights. Bring this notebook with you to Faith Group for discussions and prayer times. Select a quiet place and consistent time to read and pray. We also recommend you pray for a moment before you read God's word and ask for his illumination by the power of the Holy Spirit as you read.

Abbreviations: TAI – *Think About It* PP – *Prayer Point*

Monday, May 16 – Esther 1

TAI: As you read through Esther, keep in mind that the name of God never appears in this book! Amazing. Yet think: how does the hand of God move in this story, though his name does not appear. So, how does the hand of God appear in chapter one of this book of Esther?

PP: “God, help me trust in you in every circumstance of life. Help me trust in your providence and care!” Thank God that even the strangest political and personal maneuverings are his way of moving in circumstances to accomplish his purpose. Have you seen any of these in your life lately?

Tuesday, May 17 – Esther 2:1-18

TAI: Why were there Jews in this foreign land anyway? Why was Esther there and Mordecai? (This will test your knowledge of biblical, Jewish history!) Vashti is replaced by Esther: what secret did Esther carry with her to the king's palace? These were certainly strange customs for God-fearing Jewish people. What can we learn from God working through the secular customs of Persia?

PP: Pray for those who are trying to learn and master strange and secular customs for the sake of sharing the gospel with those who have never heard. Ask God to give you bold courage to reach out to neighbors or co-workers who may be very different from you. Ask God to help you be wise and discerning in a culture increasingly hostile to the kingdom mindset of Christ-followers.

Wednesday, May 18 – Esther 2:19-23

TAI: How is God's hand of providence again evident in this “plotting” incident at the king's gate? What does this foreshadow in the chapters to come (yes, you might be ‘guessing’ here on this one!)? Have you ever had an experience where God seemingly used indirect means to put you exactly in the right place at the right time? (Sometime ask Pastor Dana about the “subway to Brooklyn” story.)

PP: Praise God for another example of his divine providence in exposing this murderous plot to the righteous Mordecai. Praise God for his providence in protecting and guiding you – often when you didn't even know it! Ask him for his protection and guidance and grace this day.

Thursday, May 19 – Esther 3:1-6

TAI: When you think of Mordecai refusing to bow down to Haman, what other Old Testament man comes to mind? Why is this evil plot to destroy the Jews no surprise in light of history? (OK, if you need help with the first question, read Daniel chapter 6!)

PP: Express thanksgiving to God for his gracious protection of the Jewish people. Thank him for his divine protection for *all peoples, in fact!* Pray for a powerful work of the Holy Spirit to reach Jewish people all over the world with the gospel, including Israel. Ask God to give you Mordecai-like courage to stand true to Christ!

Friday, May 20 – Esther 3:7-15

TAI: What means did Haman use to time his gambit against the Jews? Was Haman truthful in all he told the king about the Jewish people? REMINDER: Are you watching for the hand of God in all this evil plotting and maneuvering? How do you think Esther will respond to this effort to destroy her people?

PP: Ask God to keep you clear of unbiblical means of discerning life direction, such as those utilized by Haman in this passage. Ask God to clearly guide you through his word, prayer, and godly counsel. Once again, thank God that this plot ultimately failed and that He cared for and protected the Jews.

Weekend, May 21-22 – Joshua 1

TAI: Pastor Dave Vilhauer is likely going to preach from this powerful passage of Scripture at Faith this weekend. What truth is God pressing into your life through reading it? How might it apply to children receiving Bibles in the service, graduates from high school and college, or to you?

PP: Pray for Pastor Dave as he preaches. And pray for those graduates celebrating a new life stage!

Monday, May 23 – Esther 4:1-11

TAI: What was the symbolism of sackcloth and ashes? Why do you suppose that people in mourning were not supposed to enter the king's gate? Why do you suppose that Mordecai stressed the sum of money that Haman promised the king? What dilemma faced Queen Esther now? What dilemmas have you faced for being a Christ-follower?

PP: Express "mourning" in prayer to God for all the broken lives and lost people and devastated women and children in the world today. Express sorrow to God for all the wicked and evil things which are done on account of love of money (what are some of them?). Ask God to give you boldness to take a stand when faced with dilemmas for following Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Tuesday, May 24 – Esther 4:12-17

TAI: What confidence does Mordecai show that God will certainly protect his people as he promised long before? What inspiration do you receive when reading the words “for such a time as this”? Though God’s name is not used in this book, what godly practice does Esther call for now? Are you prepared to perish for the cause of the gospel, if that were required of you in following God’s will?

PP: Pray for persecuted Christians around the world who this very day are dying or suffering greatly for their faith in Christ Jesus. Ask God to help you be faithful and true to him “for such a time as this” in your life. Once again, pray for courage and boldness and backbone to stand true for Christ. Rejoice in prayer that *God is faithful to fulfill all his promises – every one of them!*

Wednesday, May 25 – Esther 5

TAI: As the chapter begins, what further evidence is there that God had placed Esther in the palace “for such a time as this”? Why does Esther not ask the king immediately and directly, but first invite to a feast, one and then another? What lesson could we learn from this? What drove Haman to such hatred toward Mordecai, that he would build a gallows for him? Do you see such hatred in the world today?

PP: Rejoice that God is keeping his hand upon believers no matter what their suffering and hardship. Ask God to protect your heart from hate toward others – is their confession you need to make in that regard? Ask God to help you be strategically shrewd for the sake of Christ and the kingdom!

Thursday, May 26 – Esther 6:1-11

TAI: In the beauty of the telling of Esther’s story, there is an amazing interplay between Haman (the king’s man who was evil) and Mordecai (God’s man who was holy to the Lord). How does that interplay unfold in this chapter? What lesson can we learn from this extraordinary turn-about?

PP: Rejoice that ultimately, righteousness will be honored by God, and that our righteousness is by God’s grace in Jesus Christ our Lord. Take heart that God is not ignoring your plight as you seek to walk uprightly in a troubled world. Take a moment for quiet, heartfelt worship.

Friday, May 27 – Esther 6:12 – 7:6

TAI: It is curious that even the wicked Haman’s wife and friends sense that the tide has turned. Why do you think the writer was careful to include this detail? How does Esther once again show her great wisdom in how she speaks to the king? Where did that wisdom come from?

PP: Praise God for his extraordinary grace in this moment of the story. Express to God your great faith and trust in him. Ask him to use you to turn the tide of history, even as he used Queen Esther to do so.

Weekend, May 28-29 – Titus 1-3

TAI: This Memorial Day weekend, Rev. Walt Moser, Director of Church Planting for our Converge Heartland District, and church planter in Brandon, will preach the word to us at Faith. We don’t know

his text, but the brief, powerful book of Titus seems like a great choice to prepare for his message. Are you prepared for 'every good work' God has planned for you to accomplish, by his grace?

PP: Pray for Pastor Walt and the church plant in Brandon, and for all the church plants in our region, including ones in Oklahoma, Nebraska, Kansas, and South Dakota. Pray for those who are remembering loved one who gave their lives in service to our country, or who have loved ones currently serving.

Monday, May 30 – Memorial Day – Esther 7

TAI: Review the first 6 verses, read last Friday, and then complete the chapter. Reflect for a time on this extraordinary turn of events, and how God protected his people and vindicated his glory. Can you think of another time in history when God did a similar thing? Do you believe he can do it once again?

PP: Worship God. Honor him as the One, True, Holy and Righteous God. Also, thank him for those who gave their lives that we might have freedom of worship in our country, and pray for those currently serving in the armed forces of the United States. Pray for the chaplains ministering to them.

Tuesday, May 31 – Esther 8

TAI: Actually, perhaps we've jumped the gun just a bit, for the work is not done in the story. How is the drama between Haman and Mordecai now completely inverted? What is Queen Esther's request now to the king, and why must she make it? What sticky problem needed to be resolved, and how did the king choose to resolve it? Explain the last sentence of the chapter.

PP: Ask God to give to the church and to the nation more men of honor, integrity, and faith such as Mordecai, and more women of faith and courage like Esther. Ask God to give you these things! Pray for the leadership of our church in this regard.

Wednesday, June 1 – Esther 9:1-19

TAI: If Haman was dead and the plot to exterminate the Jews exposed, why was there violence and killing yet? Again, in what way do you see the hand of God in this second edict of the king and its fulfillment? What have you learned from the book of Esther about God's ways of fulfilling his promises?

PP: Pray for suffering Christians, that in many places, the tide would turn by God's grace and believers would be vindicated in an amazing way. Pray for the spread of the gospel throughout the world, that untold millions would turn from false religion and unbelief to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord!

Thursday, June 2 – Esther 9:20-32

TAI: What feast is inaugurated to honor this great grace of God in protecting and providing for his people? Why did the feast take on this name, Purim? Do Jews today still observe Purim? What important days in your life do you commemorate for God's work of faithfulness and grace to you?

PP: Reflect on your life, recalling various ways and times God has revealed his faithful love to you. Pray these memories back to God as a kind of prayer memorial, praising him for his faithfulness. You might want to sing the great hymn, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness, O God My Father*.

Friday, June 3 – Esther 10

TAI: Go back to the beginning of the story of Esther, and recall where Mordecai was and what he was doing, and then compare that with our text today. It's quite an amazing contrast, is it not? Are you ready for God to lead you through such a tremendous change of life circumstance, for his glory and your joy in fulfilling God's plan for you?

PP: Ask God to lead and guide you to the place of influence and testimony which he has prepared in advance for you (Ephesians 2:10). Ask God to help you remember throughout your life the lessons of the book of Esther. Tell God that you trust him with all your heart! Proverbs 3:5,6

Weekend, June 4-5 – Acts 1 and 7

TAI: Tomorrow we begin a Summer Adventure of Faith called **Salt & Light**. This journey will take us through Acts 8 to 15, an eight-week journey, utilizing a workbook for daily study, the Faith U. class for adults, summer Faith Group gatherings, and the messages of our pastors. This weekend, to review the earlier part of Acts we read this spring, reread the first chapter and chapter 7. Be ready to go on a grand adventure of Faith!

PP: Ask God to build your faith and confidence and joy in him through **Salt & Light** this summer! Pray for your Faith Group Leader. Pray for our pastors and elders as they lead us on the journey. Ask God to give you the faith of Mordecai and the courage of Esther this summer!