

ESTHER



A collaborative project by the Communications
and Family Ministries Staff at Grace Covenant

Written by:

Angela Buchanan, Nick Falkowski,
Kate Poling and Johnny Rocco

Edited by:

Angela Buchanan

Designed by:

Francyne Melberg

Listen to, watch, or share weekly messages on the
book of Esther online @ gracecovenant.org



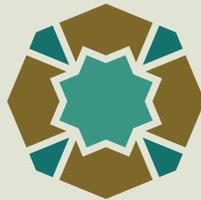
GRACE
COVENANT

INTRODUCTION

by Angela Buchanan

For 4 weeks our church family will journey to the land of Persia as we look at the remarkable story of Queen Esther. Not just adults, but students and kids too! This book of the Bible has all the ingredients of an action-packed movie: an evil villain, an orphan girl living in a foreign land, a kind and generous guardian, and a diabolical plot to kill an entire people group. Esther is filled with spiritual truths that will encourage, challenge, and inspire you.

Take some time to read through the book of Esther and then unpack the story by working through the pages of this devotional with your family around the dinner table, over coffee with friends, or at your life group. We pray this resource will help to spark conversation and reveal truths you can apply that will enable you to courageously impact the world around you.





GOD'S WAYS

are behind the scenes;

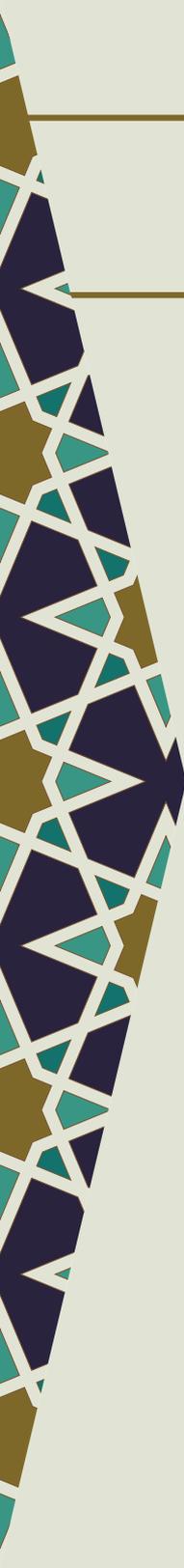
◀ *but* ▶

HE MOVES

all the scenes he is behind.

—Pastor John Nelson Darby





WEEK ONE

by Kate Poling

A few years ago, I spent some time in Cairo, Egypt and it was exhausting. Not because of the time difference or the cultural differences, but because there was never any silence. The intense traffic, constant blaring of horns, and the chatter of men coming through the window of my hostel was endless. I could not sleep! All I wanted was silence.

Silence is something we all want at some point—when the music is too loud, or when the kids won't stop fighting, or the baby won't stop crying. We have all heard the term and I am sure a lot of us have said it, "Can I just get some peace and quiet around here?" But what do we do when God is silent? It seems as if the hardest moments in life are when His silence is loudest. There are times when things look bad and all we need from God is a pat on the back, a "you're doing a good job", or even a simple, "I'm right here with you." And when we don't get it, it can feel devastating. It stops us in our tracks. It makes moving forward hard and scary.

The question is, what do we do when we stop hearing from God? How do we make sense of scriptures that tell us that, "He will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6) or "He is near to the broken hearted" (Psalm 34:18). What do we do when those passages feel like lies because we feel so utterly alone?

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible in which God is not mentioned. God was not ignoring Esther and the Israelites and He doesn't ignore us today. Esther's story was

written this way to tell us a powerful truth: we are not alone when God feels distant, but we can survive the silence and actually see God working through it. God's name may not be mentioned in Esther, but He took a lead role in curating this pivotal moment in history. God demonstrated His power through this young Jewish woman and used her to change the mind of the king during nationwide turmoil.

We tend to let the silence communicate to us that we are small, and our problems are too big. We believe the lie that we are working alone against the world and against the Enemy. But this is far from the truth. Do not underestimate how God is working behind the scenes. His silence is an opportunity for us to trust His outcome. God has given us the chance to make a difference and an impact. When God is silent, we must trust what we know to be true of Him through the Bible and what He has done for us in the past.

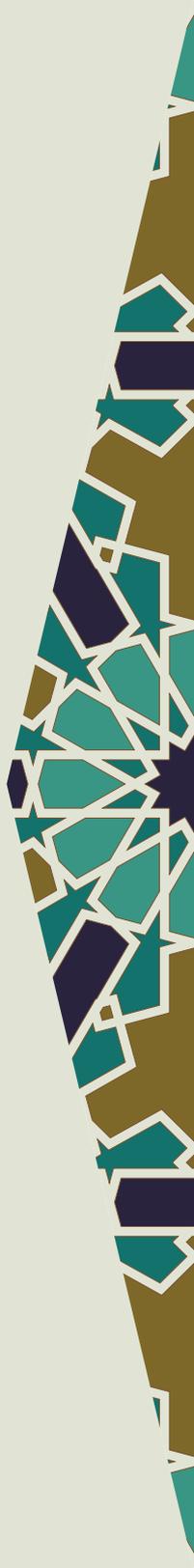
When God is silent, do the following to remind you of His faithfulness:

1. List the times when God has been faithful to you.

2. List some characteristics of God.

3. Esther had people to encourage her and remind her of God's truth. Who can do that for you?

4. Spend some time thanking God for His faithfulness



WEEK TWO

by Nick Falkowski

Have you ever seen the movie *Pay It Forward*? It's a story about a boy named Trevor who is given a school assignment to devise and put into action a plan that will change the world for the better. Trevor's plan is a charitable one that involves individuals doing a favor for three people, and then asking the recipients to repay it by doing a favor for three more people. Trevor implements his plan by trying to help his teacher and a homeless person, but what starts as a 12-year-old boy doing small acts of kindness in his community, turns into a nationwide movement that impacts hundreds of people! Trevor took the initiative and started something that impacted his world! It all started with one boy being willing to get involved and make a difference.

The crazy thing is... the same willingness that we see in this movie is the heart behind Esther. We've seen how God raised Esther up from being an orphaned, Jewish girl to the Queen of Persia. What we also see is how God used her to save His people. When plans were being made to try and wipe out the Jewish people, Esther stepped up. What started as one brave decision to get involved, God used to save the Jewish people from destruction. God used Esther to make an enormous difference in His plan for the world.

Do you believe that God wants to use you to make a difference too? That can be hard to believe, but it's true! We all face moments when we might feel insignificant, not good enough, or even unable to make a real difference. As Christians, we are all called to have an impact for His

Kingdom. God has a calling and a purpose for every one of us. The question is: Am I willing to take the steps to get involved? God is ready to meet us where we are and use us to do remarkable things... but He wants us to take that step of faith and get involved.

As you go about this week, pray that God gives you inspiration for how He wants to use you to make an impact in the world around you. Be prepared to listen to Him and take the steps He shows you!

What are some things in your community that you would like to see changed for the better?

What are some realistic things that you could do to start making that change a reality?

Have you ever felt like you couldn't make a difference? What are some things that make us feel this way?

What can we learn from Esther's life that encourages you most today?





WE CAN

change the world

and make it a better place.

It is in

OUR HANDS

to make a difference.

—Nelson Mandela





*When you find yourself in the
fog of prayer and patience*

DON'T GIVE UP
&
DON'T LOSE HOPE

You may just find

GOD'S FAVOR
IN THE FOG.

—Johnny Rocco





WEEK THREE

by Johnny Rocco

Have you ever found yourself in a season of life where the odds seem to be stacked against you? You look at the situation and begin to think to yourself, "There is no way this ends in my favor." It could look like a promotion that you have been working towards that never seems to materialize, no matter how hard you try. It might take the form of a teacher or coach who never notices your efforts and never gives you the opportunity to step up. Maybe it's an unexpected diagnosis that threatens to alter your quality of life and deplete all your resources.

We all eventually find ourselves in a season of resistance where we need God to move on our behalf. We need him to display his favor in our life, yet all of our prayers and petitions just leave us in a fog of doubt and uncertainty. In the fog, we can't see what is happening, we can't tell if God is working, and all we can do is patiently wait for the fog to lift.

Shortly after declaring independence, the American Revolution found itself staring down defeat against insurmountable odds. Nearly surrounded and outnumbered 3 to 1, the Continental Army braced for a devastating attack at Long Island, New York. For two long, tense days they waited but the attack never materialized. Then the weather turned. Strong winds and rain kept the British from advancing while the American forces devised an escape. Through the cover of night and using only small row boats they began evacuating across the East River. But as the sun began to rise, there were still 8,000 troops to be transported. They would need another 3 hours of cover to save the rest of the army! That's

when something remarkable started to happen. As the rising sun was about to expose their whole operation, a thick fog began to creep up from the river. A fog so dense that you couldn't even see a man standing 6 yards in front of you. What unbelievable timing! Conditions that would normally paralyze an army provided exactly what was needed to save the revolution. They had found favor in the fog. It was there in the midst of the fog that the most amazing part of the story was unfolding and future victory was being secured.

God works according to his timing and his timing is always perfect. As you read these passages in Esther, keep in mind that God is working even when you can't see it. When you find yourself in the fog of prayer and patience don't give up and don't lose hope. You may just find God's favor in the fog.

Ask each family member: What is the one area of your life where you feel the most resistance?

How have you tried to bring God into this struggle?

Take time to pray God's favor over that family member's circumstance.

Think back. Can you identify a time in the past where you know God pulled through for you? What were the conditions around that?

Try to find a way to share that testimony this week to remind someone that even in the fog of uncertainty He is working and His timing is perfect.





WEEK FOUR

by Angela Buchanan

How our world has changed since the arrival of social media! It used to be that we did things without much notice or attention. Have a nice dinner, go on vacation to an exotic place, or celebrate a birthday and relatively few people knew about it. But now individuals come up with elaborate ways to share their lives on digital platforms. Just think of all the creative ways people now record things like: inviting a girl to a prom, wedding proposals, or gender-reveal baby announcements so they can be shared with countless people instantly on Facebook or Instagram. That sharing is fun and light-hearted, and I appreciate the many positive ways we can communicate online.

However, there are also ways in which this large digital space has encouraged some unhealthy and even sinful behavior. I am referring primarily to the tendency to promote ourselves. It seems like many of us are challenged in resisting the temptation to draw attention to ourselves. In some extreme cases, people exaggerate and overfilter their lives to a point that they present a completely fake persona in the hopes of receiving the accolades and applause of man. The truth is, we can manipulate people's perception by what we choose to publish or post.

Let me ask you a question? When was the last time you did something you were proud of without posting it on social media?

In the book of Esther, Mordecai is a man of integrity who does something really great without feeling the need to let

everyone know about it. First of all, he provides a home for his orphan relative, Esther, and later he exposes a plot to kill the king. He does both because they are simply the right and good things to do.

Integrity has been described as doing what is right even when no one is looking. Basically, that regardless of whether anyone sees or whether you are rewarded or recognized for your actions, you simply choose to do what is right and good. It is a quiet faithfulness borne out a desire to please God and leave any possible favorable consequences in His hands. When we live with integrity, we don't demand recognition or dictate what we believe we deserve for our good deeds.

In the case of Mordecai, God chose to honor his faithfulness and caused him to be elevated in the eyes of the king. His example, in contrast to the evil Haman, encourages us to lay down the striving of self-promotion and instead to humbly trust God to position and promote us in his perfect timing.

How do you handle it when you do what is right but no one seems to notice?

Can you think of another person from the Bible who also refused to walk in self-promotion and waited for God to promote them?

What is one practical way you can grow as a person of integrity this week?





HUMBLE

yourselves under the

MIGHTY HAND

of God, that he may

EXALT YOU

in due time.

—1 Peter 5:6



