



Cosmo

*Was a Diva*



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# Esther Was a Diva

Esther was a diva. She is introduced as a young lady who was “beautiful of form and face” (Esther 2:7). The NIV says Esther “had a lovely figure and was beautiful.”

The name Esther literally means “star.” If Esther lived today, she would have her own reality show called the *The Esther Experience*, and people could tune in daily to view the diva in action. Her pictures would regularly be found on the covers of W magazine and Vogue. Tabloids would run stories about her: “Is Esther Too Thin?” “Does Esther Have a Baby Bump?” “What Is Esther Wearing, and Where Did She Buy It?”

Esther wasn't merely easy on the eyes. She wasn't just pretty. No, Esther was much more than that. The text makes it clear that Esther was beyond pretty. Esther was beautiful. Whatever the gene pool happened to be that brought Esther into being, it definitely worked in her favor because she was, as they say where I come from, *fine*. To really say it correctly, you have to drag the i out a bit. Esther was *fiiiiine*.

Yet even though Esther was fine in both form and face, her life started out as an uphill battle. Orphaned as a young girl, Esther—also known as Hadassah—was taken in by her relative Mordecai. Esther 2:7 tells us that Mordecai raised Esther as his own daughter. Both of them undoubtedly lived difficult lives as minorities and exiles in a foreign land. Yet despite the harsh reality of Esther's existence, her story has been preserved for more than 2500 years as a tale of beauty, bravery, and even a bit of diva-like behavior. When

Esther was challenged to risk her own life to potentially save the lives of others, she initially balked. She played the diva card and stalled. That's when Mordecai challenged her to think beyond herself by saying a line that may be better known than Bogart's, “Here's looking at you, kid.” Mordecai said, “**And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:14).

For such a time as this.

It's a phrase quoted in churches and small groups and printed in Christian newsletters, magazines, and books. It's a phrase that encapsulates the power of personal destiny, appealing to the hope in all of us. This is because deep within each of us is a desire to experience purpose and meaning beyond our own understanding and our own abilities and decisions. We were created for this. We want our own renditions of the Esther experience. Maybe that's why Esther's story appeals to such a broad audience. In Esther's story, we come face-to-face with the potential of our own life story and God's providence. Providence is the hand of God in the glove of history. Nowhere in the Bible are God's invisible fingerprints shown more clearly than in the book of Esther. In fact, Esther is the only book in the Bible where God's fingerprints are the only evidence of His presence. It doesn't even include His name. If you start reading from the very first verse of Esther all the way through to the closing chapter, you will not come across God's name even once. That cannot be said of any other book in the Bible. Not only is God's name not found, but neither are there any references to God's people sacrificing to Him, worshipping Him, or serving Him. There are no references to the Word of God or even to His laws. This absence caused a stir when the books of the Old Testament were being compiled. After all, how could God author a book that didn't mention Him by name?



## The Power of Providence

Yet while the name of God is not present in the book of Esther, His fingerprints are everywhere. The theological term for this is providence. Providence is the work of God whereby He integrates and blends events in order to fulfill His original design. Providence is God sitting behind the steering wheel of life. It refers to God's governance of all events as He directs them toward His intended end. Providence is God using what is frequently called luck, chance, coincidence, or mistakes to stitch events together into a tapestry of meaning.

God's providential dealings often happen behind the scenes. Like the great and powerful Oz behind the curtain, God isn't always directly seen in what He does. Unlike the great Oz behind the curtain, though, God isn't a fake, and He is always directly involved in what is happening.

Yet sometimes we label as a mistake what God has done on purpose. Things might look completely out of order in the visible realm when they are perfectly in order in the spiritual realm, having been arranged in a way that brings about God's perfect plan. Each Wednesday night at our church, I set aside a time to answer questions about the Bible from the congregation. It's more informal than when I deliver a sermon. In this setting I hear what's on the hearts of church members and address practical issues of living out the Christian life.

Not too long ago, one of the questions was why God's name was absent from the book of Esther. No one knows the answer for sure, but we do

know that when the story of Esther took place, God's people were living outside of God's will. God had instructed them to go back to Israel from Babylon, but many of them did not go back, choosing instead to stay where they had become comfortable. Living as the minority culture in a foreign land must have been challenging. But regardless, the people of Israel had become accustomed to their way of life, their community, and their day-to-day activities. They had become at home outside the will of God. In fact, they had become so at home there that Mordecai himself willingly placed Esther in a position of moral compromise—a situation where she would be required to sleep with the king without being married to him.

People can start to feel at home outside the will of God. Just as Jonah fell asleep in the middle of a thundering storm that God had sent to shake him up, a person can get so comfortable being out of the will of God that it seems like too much trouble to get back in it.

Because the book of Esther takes place in a context of a people living outside of God's will, as well as for other reasons, God takes a step back, not even allowing His name to be used in it. Yet even without the direct mention of God's name, this book contains some of the greatest and most profound spiritual principles. If you will truly grasp and own the principles found in the book of Esther, they can literally change the course of your life. If an unknown and foreign orphan girl named Esther can become the queen of a kingdom, there is nothing that God cannot do.

## God's Cosmic Blender

You probably have a blender in your kitchen. Blenders have been uniquely designed to take independent foods and integrate, unite, interface, mix, and join them together to create something new and better than any of the items could have been on its own.

Just to keep the record straight, I don't cook. In fact, boiling water one time almost got me into trouble because I forgot to turn off the burner and then proceeded to take a nap. Yet even though I can't claim to be much of a cook, I do know that a blender puts different ingredients together so that they are amalgamated into something brand-new. Throw some ice cubes, strawberries, orange juice, and a banana together in a blender, and the end result is a fruit smoothie that is much tastier than any of the individual items.

What a blender does in your kitchen, God does in His universe. God is the consummate blender. He has an astounding ability to take seemingly unrelated things and put them together to form something bigger, better, and more beautiful than what each one was on its own. And no story in the Bible better illustrates God's ability to do this than the story of Esther. In Esther, we witness God perfectly intersecting plot lines and people in order to bring about His intended purpose.

## Vashti Is Vanquished

We are first introduced to the story of Esther when the Persian king Ahasuerus, ruler of provinces from India to Ethiopia, decided to have a banquet. In fact, Ahasuerus didn't just have one banquet. This party king had at least five banquets, all recorded in the first two chapters of Esther.

At Ahasuerus' banquets, the men were in one location and the women were in another. One night while drunk, Ahasuerus sent seven eunuchs to bring his queen, Vashti, to his side of the party. Ahasuerus wanted to display Vashti's beauty before all of the men at the party. Now when a person becomes drunk, he quits thinking rationally and sometimes does unexpected things, such as summoning his wife to show her off before all of the other drunk men at the party. More than likely, that meant much more than just having Vashti strut the runway once or twice. It probably meant some form of uncovering or disclosure that Vashti apparently didn't feel comfortable with.

We know that Vashti didn't want to come at Ahasuerus' command because in Esther 1:12 we read that she refused. "Nope, not doing that," Vashti said (in my Tony Evans' paraphrase). "You're a fool, A-has, if you think I'm going to come and put myself out there in front of your whistle-blowing friends. It's not happening."

Vashti's refusal upset Ahasuerus so much that "his wrath burned within him" (verse 12). He asked the princes what should be done about a queen who refused to come when he called. This question got a well-thought-out reply by one of the princes named Memucan.





*Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, "King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come." This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in the same way to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger. If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she (Esther 1:16-19).*

Basically, Memucan said that word was going to spread through the kingdom that the king's wife resisted him and his request, and when that happens, everyone is going to have problems with their wives as well. Women will start marching or protesting because if Vashti doesn't have to respond to her husband's requests, neither should they. If the king can't run his own house, the princes warned, it's going to create a terrible situation for every other man in all 127 provinces that he ruled.

After hearing the prince's council, Ahasuerus quickly got rid of Vashti. He put her out of his kingdom, banning her from her role and his presence for the rest of her life. However, not long after that, the party was over. And when it was, our king sobered up. Once he got sober and his anger decreased, Ahasuerus thought about what he had done. We read,

*"After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her" (Esther 2:1).*

In other words, he came to his senses. He had temporarily lost his mind and made a law that he now regretted. The problem, though, was that the law of the Medes and the Persians simply stated that when the king made a decree, no one—not even the king himself—could reverse it.

In a span of just a few days, Ahasuerus has gone from partying and drinking to being lonely and depressed. He has banished his beautiful wife, Vashti, and now he misses her. So the king's attendants came up with another idea.

*Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given them. Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti (Esther 2:2-4).*

Rather than have him mope around all day long about a regrettable decision, the attendants suggested that the king simply start his own *Next Top Queen* search. Surely there were other women like Vashti who could be his wife. And to make matters easier, they even offered to go on the road and conduct preliminary screenings in every province of his kingdom. He wouldn't have to do a thing. The best of the best would get a yellow ticket to Susa in their quest to be crowned Ahasuerus' next queen.

Ahasuerus seemed to like the idea of starring in a season of *The Bachelor-King*, and he gave the command to his attendants to begin the search for the lucky woman who would be the last one standing as he handed her his red rose.

Episode 1 began with Esther making a great first impression on those who could help or hurt her fate.

*So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women. Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem. Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known (verses 8-10).*

We see through this passage that Mordecai had made it clear to Esther that all she needed to do was show up and look beautiful, but that she wasn't to tell anyone that she was an Israelite. To do so in Susa would not have worked well for her. So Esther followed Mordecai's advice, and in so doing, she found favor with Hegai, who not only provided her with the best location, cosmetics, and food, but also would later give Esther advice in her quest to land the king of Persia. In episode 2, we find Esther and all of the other bride hopefuls spending the next 12 months preparing themselves in the harem with every possible form of beauty treatments available in that day.

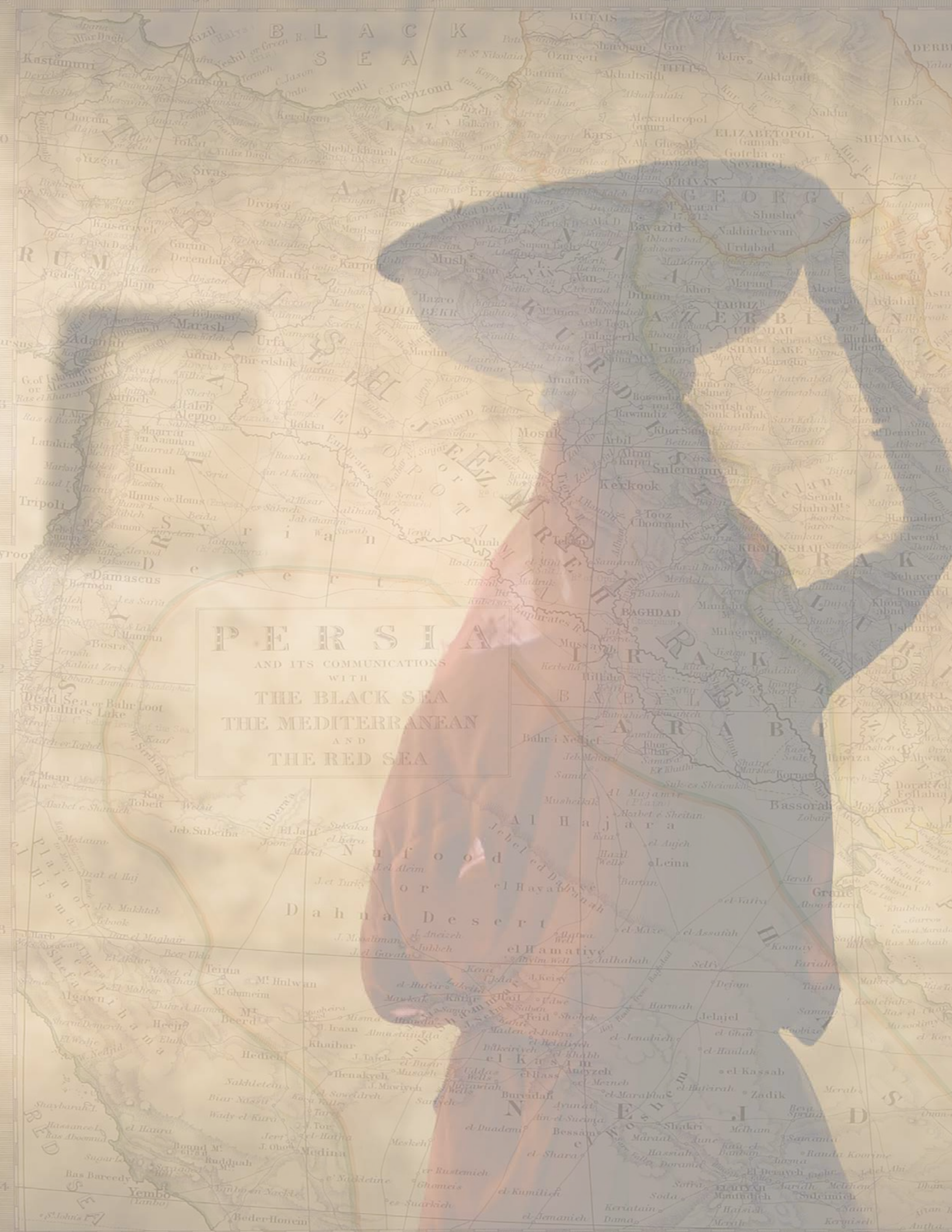
*Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to the King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months of spices and the cosmetics for women...(verse 12).*

Each woman spent six months in each beauty regimen, but as we have already seen, Esther had found favor with Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the women. So Esther received not only the best beauty treatments but also the best food during that time. After the 12 months of preparation had concluded, we reach episode 3, when it's time for Esther to make her presence known to the king.

*The young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given to her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.*

*Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign (Esther 2:13-16).*





When it came time for Esther to visit the king in his palace, she chose to take only that which Hegai, the king’s eunuch, had advised her to take. Hegai knew what would please the king, and because Hegai favored Esther, he sent her to the king with everything that would help to make the best impression on him. And his plan worked.

Episode 4 gives us the king’s decision.

*“The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (verse 17).*

Esther had won both the title and the crown as queen next to King Ahasuerus. But remember, we are only in episode 4. There is a lot more of this season that still needs to play out.

## Introducing Haman

The season heats up as we’re introduced to another character in the story named Haman. In chapter 3 of Esther, we learn that Haman has been promoted to a high position by King Ahasuerus. In fact, Haman’s position is so high that his mere presence demands a response from the king’s servants. However, as we will read in verse 2, Mordecai—Esther’s relative—refuses to bow before him:

“All the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.”

Mordecai’s refusal to pay homage to Haman, along with the fact that he was a foreigner, enraged Haman. In fact, Haman was so full of rage, he wasn’t content to make Mordecai alone suffer for his decision. Haman decided to make all of Mordecai’s people, the Jews, suffer as well. In fact, Haman comes up with a plan to annihilate the Jews.

So now we have a Persian king who has deposed his queen because she wouldn’t respond to him the way he had wanted. We’ve met a beautiful girl—Esther, the Jewish orphan—who has caught the king’s eye and become the queen of the kingdom. We also have the evil Haman, who has been promoted to a position that requires others to bow down to him. We also have another man—Mordecai, a cousin of the queen—who refuses to bow to Haman. Now Haman wants to kill an entire race of people, the same race as the beautiful queen, because his pride has been tampered with by a man of that race. And we are only partway through the story. The book of Esther relates a story of intrigue, suspense, loyalty, pride, love, defiance, and beauty thus far. Basically, it’s a soap opera tucked away between Nehemiah and Job.

Fast-forwarding through a few more episodes, we come to the end of chapter 3 and the king’s irreversible decree to annihilate the Jews. When Mordecai hears of the impending doom brought onto his people all because he wouldn’t bow to Haman, he tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth and ashes, and goes to the middle of the city to wail loudly in public. Feeling personally



responsible, Mordecai sends a message to Esther giving her a copy of the text of the edict that declares the upcoming destruction of the Jews, hoping she will go to the king and plead with him to do something.

Mordecai had told Esther not to reveal that she is a Jew. But now she's living in the palace with the king and the Jews are slated for genocide, so Mordecai tells her that now is the time to reveal her true identity. The king chose her for a reason. Surely he will listen to her plea.

Esther, heartbroken for her cousin and her people, sends a message back to Mordecai explaining why she's helpless to do anything to stop the decree. Decrees cannot be revoked, and everyone knows whoever enters the king's presence without having been invited risks being killed. Basically, Esther plays the diva card and lets Mordecai know that he doesn't understand how things work in the palace. A person in Esther's position doesn't simply march into the presence of the king and tell him what she's thinking. In fact, Esther goes so far as to tell Mordecai that she and the king haven't even hooked up recently. It's been a month, and the king hasn't even asked for her.

*All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days (Esther 4:11).*

Esther knows she's come from rags to riches—from the outhouse to the white house. She used to wash her own clothes by hand, and now she has maids to wash them for her. She used to fetch her own water in a jug, but now she bathes daily in warm baths drawn for her. She's traded in her walking shoes for a Mercedes chariot and exchanged Target for Neiman Marcus. Those things aren't bad, but Esther has begun to believe her own reviews. She has bought into the meaning of her own name—that she is a star. And to help out someone else by appearing uninvited before the king is just too risky for a star. After all, Esther could lose more than everything she has; she could lose her life. So, in a manner of words, Esther tells Mordecai, "Nope, not happening."

Mordecai gets the note from Esther and sends another note straight back to her. This is the child he had rescued from an impossible situation. This is the cousin he called his own daughter. Mordecai wasn't about to take a "nope" as Esther's final answer.

*Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have attained royalty for such a time as this? (Esther 4: 13-14).*

Mordecai reminds Hadassah, now known solely as Esther, that even though she's living a luxurious life in the palace, she won't escape Haman's wrath any more than the next Jew in the kingdom. A king's edict is a final edict. More than that, Mordecai reminds Esther that although she might be in a unique position to help her people, if she doesn't step up to deliver them, God will find someone else who can do the same job. Mordecai reminds Esther

that she is not indispensable. If she won't cooperate with God, He can find someone who will. Ahasuerus already got rid of one wife, Vashti, in the span of one party. Getting rid of the second one might not be that difficult.

Mordecai was trying to help Esther make the connection between her beauty, her opportunity, and the kingdom of God. She had not yet understood that how she looked and the position she held were tied to a kingdom purpose. All she thought was that she was fortunate because she could dress up and look fine, grabbing the eye of the king. But God had specifically placed Esther in a position of influence, combining her background, history, and personality in such a way as to deliver His people. It wasn't just about her fine clothes, furniture, lifestyle, hairstyle, and bank account. The favor Esther had received was about much more than all of that.

## For Such a Time as This

I realize this story is from a time long ago in a kingdom far away, but the principles are as relevant as if it happened today. Have you ever considered that maybe God has you here in His kingdom on earth for such a time as this? Have you ever considered that everything that has happened in your life—the good, bad, and the ugly—has happened for a specific purpose up to this point? If all you see is what you see, you haven't seen the my steries of kingdom yet.

God's kingdom involves His rule, His purposes, and His agenda. In the kingdom, one overarching principle rings true: *You are blessed in order to be a blessing. You are freed in order to set free. You are redeemed in order to redeem.*

Maybe you've been blessed with an excellent education, or great looks, or even a good life. Whatever God has given you—be it a talent, gift, or unique capacity in life—He has done it on purpose. He doesn't want you to hoard your blessings, but to use the position He has given you to bring about His purposes in the lives of others around you. Esther feared going before the king because she thought that doing so would mean trouble. If he didn't hold out his scepter, she could lose her life. But Esther's fears were rooted in one thing: Esther. When the greatest thing that matters to you is you, then even if you are in the kingdom, you will miss the point of the kingdom altogether. Just as Esther almost did, you will miss out on the kingdom-sized destiny God has just for you.

After Mordecai's reply, Esther finally got it. She connected who she was and the position she was in with God's purposes. When she did so, she sent back a much different reply to Mordecai.

*Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish (verse 16).*

People often take a risk in life for a business deal, or a thrill, or even a relationship. Why not take a risk for God? Esther did. She decided to take the risk—with the appropriate planning and preparation.



Esther's plan involved asking all the Jews in Susa to fast and pray for her for three days and nights. She and her maidens would also pray and fast. After this, she would go to the king and risk her life to save her people.

As Esther was making plans to visit the king, she didn't know that God was working His cosmic blender in the background once again. All Esther could see was that in a few days she had to approach a man who had shown no interest in her for the past 30 days. Not only that, she had to approach a man who had banished his previous wife just because he was drunk one night and she didn't do what he had requested. This is the same man who could have Esther killed simply by not extending his golden scepter, the same man who had given in to Haman's wishes to annihilate an entire people group simply because Haman wanted him to.

Even so, after three days Esther approached the king. I'm sure you could have heard a pin drop in the room as Esther made her appearance before him without having been summoned. Seconds probably seemed like minutes or even hours as the two met eyes and Esther waited on the king's response.

*When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter (Esther 5:2).*

She had survived. The first part of the challenge was over, and Esther had received favor from the king. But the story couldn't end there. Esther still needed to speak on behalf of her people. At this point, Esther planned to invite the king and Haman to dinner so she could do just that. But what Esther didn't know is that while she was

preparing herself for that next step—the dinner—God was working behind the scenes. Haman had decided to build a gallows to hang Mordecai and his family on as a prelude to the killing of the Jews. At the same time, the king had a rough night, and everything in Esther's story thus far hinges on this one night.

*During the night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. The king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him" (Esther 6:1-3).*

The king couldn't sleep. That may seem like a minor thing. After all, I'm sure the king had many sleepless nights. But what matters is that the king couldn't sleep this night. On this night, the king requests someone to come and read to him in order to put him to sleep and stop his tossing and turning. He calls for the record keeper. You can't get much more boring than that. There is nothing like reading the minutes of a board meeting to put you fast asleep.

But as the records are being read, the king notices something—someone had saved his life. That seems pretty important, the king thinks. He asks his servant what had been done for the person who saved his life. "Nothing," the servant replies. The king doesn't like that at all, so the next day he calls Haman in and asks him what should be done for someone he wants to honor. Haman, thinking the king must be planning to honor him, gives him a great reply.

*Let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor" (verses 8-9).*

Great idea, the king agrees. In fact, since Haman has all of the details down so clearly, Ahasuerus decides to let Haman carry out the plan himself—with one slight change from what Haman had envisioned. This honor belongs to Mordecai. Mordecai, the man Haman was about to hang, is now the man the king has ordered him to honor. The tables were turned overnight simply because the king could not go to sleep.

That is how great God is. God works behind the scenes—keeping people awake when they ought to be sleeping—when people step out as Esther did and take a risk to be used by Him.

Esther didn't witness God moving behind the scenes until she went forward and took the risk. Once she did that, God went to work setting the stage for the next episode. Proverbs 21:1 tells us, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." That's good news for you and me. The king is the most powerful man in the world, and if his heart is in God's hand, then whose hand is your boss' heart in? Whose hand is your family member's heart in? Whose hand is your present circumstance in? If God can direct an entire government and save a nation simply by keeping the king awake, He can certainly fix whatever mess you might be in if you will step out in faith.

When I was younger, I caught a glimpse of God working behind the scenes on my behalf. While in seminary, I worked the night shift at the Trail-

ways bus station. It was called the dead-man shift because it lasted all night long. After a few weeks on the job, I was approached about a scheme the employees had going on. Someone would punch you in even though you weren't in, and you could sleep an hour longer than your normal break allowed. Essentially, you would get paid for sleeping.

When they came to me and told me how the system worked, I told them that I couldn't take part in their scheme. As a Christian, I couldn't do that. Their response was simple: "You don't have a choice. Everyone does it."

Again I replied, "I'm sorry, but as a follower of Jesus Christ, I can't participate in your scam." Needless to say, the rest of the employees didn't like that and tried to punish me for not participating. For example, when five of us were supposed to be unloading a bus, the other four would sit down and watch me do it by myself. Scenarios like that played out for an entire month simply because I wouldn't go along with their deception.

But while this was going on, God was working things out behind the scenes. One evening I got a call to come to the front office. The person I met with in the front office told me that they had a suspicion about what was going on during the night shift and that they had sent one of the supervisors to go around at night and check it out. The supervisor noticed that most everyone was taking part in the scam but that I wasn't. As a result, they promoted me over everyone else and made me the night supervisor.

While I was unloading buses all by myself and the others were sleeping, God was working behind the scenes. God can work it out, friend. Trust me. I've seen it in my own life—not just at Trailways, but in many scenarios. God can work things out while people are sleeping, just as my fellow employees were at the bus station. Or, as in the case of King Ahasuerus, He can work



things out while someone can't go to sleep at all. We might call it luck, chance, or coincidence, but providence is the invisible hand of God orchestrating things for good. Just as God arranged for Ruth, a Moabite widow, to connect with Boaz, who would eventually marry her, and just as God arranged for Moses' mother to be hired to raise him, God is continually in the business of hooking people up to carry out His divine plan.

## Haman Is Hanged

Or, as in the case of Haman, God can bring things together for bad. We read that when Haman got the news of what he was going to have to do for Mordecai, the man he was just days away from hanging on his gallows, he "hurried home, mourning, with his head covered" (Esther 6:12). Yet before Haman had much opportunity to cry at all, he was rushed to the banquet Esther had prepared for him and the king. At the banquet, king Ahasuerus asked Esther what it was that she wanted. "It shall be granted you...even to half of the kingdom it shall be done" (Esther 7:2).

But Esther told the king that she didn't want half of the kingdom. What she wanted was for her life and the lives of her people to be spared from an attack that had been planned against them. Enraged, the king asked Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?" (verse 5). Esther pointed to Haman.

Haman was sobbing a few hours earlier, but now he's terrified before the king and queen. King Ahasuerus went outside into the palace garden to try to cool off from his anger, but Haman stayed behind in the room and begged Esther for his life. Apparently, Haman's pleading got out of hand.

*When the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?" As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face (verse 8).*

*Immediately taking Haman out of the presence of the king and queen, "they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided" (verse 10).*

Friends, God is able to turn any situation around. The Bible is full of examples of God taking what looked like a hopeless situation—a too-late situation, a missed-shot opportunity—and turning it around. Consider Joseph, for example. He was sold into slavery, framed, and imprisoned in Egypt, but God worked it out so that he became next in line to the Pharaoh.

God turned things around for Joseph in Egypt and for Esther in Susa, and He does it in our own lives too. God directs our paths to get us exactly where we are supposed to be.

According to my plan, I was never supposed to come to Dallas, where I eventually became the first African-American to graduate from Dallas Theological Seminary with a doctoral degree.

According to my plan, I was never supposed to stay in Dallas, where I have served as senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship for more than 35 years. And God saw fit to open doors in the early 1980s for me to spread His





Word through a radio ministry when most major Christian radio stations resisted airing Black preachers to their listeners.

According to my plan, I was supposed to be studying in Indiana. But one of my college professors saw something in me and offered to pay for me to apply to a school that I thought was not even an option for me. I didn't even have the money to pay my application fee. But God spoke to a professor on my behalf, and because He did, my life has gone in a direction that I had never imagined.

Regardless of how impossible things may seem, I want to encourage you to never give up or quit on God. God can work out, in, through, and around any situation for your good and His greater glory. But what He won't do is acquiesce to your divahood. God won't bow to your Esther-dom. Remember, the name Esther means "star." And God is not impressed by anyone's stardom. After all, He is the One who gave what was needed in order for you to get there.

God is not impressed when He takes us from the bottom to the top and yet we are silent about His kingdom. When God receives no benefit from blessing us, we have failed to connect our blessings with God's purposes. God gave Esther favor wherever she went—not just so she would have favor, but so through her, God could empower His people to defend themselves from the impending attack. God never blesses you just for you. The fastest way to cut off your blessing is to keep your blessing just for you.

Never be a blessing diva, assuming that your blessing is only about you. If God sees that He cannot use you for His kingdom purposes, He will find someone else through whom His deliv-

ering power can come. This is the warning Mordecai gave to Esther early on.

We live in a pompous world, a world of celebrity. We think that if we have a nice home, or a nice car, or a nice job, or a nice bank account, or any number of things, we're above taking steps of faith, risky moves that God calls us to on behalf of others. In our celebrity-style Christianity, we often elevate our royalty above our service. Yes, it's true that as a child of the King, you are a prince or a princess. You are royalty. But Jesus said He is looking for servants, not celebrities. He says, "The greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). A truly great person recognizes the unique opportunity he or she has been given and hasn't forgotten where that opportunity came from and why it exists.

Make sure you never find yourself too blessed to be a blessing—or too blessed to be used. God wants to bless you, but He doesn't want you to play the diva card when He does bless you. He wants to make sure that when the time comes, you will be willing to be used by Him to help others in His name for His glory and His kingdom purposes.

We are all valuable to God. But some of us are more useful to Him, which in turn, increases the value we have already been given.





## ESTHER WAS A DIVA

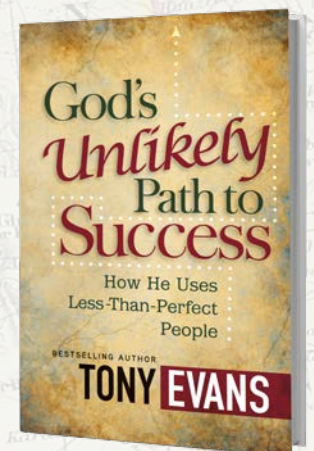
For example, if you and I were to walk together on a sandy beach, we would be walking on sand that is free. However, if we wanted to buy some of that sand to use it at a school playground, we would pay roughly \$25 a bag for that free sand. If we needed that sand as sandpaper for a restoration project we were working on, we would be paying several dollars just for a few sheets. And in Silicon Valley, where companies use sand in the process of making computer chips, the free sand we had been walking on has now increased exponentially in value when connected with high-priced computer chips. It's a simple law of economics—value goes up as usefulness goes up. God's blessings in your life ought to make you more than just blessed; they ought to make you useful to His kingdom.


There's no doubt that Esther had been blessed. She had been placed in a unique position close to the king and was experiencing all the benefits of his favor. However, until Esther was willing to use her lifestyle to meet the need of her people because of her love for God and faith in Him, Esther's blessings would have remained just that—blessings and not a destiny.

More than that, when it came time for the decree to be carried out against the Jews, Esther would have lost the blessings she had been given, including her life. Friend, if you have been a diva—or the male version, a divo—remember who has made you and given you the talents, skills, looks, finances, or opportunities that you have. God is not interested in acquiescing to celebrities. Rather, He is interested in blessing servants whose hearts are committed to Him and committed to using what He has given them to help deliver others.

Mordecai told Esther that she had come to her position “for such a time as this.” And so have you. Wherever you are, get rid of the diva card. Don't play it. Instead, use what God has given you to help others while glorifying Him.

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