

Revive Our Hearts™

ESTHER

TRUSTING
GOD'S PLAN

A Bible study based
on the teaching of

NANCY DEMOSS
WOLGEMUTH



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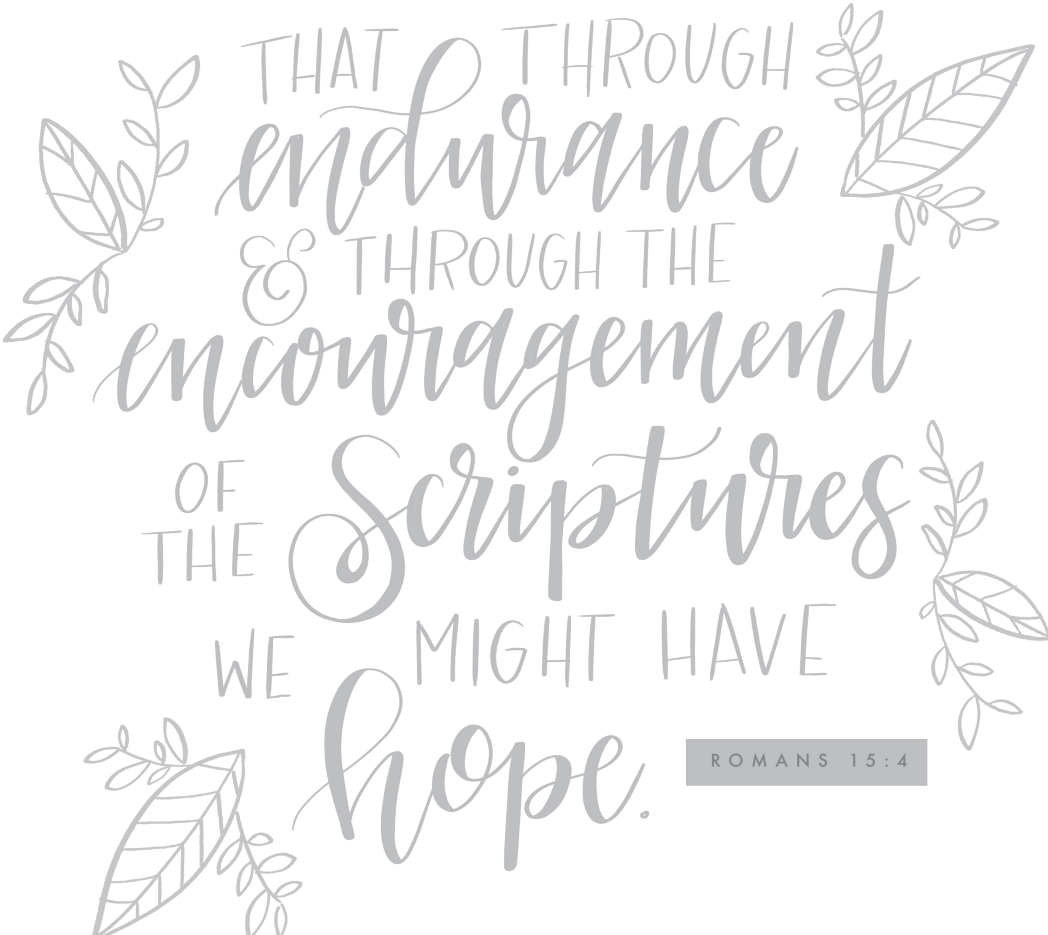
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Adapted from the teaching of Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth by Paula Marsteller, Mindy Kroesche, and Leslie Bennett, edited by Erin Davis, Hayley Mullins, and Mindi Stearns.

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As you work through this study, use this space to doodle, color, and meditate on God's Word and consider how the story of Esther gives you true hope.

FOR WHATEVER WAS WRITTEN IN FORMER DAYS
WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION

The text is surrounded by several decorative doodles of leaves and branches. There are four main clusters: one on the left side, one on the top right, one on the right side, and one on the bottom left. Each cluster consists of a small branch with several leaves, drawn in a simple, sketchy style.

THAT THROUGH
endurance
& THROUGH THE
encouragement
OF THE
Scriptures
WE MIGHT HAVE
hope.

ROMANS 15:4

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Esther's story

AS IT BEGINS IN ESTHER 1

THE KING'S BANQUETS

¹ Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, ² in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, ³ in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, ⁴ while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. ⁵ And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. ⁶ There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. ⁷ Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. ⁸ And drinking was according to this



edict: “There is no compulsion.” For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired.⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

QUEEN VASHTI’S REFUSAL

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

¹³ Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king’s procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment,¹⁴ the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena,

and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king’s face, and sat first in the kingdom):

¹⁵ “According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?”

¹⁶ Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, “Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

¹⁷ For the queen’s behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.’¹⁸ This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen’s behavior will say the same to all the king’s officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.¹⁹ If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come

before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. ²⁰ So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike.”

²¹ This advice pleased the king and the

princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. ²² He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

It may be safer to look through your windshield when you're driving, but glancing in your rearview mirror gives you a clear look at where you've been. God's providence is often better seen in retrospect than in the moment.

The Old Testament book of Esther makes no reference to God, but the entire story bears the unmistakable imprint of His ways. God will strengthen your faith as you see how He intervened to deliver His people. The Lord *still* masterfully orchestrates every detail of our lives and this universe in jaw-dropping ways. Nothing and no one can thwart His plan!

Expect these seven truths to deeply embed themselves in your heart through this study:

- **You are in a battle.**
- **God has a sovereign plan.**
- **You are a part of God's plan.**
- **God's plan will never fail.**
- **It's a beautiful thing to live under God's caring providence.**
- **There is no situation so desperate God cannot redeem it.**
- **Don't judge the outcome of the battle by the way things look right now.**

TIPS FOR USING THIS STUDY

Throughout this study, ask yourself:

- What does this passage teach me about the heart, ways, and character of God?
- How does this passage point to Jesus and the gospel?
- Is there an example to follow or avoid? If so, how should I seek to change in response?

Each week of study is divided into five suggested daily lessons, but feel free to work at your own pace. Do what works for you!

Remember the Holy Spirit is your primary teacher as you seek to understand God's Word. Jesus himself told you that the Holy Spirit is a gift and a "Helper" able to "teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that [Jesus has] said to you" (John 14:26).

Secondary tools that can help you better understand the Word of God (but aren't necessary to complete this study) include:

- An English dictionary to look up the basic meaning of words
- Various translations of the Bible (a good online tool is BibleGateway.com)
- A concordance
- A Bible dictionary
- Commentaries
- A study Bible
- Colored pens or pencils to write in your Bible



As you go through the study, you may find it beneficial to listen to the audio series “Esther: God’s Woman at God’s Time.” Find it at ReviveOurHearts.com/Esther-Series.

To help you get more from this study, we've also included group discussion questions at the end of this book. You can join the discussion about Esther with the *Women of the Bible* podcast created to accompany this study. Find it at ReviveOurHearts.com/WomenoftheBible.

OUR HOPE FOR YOU

During the next six weeks, may God grow your awareness and trust in His providence, expand your humility as you wait on His perfect timing, and bear the fruit of self-control and restraint in your life.

He is faithful to do it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Spend time meditating on and memorizing the following verse this week:

the KING'S heart is a
stream OF water
in the HAND of the Lord;
he turns it
WHEREVER
he will

PROVERBS 21:1

Week 1

GOD SETS THE STAGE

Big Idea: NOTHING CAN STOP GOD'S PLAN FOR THIS WORLD—OR HIS PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE.

As we look back over history, we can often see God's hand directing events. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, thrown in jail for a crime he didn't commit . . . putting him in the position to interpret Pharaoh's dream, become second-in-command over Egypt, and ultimately save the Egyptian people and his own family (Gen. 50:20).

The persecution of the early church in Jerusalem had believers running for their lives (Acts 8:1) . . . resulting in the spread of the gospel across the Roman Empire. In more recent times, the weather report for June 6, 1944 had German officials believing there could be no attack . . . leaving their troops unprepared and opening the way for the Allied Forces' invasion on D-Day.¹

At the time of these events, those involved probably didn't see God at work. Esther, Mordecai, and the Jewish people in the Persian Empire may have wondered if He was working too. Living under the rule of a tyrannical king, it would have been difficult to see God in their circumstances. But as we find out in this week's study, even when we can't see His hand, we can trust that God is working for our good and His glory.

Day 1: *Meet the Cast: The Invisible Hand*

Read Esther 1.

The story of Esther is an account of God intervening in history to deliver His chosen people from annihilation. Why was it so important to the fulfillment of God's promises and plan that the Jewish people not be destroyed? (Look for clues in the following two passages.)

1. Read Genesis 3:15

Theologians recognize this as the first gospel proclamation in all of Scripture.

Who do you think the “woman’s offspring” is referring to? Who would eventually bruise Satan’s head? What answer do we find in Galatians 4:4–5?

Before the Curtain Goes Up

About one hundred years before Esther’s story begins in 586 BC, the Jews were taken captive to Babylon as God’s discipline for their sin (Jer. 52).

They were captives in Babylon for seventy years before the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians (Jer. 29:10). God then worked through King Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–6) to give the Jews the freedom to return to their homeland (around 538 BC). However many stayed behind in Persia, including Mordecai and Esther’s families.²

At its height, the Persian Empire was vast, spanning from the Balkan Peninsula—including parts of what is present day Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine—to modern-day India and all the way south to Egypt.³ Our story takes place in this empire, in the city of Susa (located in modern-day Iran).⁴ The curtain goes up on the story of Esther about four hundred and fifty years before the promised Messiah would be born.

2. Read Genesis 22:18

Centuries before Esther came on the scene, God promised Abraham, “In your _____ shall _____ of the earth be blessed.”

Galatians 3:8 tells us that this promise to Abraham was another gospel proclamation. Write out the verse below.

Galatians 3:16 goes on to clearly state who Abraham’s offspring would be:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

In the book of Esther, we see God preserving the Jewish nation so the Messiah could still come from Abraham.

Esther’s story is really God’s story.

As you read the book of Esther, you will see God’s:

- **Faithfulness** to His covenant and His people.
- **Sovereign control** over every circumstance.
- **Providence.**



How would you define the providence of God?

God's Mysterious, Interesting Providence

Professor Dale Ralph Davis refers to God's providence as "that frequently mysterious, always interesting way in which Yahweh provides for his servants in their various needs."⁵ Start looking for God's providence, and you'll see it everywhere!

You'll see in Esther that God has a plan that cannot be thwarted by anything. God *will* deliver His people and ultimately fulfill all His purposes in this world. May this story from Scripture help you recognize the unseen hand of God that's always at work in your life.

If someone wrote an account of the "coincidences" in your life, what are some stories they might include of God's providence at work?

Even when you can't see it, God is there. His work is hidden from our sight many times, but He is always acting on behalf of His people and His glory. The book of Esther is a beautiful portrayal of Romans 8:28. Look it up, and then personalize it with your name.

And we know that for _____ all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

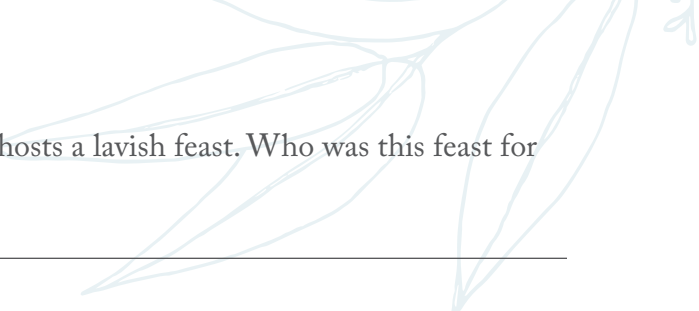
This incredible story helps us marvel at the masterful way God orchestrates every detail of our lives and of this universe. When you cannot see the hand of God, trust His heart and know that His providence is always working on your behalf. Take a few moments to write out a prayer asking God to give you eyes to see His providence working over the next few weeks.

Day 2: *Meet the Cast: King Xerxes*

Read Esther 1:1-8.

Depending on your Bible translation, you might see “Ahasuerus” or “Xerxes” in the first verse of Esther. This is one and the same man. Ahasuerus is his Persian title, meaning “high father” or “venerable king”; his Greek name is “Xerxes the Great.” (We’ll use Xerxes in this study, since it’s easier to pronounce.)

At the time of Esther, King Xerxes was one of the most powerful men on the face of the earth. He reigned from 486 to 465 BC over a world empire. Revisit Esther 1:1 and write down the details included about his kingdom.



The story of Esther begins as Xerxes hosts a lavish feast. Who was this feast for and why did he give it? (vv. 3–4)

According to verse 4, how long was the feast? _____

That's a six-month-long party!

Many think Xerxes gave this feast to gain support for—and prove he had the resources for—a war he was preparing to wage against the Greeks.

This six-month feast climaxes in a massive banquet for _____, lasting _____ days (v. 5).

He didn't skimp on this banquet either! In your own words, describe the party setting below. (Hint: see verse 6.)

Scripture records that alcohol was a part of the party atmosphere (vv. 7–8). How does verse 8 describe the edict (or rule) at this event in regard to drinking?

Three Snapshots of the Man Esther Married

We learn what sort of ruler Xerxes was from the Greek historian, Herodotus. These graphic images tell the story of an erratic king.

Snapshot 1: A man named Pythias offered Xerxes an enormous sum of money to wage war against the Greeks. When Pythias asked Xerxes if just one of his sons could stay home instead of going to war, Xerxes had that son cut in half and made his whole army pass between the pieces of the severed body.⁶

Snapshot 2: When a storm destroyed the two bridges Xerxes' men had built across the Hellespont, he had the engineers

A Persian law stated that every time the king took a drink, the people had to take a drink. He probably didn't want people to feel as if they had to drink every time he did, so he waived that law for this feast.

Read Proverbs 31:4–5. What wisdom does it give regarding this issue?

About the Wine . . .

The Bible makes clear that the *abuse* of alcohol is to be avoided (see, for example, Ephesians 5:18). But believers in the Church disagree on specifics. Some focus on the potential dangers of drinking (Prov. 20:1, 23:29–30), while others point out that wine is a gift from God intended for our enjoyment (Psalm 104:14–15; Isa. 55:1; John 2:1–11).

Christians have freedom in this matter. To take one position does not necessarily make us more spiritual than if we take another. But neither do we have a license to tear down those who disagree with us.

Here are several questions that are helpful in determining our practice in this matter—as well as in other potentially enslaving behaviors.

1. Is it harming my body?
2. Does it—or could it—enslave me?
3. Is alcohol an idol in my life?
4. Could my drinking cause spiritual damage to others or lead them into sin?⁹

For more on this topic, check out chapter 7 in *Adorned: Living Out the Beauty of the Gospel Together*.

Don't Lose Hope

Do you know any angry, cruel, and vindictive people like Xerxes?

You might have grown up with, married, or worked for someone like this. In His providence, God sometimes allows ungodly people to be in charge. When this happens, it's easy to lose hope or think nothing will ever be different.

But remember the final chapter hasn't been written yet. The success of the ungodly is short-lived. God overrules even the orders of wicked men because He is the King of all the earth (Psalm 47:7).

beheaded and the water beaten with three hundred lashes.⁷

Snapshot 3: At one point, Xerxes tried to seduce his brother's wife. When she refused him, he had an affair with her daughter and then arranged for her whole family to be murdered.⁸

King Xerxes' pride becomes a setup for God to demonstrate His power and His kingdom, which rules over all kings and kingdoms of this earth.

You may not be under the authority of a cruel, vindictive king, but we all know how it feels to be impacted by someone whose actions are ungodly or unfair.

Journal about a time when you were under such authority. (Maybe that time is now.) Can you see evidence of the Lord's hand? Write about that too.

Day 3: *Meet the Cast: Queen Vashti*

Read Esther 1:9–12.

We're now introduced to another character in this cast: Queen Vashti. When we meet her, she is fulfilling her role as the queen. According to Esther 1:9, what was she doing?

The feasting and banquets in those days would have been segregated. It would have gone against protocol for the women to come into the place where men were feasting. Yet what did the king command in verses 10–11?

Why did he request this? (v. 11)

After six months of arrogant show-and-tell, under the influence of alcohol, King Xerxes decided to show off the one thing he hadn't yet shown off—his queen. But Queen Vashti refused to come (v. 12).

Do you think Vashti did the right thing in defying her husband's order? Why or why not?

We don't know exactly *why* Vashti refused to come or *how* she refused to come. That raises the question: is it ever right to disobey those in authority over us? What do you think and why?

Read Romans 13:1–5.

God's Word is clear that He has ordained authority and that we are to submit to it. However the exception seems to be when authority encourages us to break one of God's commands. Look up the following verses. Circle whether you think the actions of the people in these examples were pleasing to God, then give an explanation for your answer.

EXODUS 1:16–17, 20

Yes/No

DANIEL 3:16–18

Yes/No

DANIEL 6:7, 10

Yes/No

ACTS 4:16–17, 20

Yes/No

ACTS 5:27–32

Yes/No

God used Vashti’s situation to position Esther in the palace “for such a time as this” (Est. 4:14). In God’s providence, He overruled a tragic situation for the good of His people and the fulfillment of His redemptive plan.

God is able to overrule even the worst situation for your good and to fulfill His plan. How have you seen Him do this in the past?

How are you hoping for God’s providence to intervene in a current situation? Write it out as a prayer below.



Day 4: *Meet the Cast: The King's Advisors*

Read Esther 1:12–22.

How did King Xerxes respond when his queen didn't come? (Est. 1:12)

Perhaps the king was used to getting everything he wanted . . . until this moment. He had just been disrespected in front of the very people he'd spent six months trying to impress. So he turned to his wise men for advice. Read verses 13–14.

How many men did the king consult, and who were they?

In verse 15, what wrong did Xerxes accuse Vashti of?

Whom did Memucan say the queen had wronged? (v. 16) Do you think this was an exaggeration? Why or why not?

What was Memucan concerned would happen once other women in the kingdom heard about Vashti's behavior? (v. 17–18)

How did Memucan advise the king in verse 19? Do you think his counsel was good? Why or why not?

Memucan gave King Xerxes earthly wisdom. James 3:13–18 contrasts this kind of “wisdom” with the wisdom that is from above. According to this passage, what characterizes true wisdom?

What did the king think of Memucan's advice (Est. 1:21–22), and what did he do in response?

As a woman, what do you think about the way Vashti was treated?

We see that God's purposes were set in motion, even through Xerxes' ungodly choices. What did Xerxes' treatment of Vashti set the stage for?

As you walk into the next lessons, notice this detail from verse 19: the law of the Persians and the Medes was a law that couldn't be reversed, even by the king.

Apparently the people felt it was better to be ruled by kings who made rash laws as long as they couldn't then change those laws.

Review this week's memory verse, Proverbs 21:1, by writing it out and placing it somewhere prominent, such as your bathroom mirror or car steering wheel.

Day 5: *Meet the Cast: The Hero of the Story*

Read Esther 1.

Write out John 10:10 below.

According to this verse, what is Satan's goal? What is God's goal?

We can trust that though Satan seeks to kill and destroy, God came to give us abundant life. The Old Testament is filled with story after story of Satan trying to destroy the people of God so the Messiah could not be born and God gaining the victory over his devices. Name a couple of examples you can think of.

In the book of Esther, the people of God are once again under attack. The Jewish race faces extermination, chiefly through one powerful man named Haman. (We'll learn more about him in future chapters.)

As you read the book of Esther, watch for this thread: there's a battle between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God. In this story King Xerxes and Haman represent the kingdom of man. Mordecai and Esther represent the kingdom of God.

That's not to say Mordecai and Esther were perfect; they definitely had their flaws. But they also seemed to have a heart for God. However at the end of the day, Esther and Mordecai are not the heroes of this story. **God is.**

As you begin your journey through Esther, write down some differences between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God, using the prompts below.

The Kingdom of Man Versus the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of man is visible. The kingdom of God is _____
(2 Cor. 4:18).

The kingdom of man is a kingdom of darkness. God's kingdom is a kingdom of _____ (1 Pet. 2:9).

The kingdom of man is temporal. But the kingdom of God is _____. It will never be overthrown (Dan. 7:13–14).

Which of these truths encourages your heart the most today and why?

It's challenging for us—as it was in Esther's day—to live as children of God in a world that doesn't recognize Him as King. What temporary things are most likely to distract you from investing in God's invisible, eternal kingdom? List them below.

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In this six-week study, explore the subject of God's providence, walking verse by verse through the book of Esther. With Scripture memory, daily study, and group discussion questions, this resource is ideal for both individual and group study.



NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH has touched the lives of millions of women through two daily nationally syndicated radio programs—*Revive Our Hearts* and *Seeking Him*. Her books have sold more than three million copies and are reaching the hearts of women around the world.

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