



Preparing for Small Group: Read the passage below, and answer the following questions.

- (1) What do these verses tell me about God?
- (2) What do these verses tell me about sinful humanity?
- (3) What do these verses tell me about Jesus?
- (4) What does God want me to know?
- (5) What does God want me to do?

“At Work Always, Everywhere”

Esther 1:1-2:18

Main Point: God is at work always and everywhere.

Applications related to the fact that God is at work always and everywhere:

There’s no coincidence inside God’s providence (2:5-8).

In Scripture, whether revealed explicitly like in the life of Jesus or whether revealed implicitly in the lives and circumstances in the story, God is always the primary character of the story. God is always there, regardless of whether He’s mentioned or recognized. God is always there, regardless of where “there” is. In a foreign land, under pagan rulers, what becomes immediately clear in the story of Esther is that God is there. In fact, there are no coincidences in this story; rather, every possible coincidence is evidence of God’s providence in the lives of His people. Did it just happen that Mordecai was exiled and ended up in Susa at this time? Did it just happen that Esther had become an orphan and that he had adopted her? Did it just happen that Esther was a beautiful, young lady, who caught the eye of the king’s men who were looking for a potential queen for the king? The obvious answer implied in the text is “no, it didn’t just happen!” While we don’t know *why* all of these things are happening at this point in the story, we can know for sure that all of these factors didn’t just line up by coincidence. All of these factors help to remind us that there’s no coincidence inside God’s providence.

1. What is the providence of God? Look up a definition of providence, and discuss.
2. What are other examples of God’s providence in Scripture? In what ways have you experienced God’s providence in your life?
3. What is a coincidence? Look up a definition, and discuss. Does Scripture — the doctrine of God — argue against coincidences in our lives? Why?
4. Do you tend to see things as coincidences, or God’s providence? Why, or why not?

There’s no circumstance outside of God’s control (2:5-8).

While the obvious providence of God is at work in the lives of Mordecai and Esther, there’s a second aspect to the providence of God in their lives, which is the fact that no circumstance is outside of God’s control. Just looking at these sentences point to an amazing series of events and circumstances that led to this moment in the lives of Mordecai and Esther. From the deportation to Babylon to whatever journey led Mordecai to Susa, this story reminds us that no circumstance is outside of God’s control. Esther experienced difficulty in life. She had lost both of her parents and had to be raised by her uncle in a foreign land. In this circumstance,

however, Esther also caught the eyes of the king's men, which led her to be taken into the king's harem, most likely without a choice in the matter. These circumstances were not easy, but this story does remind us that even in difficult circumstances, God's people are not outside of God's control. In all of these circumstances — even the situations that were hard and painful — God's control was evident, using every circumstance to bring Esther and Mordecai to that place at that time for God's purpose at that point in their lives.

1. Talk through the circumstances in the lives of Mordecai and Esther that led up to this point in their lives. Which circumstances are easier and which are harder to accept God's control over? Why?
2. Think through your lives, which circumstances are easier and which are harder to accept God's control over? Why?
3. Why is accepting God's sovereignty, as revealed in His Word, important?
4. Do you know someone who is questioning God's presence and control because of a circumstance in their lives? Take time right now to pray for them in your group.
5. How would you share the story of Esther in chapters 1 or 2 with someone who finds him/herself in a circumstance where it's hard to see God's presence and work?

There's no power like God's power over human hearts (2:9-18).

The culmination of God's providential working through the circumstances and lives of those involved are captured in a powerful, repeating phrase in Esther 2:9-17, which is that Esther was continually winning the favor of others. From the eunuch who gave her favor in her preparation and placement in the king's harem, to others around her who continued to see her actions and have favor in their hearts towards her, Esther was winning the favor of those around her. And ultimately, God's favor on Esther led to the king's favor towards Esther, as the king immediately loved Esther more than any of the other women and selected Esther to be his queen. In every case — both in the actions of the individuals and in the language of the Scriptures — God's powerful favor towards Esther was at work to work out His plans for his people through Esther, moving hearts — even the heart of a pagan king — in order to fulfill His plans for His people.

1. Do a word study on the word "favor" as translated in the ESV in Esther 2:9 and 2:17. What's the significance of this word in relationship to the God's favor and covenant relationship towards His people? Why do you think the author of Esther was led to use this word in this passage in relationship to the response of the eunuch and the king towards Esther?
2. From Esther 1:1-2:18, discuss the visible display of the power of the king in contrast to the lack of any direct mention of God's power in these chapters. Additionally, discuss the lack of power that the king had in compelling the queen to do what he wanted her to do in contrast to the power of God to compel the king and others to do what He wanted them to do.
3. How does Esther 1:1-2:18 remind you of the aspects of the world's system today? How does this passage encourage you in relationship to what it reveals about God, even in places and times where His presence might be hard to see?
4. How should knowing God's power over human hearts impact your life today?