

Stand Up: How to Fight Injustice



God chooses to work through ordinary people.

We live in a world where injustice thrives.

- » Over twenty million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking.³
- » One in nine people in the world suffer from chronic malnourishment.⁴
- » Racism abounds on all fronts.

We've seen great injustice played out on the world stage, but we also know injustice on a personal level. It's easy to ask: "Where is God in the midst of the injustice I see?" We may even desire to do something about what we see, but other questions threaten to shut down our best intentions: "Who am I? What could I possibly do to make a difference?"

The Book of Esther gives us insight into these questions. In a time of great injustice against their own Jewish people, Mordecai and Esther rose to the occasion and took a stand. It was a potentially costly stand, but it was the right one. As we look at their lives, we see a model for how we can live for Christ as we stand up for others.

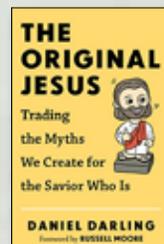
The same God who worked through Mordecai and Esther is working in the world today, calling ordinary people to an extraordinary mission—His mission.

Let's discover how God is calling us to stand up and work for justice.



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Session 1 **Be Ready to Stand** *Esther 2:5-10,15-17*

Session 2 **Stand with Conviction** *Esther 2:21-3:6*

Session 3 **Stand Down** *Esther 4:1-3,10-16*

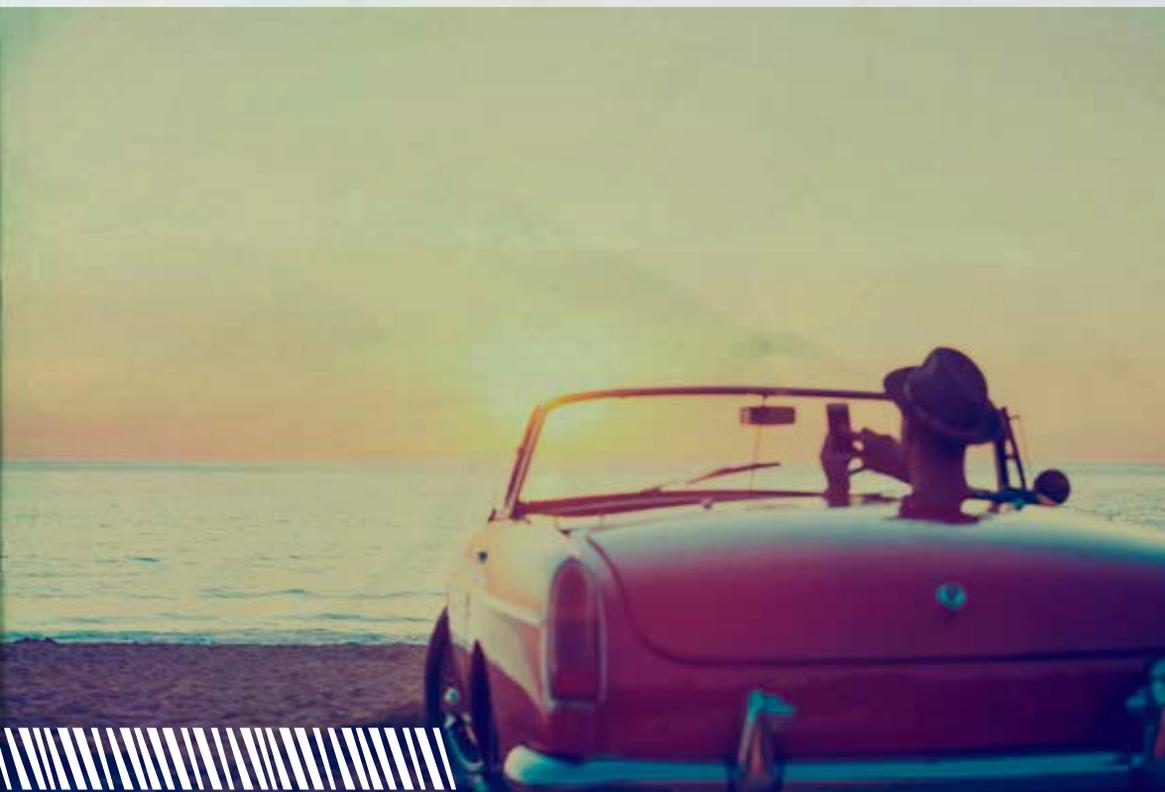
Session 4 **Stand with Humility** *Esther 5:1-14*

Session 5 **Stand Up and Speak** *Esther 7:1-10*

Session 6 **Keep Standing** *Esther 8:1-8; 9:20-22*

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Be Ready to Stand



When have you been at just the right place at just the right time?

QUESTION 1

God is always at work behind the scenes.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

History often turns on seemingly small events.

- » What if Richard Nixon had listened to advisors and rested before his televised debate with John Kennedy in 1960?
- » What if Gerald Ford had not accidentally misstated his response to a foreign policy question in his final debate with Jimmy Carter in 1976?
- » What if a few thousand voters in key counties in Florida had chosen differently in the election of 2000?

Our lives also often turn on seemingly small events. A lot of people chalk up these moments to coincidence, but could it be more than that? Christians often can look back at certain moments in their lives and see that, although they may not have been aware of it at the time, God had His hand on them and their circumstances.

Esther could attest to that. Esther was a young Jewish girl in a strange land, and God was at work in her life, putting her in the right place at the right time. She may not have been aware of it at the time, but God was working behind the scenes to put her in a place of power and significance.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Esther 2:5-7 (CSB)

⁵ In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. ⁶ He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile. ⁷ Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.

Esther was an orphaned Jewish girl who had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. Living in a strange land under an authoritarian despot, King Ahasuerus, she was forced to participate in the king's unseemly beauty pageant. She had few choices and few options. And yet, as her story unfolds, we witness her dramatic rise to power.

How did a Jewish girl end up in this foreign place? In 586 BC, the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem, just as the prophets had predicted. God was fulfilling His promised judgment on the rebellious nation of Judah. Then, in 539 BC, the Persians defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jewish exiles to return home (Ezra 1:1-4). Many Jewish exiles made the return trip, but others like Mordecai and Esther chose to stay in Persia. Mordecai may have stayed because he held an important role in the Persian capital of Susa. Scripture notes that he was "in the fortress of Susa" and "was sitting at the King's Gate" (Esther 2:19), indicating that he held an integral position in Ahasuerus's government.

Before we go any further with the events in Esther's and Mordecai's lives, note that God was active in what was happening. For some, that statement may seem surprising because, unlike any other Bible book, nothing about God is mentioned in the Book of Esther. Neither His law nor His covenant is mentioned—not even His name! However, the lack of any theological language does not mean God was distant or inactive. God was working to keep His promises to save His people and He was using the unlikeliest of people in the process. Esther's family, her heritage, her status as an exile in a strange land, and even the unfortunate and unexpected events she endured were all part of God's grand design to save His people.

What part of Esther's circumstances catches your attention?

QUESTION 2

Esther 2:8-10 (CSB)

⁸ When the king's command and edict became public knowledge and when many young women were gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai's supervision, Esther was taken to the palace, into the supervision of Hegai, keeper of the women. ⁹ The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked female servants to her from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem's best quarters. ¹⁰ Esther did not reveal her ethnicity or her family background, because Mordecai had ordered her not to make them known.

The Book of Esther begins with the account of Queen Vashti's treatment of the king and her subsequent loss of position (1:1-22). But now the king was without a queen, and he set out to change that by choosing from a large number of eligible young women. Hundreds of women were uprooted from their families and communities to live in relative isolation in the king's harem—and that included Esther.

Esther gained the favor of Hegai, the overseer of the king's harem. Out of hundreds of young women, why did Esther get noticed? Verse 7 tells us she was physically attractive, but surely other aspects of her character also caused Hegai to be pleased with her. Indeed, she pleased all who encountered her (v. 15).

We might wonder why Mordecai encouraged Esther to hide her Jewish heritage. Persia was less antagonistic to Jewish exiles than Babylon, but a stream of anti-Semitism still ran in the country, as we will see in the next session. Perhaps being Jewish meant the loss of influence in Susa, though when confronted with her Jewish heritage later, King Ahasuerus didn't seem to care. Perhaps Mordecai feared Esther's Jewish heritage would be a detriment to her chances at becoming queen, or it would cause her to be treated harshly. Scripture gives us no clue as to the motivation behind Mordecai's instructions to Esther.

Was this the right approach? It is hard to know. On the one hand, hiding her Jewish heritage did not violate the law of God. On the other hand, Esther could not hide the routines and rituals prescribed by the Jewish law; she would need to practice these in the harem and later in the palace—unless, of course,

When have you found yourself completely outside your comfort zone?

QUESTION 3

How do we navigate the tension between the messiness of Esther's story thus far and God's sovereign plan?

QUESTION 4

she was not engaging in such activities. Some scholars have speculated that Mordecai and Esther may have abandoned many aspects of their Jewish culture during the exile. The first-century church encountered many Jews like this—Jews who had embraced the Greco-Roman culture around them. So, although we don't know how committed Mordecai and Esther were in their religious practice, we do know God ultimately used them to rescue His people.

Esther 2:15-17 (CSB)

¹⁵ Esther was the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had adopted her as his own daughter. When her turn came to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch, keeper of the women, suggested. Esther gained favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her. ¹⁶ She was taken to King Ahasuerus in the palace in the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

Four years transpired between the time Ahasuerus dethroned Vashti and when he made Esther his new queen. During a portion of that time, hundreds of women waited with uncertainty. Esther perhaps





felt that same uncertainty, moving along the track from orphaned Jewish slave to participant in Ahasuerus's harem to queen of Persia. Yet, of all the young women in Persia, Esther was perhaps the least likely to end up in the palace. She was Jewish with no family name or connections that might propel her to power. And yet she was now the queen—placed in a position of influence and given the resources to serve God's people in ways she was not yet aware. God was at work, moving to fulfill His many promises to preserve His people.

God even works in less than ideal situations. We can't deny that the pagan King Ahasuerus used sinful practices in seeking a new queen. Esther participated in a process that didn't honor God's design for sexuality and marriage. It is important to remember that the Bible records many historical events while not endorsing the obvious sinful behavior in those events. Yet God is always at work—even in a fallen, sinful world.

Esther's life foreshadows our own salvation in Christ. Like Esther, we were foreigners, unlikely objects for the affection of our King. And yet, when we are in Christ, we are His royal bride and the object of His devotion. One day, when Jesus returns, His bride—the church—will be crowned with honor. There will be a great feast in heaven, the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9).

Esther surely didn't realize its full impact, but God was behind her story, putting her in a place of influence. Her position would not just benefit her; it would benefit her own people, the Jews. And ultimately, we would all benefit, for Jesus came through the very people she helped to save.

What opportunities exist for you right now to be a person of influence?

QUESTION 5

"God was working to keep His promises to save His people and He was using the unlikeliest of people in the process!"

DANIEL DARLING

SPIRITUAL MILESTONES



Consider the personal experiences that have shaped your faith journey. Identify two to three defining moments in your spiritual life. (Note: Milestones can include your salvation, mission experiences, times of spiritual growth, and so on.)

LIVE IT OUT

God is actively at work—even behind the scenes.

- » **Look back.** Reflect on your walk with Christ. What events has God used in your past to bring you to Him—or bring you closer to Him? Consider those events that may have even seemed minor or inconsequential at the time. Thank God for His faithful work in your life.
- » **Make a list.** List the gifts, skills, or attributes God has given you. Ask God to show you how you can use those to honor Him, even in unfavorable situations.
- » **Encourage.** You may know someone facing circumstances beyond his or her control. Offer your support and encouragement. Help him or her see that God is present—and He is at work even if it is not yet evident.

God is with us, in both the big moments and the little, seemingly inconsequential ones. God has placed each of us where we are in this moment to speak up and out, to spread the good news of His deliverance, and to stand for Him whenever possible.



My thoughts