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Stand Up and Speak



How would you describe your experiences with public speaking?

QUESTION 1

Be bold, but leave the results to God.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Believe it or not, about 10 percent of us actually look forward to public speaking. At the other end of the spectrum, about 10 percent of us dread it to the point of great anxiety. The 80 percent of us left in the middle experience some level of anxiety, but are able to accomplish the task.⁵

It's one thing when you're called on in a meeting to answer a question or give a brief report; we don't have time to get nervous. But if our boss tells us that we must make a major presentation in three weeks, we have plenty of time to think about it—and thinking about it makes us nervous!

That nervousness is greatly multiplied when what we say carries significant consequences.

Boldness in speaking may not always come easy. Courage to do the right thing in a risky situation does not come easy either. Yet in Esther, we see a woman who did both. Lives were at stake. If she didn't speak and act boldly, thousands could die. If she acted courageously yet blundered it—well, she could make matters worse.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Esther 7:1-6 (CSB)

¹ The king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen. ² Once again, on the second day while drinking wine, the king asked Esther, “Queen Esther, whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek, even to half the kingdom, will be done.” ³ Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your eyes, Your Majesty, and if the king is pleased, spare my life; this is my request. And spare my people; this is my desire. ⁴ For my people and I have been sold to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn’t be worth burdening the king.” ⁵ King Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, “Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?” ⁶ Esther answered, “The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman.” Haman stood terrified before the king and queen.

In Esther 6, we learn that God already had been at work. King Ahasuerus had spent a sleepless night. Surely this was not mere coincidence, but insomnia brought about by God. In that moment of sleeplessness, the king had daily reports read to him and he heard of Mordecai’s unheralded act of heroism in thwarting the plan to assassinate the king (Esther 6:1-3). Perhaps shamed by his failure to properly reward Mordecai, the king instructed Haman to honor Mordecai—the very person Haman despised (6:4-11)!

When we reach chapter 7, we find the king, Haman, and Esther seated at their second banquet. The events of the last few days—the planning, the praying, the fasting—all came down to this moment, this ultimate act of courage. It was time to expose all, and Esther did just that, revealing both her Jewish identity and Haman’s evil plans. At last, King Ahasuerus learned that both his wife and the man he had just honored were scheduled to die—and the man sitting at the table with him was the one who had devised the scheme. Esther appealed to the king to act, even as she had prayed, fasted, and appealed to God to act.

Haman had been exposed, and he “stood terrified” (v. 6). The word used to describe Haman’s reaction was normally used in the Old Testament for the fear and trembling people experienced at a divine encounter

What do you find interesting about the way Esther handled this situation?

QUESTION 2

(see 1 Chronicles 21:30; Daniel 8:17). Haman knew he had just angered the most powerful man in the known world—and he rightly trembled in fear

Esther exposed this dark deed with great boldness, but she also did it with wisdom.

- » Esther didn't point the finger of blame at the king, though King Ahasuerus had unwittingly signed her death warrant. She appealed both to his innocence and his self-interest. In verse 4, Esther affirmed, "If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn't be worth burdening the king." This implied that the destruction of the Jews would mean wiping out a part of the work force and economy, spelling great financial loss for the king.
- » Esther spoke on behalf of others. She didn't simply advocate for her own life, she spoke up for all her people. Esther entered into the suffering of her people.

Esther could have caved in to fear in that moment. She could have simply kept silent, turning a blind eye to the injustices in Persia against the Jewish people. But she used the opportunity before her to give a voice to her people. In the process, she gave us a great example of living out Paul's words: "Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Ephesians 5:11).

Esther 7:7-10 (CSB)

⁷ The king arose in anger and went from where they were drinking wine to the palace garden. Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life because he realized the king was planning something terrible for him. ⁸ Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the house?" As soon as the statement left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. ⁹ Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said: "There is a gallows seventy-five feet tall at Haman's house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king." The king said, "Hang him on it." ¹⁰ They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

What are some fears that often hinder us from speaking out against the darkness around us?

What makes it hard to leave vengeance in God's hands?

QUESTION 4

Now that Esther had planned, prayed, fasted, and finally spoken up, what was next? She could do nothing but wait. But she wouldn't have to wait long.

Let's not assume King Ahasuerus immediately knew what to do. Unfortunately, we've all had those moments when anger clouded our thoughts. Perhaps that's why the king left the room; he needed to get away from the man who angered him so that he could clear his thoughts. He had to make a decision nobody else could make for him. His advisors and counselors were all bereft of wisdom—and he couldn't ask his most trusted advisor, Haman, since he was the problem!

History records that King Ahasuerus was well-known for his nasty temper and rage. At times, he could be an unstable, vindictive, and irrational decision-maker. Consider how easily he tossed out Queen Vashti because she refused to be paraded in front of others (Esther 1:10-21), and how haphazardly he signed onto Haman's Jewish genocide plan (3:7-14). King Ahasuerus had a history of rash and ridiculous decisions, but in this moment, he made the right choice. He determined to sentence Haman to death, and soon he would also empower the Jews to stand against those who sought to harm them.

Now that he had been exposed, Haman rightfully feared vengeance and retribution. In desperation, he literally threw himself on the mercy of the queen. How ironic that Haman brought all this on himself because a Jew would not fall and bow before him, yet he





now fell before a Jew. The irony continued in that the gallows Haman built to kill his enemy was used to kill him. As Solomon wrote, “The one who digs a pit will fall into it” (Proverbs 26:27).

This is a perfect example of God’s sure justice. Esther and Mordecai did all they could to fight the evil injustice about to be carried out against the Jews, but they ultimately had to trust Israel’s fate to the hands of God. Esther and Mordecai could have tried to push through their own justice. They could have attempted to take matters into their own hands, but they left matters in God’s hands.

Seeing people who are hurt, abused, or taken advantage of pulls at our hearts. We want to see the wrong righted and justice served. We do what we can on behalf of others, but we must leave any vengeance in the hands of God.

- » “Human anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness” (James 1:20).
- » “Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay” (Romans 12:19).

God’s justice and judgment will come—and not just against the Hamans in this world, but against all of us. In reality we are all like Haman; at our core, we are dead in our sins and given to the temptations of power, lust, and greed. We are not the good and noble people we think we are. We are all sinful people deserving death (Romans 6:23).

Like Haman, we can prostrate ourselves before our King, begging for mercy for our sins and crimes committed against Him. But unlike Haman, we have someone who was willing to stand in our place and face the judgment for us. Jesus went to a cross intended for us so that we could receive the mercy of God. What’s more, by His resurrection, Jesus defeated the corruption that infects human hearts; we have life! We no longer have to fear the judgment of God because “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Where do we have opportunities to be bold about justice in our community?

QUESTION 5

"Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them."

EPHESIANS 5:11

TAKE A STAND



**Which of the following injustices are present around you?
Circle all that apply.**

- Racial discrimination
- Human trafficking
- Abortion
- Abuse
- Bullying
- Other: _____

In the space below, list one or two things you can do about these issues individually.

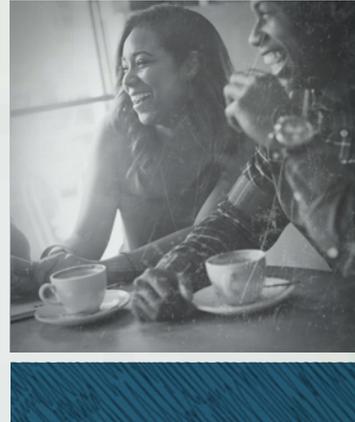
In the space below, list one or two things your group can do to stand up for justice on these issues.

LIVE IT OUT

What steps will you take to stand up for others?

- » **Worship.** Spend some time thanking God for being both holy and merciful. Ask Him for eyes to see others as He sees them and a heart that is willing to follow His leading.
- » **Grow.** Have coffee or lunch with a mature Christ-follower. Ask them to share with you what God has taught them about stepping out in faith and taking a stand against injustice.
- » **Make a plan.** As a group, identify a need in your community that you can speak up for. This can be one of the issues listed in the “Take a Stand” activity on page 119. Gather a few ideas of how your group can help, and make a plan to get involved.

We may not have a royal title in a huge empire, but we each have a voice. **Is God leading you to act or speak on behalf of others? Take a bold stand and see what God will do.**



My thoughts