

The Book of Esther: A Woman of God Resists the Status Quo of Injustice

A 7 Week Study

Dr. Brandi Bingham Kellett

Individuals and independent small groups are welcome to us this study as a guide as you dig into the Word alone or with others. Any group meeting as part of a church, ministry or non-profit, please contact me before using this curriculum. Any sales or reproduction of this work is prohibited. Dr. Kellett has written over a dozen Bible studies, available upon request.

Contact me with questions. Expandyourus@gmail.com

Some reminders, as an introduction:

An Overview of God's Relationship with Humanity:

A) Genesis 1:26 and 2:18: *God made us for community, like the Trinity*

"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness."

"It is not good for man to be alone."

B) Genesis 2:7: *God made us intimately, with His own breath*

God formed man and "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being."

C) Genesis 2:15: *God designed us for work, for productivity, & to take care of His Creation*

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

D) Genesis 3:22: *God made us mortal to protect us from eternal brokenness*

"Man must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

An Overview of God's Relationship with Israel:

A) Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1; 17:7-8: *God claims Israel for his own and attaches himself to it.*

"Leave your country and go to a place I will show you. I will give you land and have chosen you to be a blessing to others."

"Do not fear, I am your shield, and your great reward."

"I will be their God."

B) Genesis 9:15-16 and 22:14: *God calls Israel to remember and always preserves a Remnant.*

"The rainbow will be a sign of the covenant. I will remember."

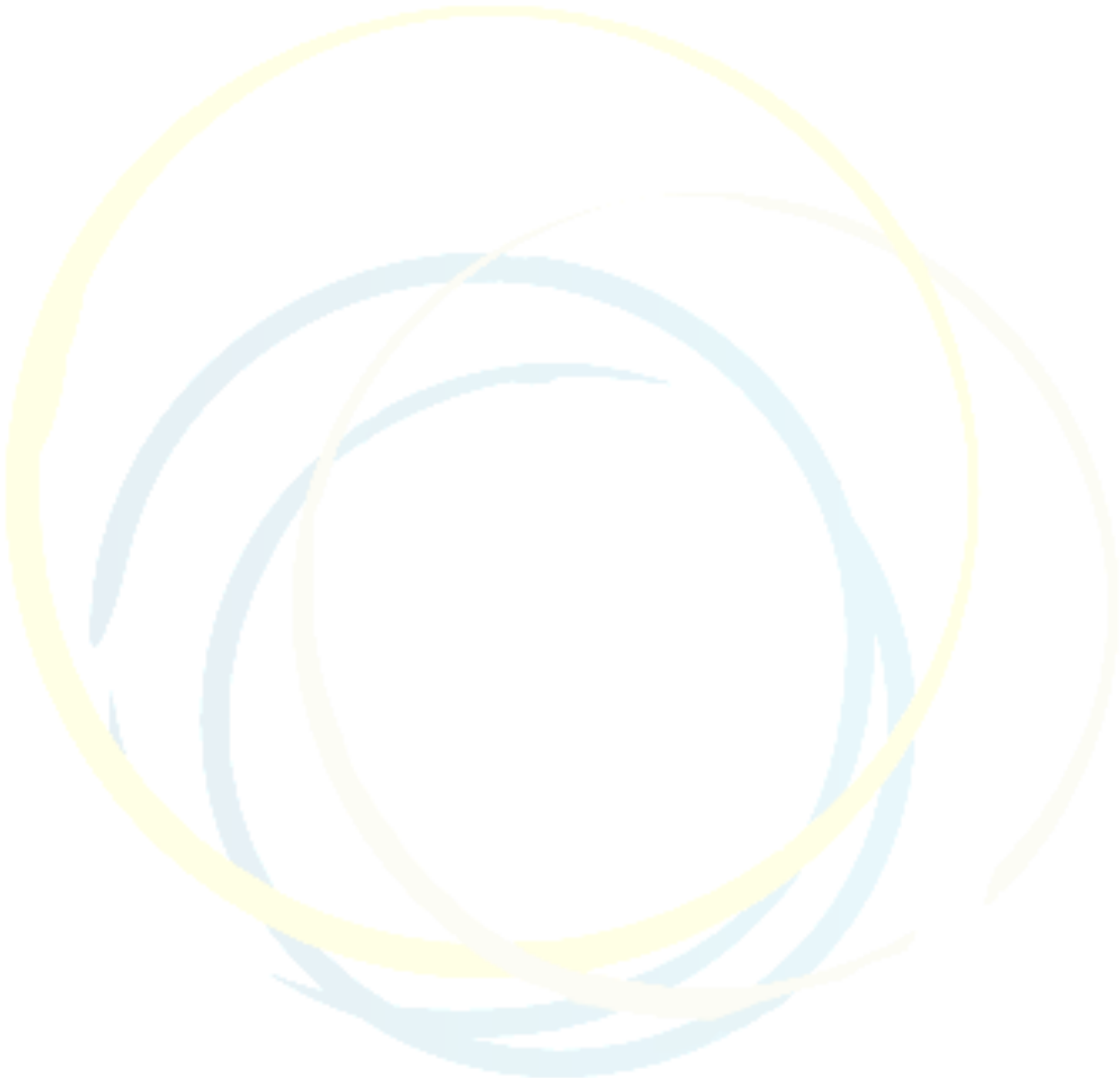
"[with Isaac] On the Mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

C) Deuteronomy 25:19: *God promises Rest*

(free from external threats and untroubled by internal conflict)

"When God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving

you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek.”



Week One

Day 1: Esther 1:1-9

As Esther opens, most of the Jewish people have been in exile in Babylon for nearly 100 years. They are now living under their 4th Babylonian King; and yet, God has promised to bring them out of exile, restoring them to Israel.

- How do you hang on when God's promises seem deferred (or far off) for you?
- How do you keep hope alive when you feel despair?
- What drives you closer to Jesus: Fulfilled promises or waiting for God to move on your behalf?

Day 2: Esther 1:1-9

Xerxes and Vashti host week-long banquets and 6 month celebrations of their wealth and power.

- What motivates you to celebrate?
- Are you ever motivated by creating an image of your life you can share with others? (Insta-what????) Do you value aspects of your life you can display for others?
- Xerxes made sure his guests could drink whatever they wanted, however they wanted it. Does Xerxes have a responsibility to "drink responsibly"!??
- Are you honoring God in the way you celebrate? Do you lower (or ignore) standards to make others comfortable, or to help them enjoy your company? Are there common situations in which you find yourself dishonoring who God calls you to be?

Day 3: Esther 1:10-12

Xerxes gets furious when Vashti doesn't give him what he wants.

- Why do you think Xerxes reacts so strongly to her denial?
- Do you have a sense of entitlement in any area of your life?
- What do you do when you don't get what you want? (From others? From God?)

Day 4: Esther 1:13-22

Xerxes turns to astrologers to ask for advice in how to handle Vashti's rebellion.

- To whom do you turn when you need advice? Can you think more deeply about whose voice you listen to?
- The astrologers suggest that Vashti's unpunished act will lead to a breakdown in society's gender stability. What do you think of this advice?
- Do you feel responsible as a "leader" to behave well? Does your behavior matter to your community? How does your behavior reflect Jesus?

Week 2 Questions

Day 1 and 2: Esther 2:1-7

Xerxes came back from war with Greece defeated and then had trouble finding his own voice.

- When are you most vulnerable to bad advice? Is it when you are doing well or when things are hard? How do you decide whose advice to prioritize?
- Everything in Xerxes' life existed to gratify him. Are you ever susceptible to that way of thinking? How do you resist self-centered thinking?
- Esther was an orphan who was adopted by Mordecai, a Jew who had been in exile for decades. If you were Mordecai, how would you hang on to your heritage? Would you value that and try to pass it on, even in the midst of a people who look down on you? Think about the complexity so many families face in our city who are not in the majority. Do you have compassion for them?
- Do you feel like you have a sense of your heritage or what you would value if you were forced into exile and your beliefs/faith were a minority? Ponder God's calling on which values and beliefs should define you.

Day 3: Esther 2:8-11

Esther is taken and there is nothing she or Mordecai can do to resist it.

- Esther is chosen for her beauty. Do you long for recognition? What do you want to be chosen for?
- Esther did not disclose her Jewish heritage. Do you think that is a betrayal? How and when do you disclose your beliefs to others?

Day 4: Esther 2:12-18

Esther's life is now centered on her beauty.

- How would you feel if your worth was based on your outward appearance? Do you feel like it is in our society? Reflect on how much YOU emphasize your beauty or body...do you ever place value there? I know society stinks at this, but are you complicit in it?
- Esther had been kidnapped. Her new reality was based on injustice. Think about injustice in your life. When you are not being treated fairly do you panic and fall apart or do you trust God is working and patiently wait for him to reveal deeper issues?
- Esther was able to ask for advice from Hegai and then act on that advice. When you are praised and pampered and told you are wonderful (or when you feel wronged and victimized) is it hard to humble yourself and ask for advice?

Day 5: Esther 2:19-23

Esther is chosen.

- Even after meeting with success, Esther still submits to Mordecai. As you grow and mature and have success as an adult, is it hard for you to humbly ask for and accept advice from your elders? What is God's best (calling) for you in those relationships?
- Mordecai might have felt wronged or left behind...and yet God was about to use him to save Xerxes' life. Do you ever feel left behind by God?
- Reflect on the idea that because God calls us into community, God might be working on us so that we can be present to save or help others. Have you ever been (or are you now) in a situation where God led you to a certain place so that you could serve someone else? Ponder God's calling on your role in your community this week.

Week 3 Questions

Day 1 and 2: Esther 3:1-2

Most scholars think Haman did not deserve his promotion.

- Do you harbor ill will against someone who is given what they have not earned? (Is there someone who comes to mind right now?). That is God's sense of right and wrong in you! Ponder God's calling on your relationship to God's justice. Do you have a role?
- Most scholars think Mordecai did not deserve his original promotion either. What happens to your sense of justice when people you love receive gifts they don't deserve? Are you at times hypocritical in your response to God's justice and mercy? In what's "fair?"
- Mordecai did not bow because he hated Haman (as an Amelkite), not because of idolatry. Haman hated Mordecai because he was a Jew. How do you decide when to pick a fight and when to let things go?
- Ponder God's calling on your reactive instincts! Is every instinct in a relationship right or do you often react in a way contrary to Christ's command to be "salt" and "light?"

Day 3: Esther 3:3-6

When we are given power we often want more, more, more. When we are given a community or a place to belong we often want more security, better pics, more recognition.

- Despite God's blessings, do you walk around looking to be offended/overlooked, or knowing you are secure in Christ and your community so that you can extend grace to everyone around you?

- Haman held a grudge (as did Mordecai!!), and was looking for a fight. Who in your life do you approach defensively? Is your approach right or do you need to examine (Ponder!) some relationship patterns?
- Ponder God's calling on your sense of security, or identity. God's Word says God "knit you together," that God "chose you" and "loved you first," that God "will never leave or forsake you," and that "you will seek God and find God when you seek him with all your heart." How do your current feelings or circumstances make you live or think or react as if this weren't true?

Day 4: Esther 3:7-15

Haman's grudge led an entire people to be condemned. His words and influence had power. So do yours!

- Do you ever use your influence to condemn someone? Do you ever use your privilege to justify what you have earned, giving yourself more value than those around you?
- Ponder God's calling on your speech. Do you use your mouth to lift others up or to disparage friends, your spouse, your boss...?
- Haman wanted revenge on the Jews for what had happened to the Amelkites. Do you move through life keeping score? Or just with one person? With whom are you likely to keep score?
- Think about your sense of justice from the beginning of this chapter. If God kept score with us then what would we deserve?
- Is it ever helpful to keep score in your own relationships? Ponder God's calling on your score keeping.

Week 4 Questions

Day 1: Esther 4:1-3

Tragedy happens. Even to God's people.

- Do you think loving Jesus protects you from tragedy? Most of us don't think He promises us a golden path, but take some time to interrogate what you expect out of life. Is any hard news a disaster? How can you prepare your heart for a life lived with Christ...what SHOULD you expect?
- How does Mordecai respond to the terrible news of the coming genocide? How can it be a model for you?
- How do you typically respond to bad news? Unfair!? Cynicism? Blame? Melodrama? Action? When do you observe God enter into your pain?

Day 2: Esther 4:4-8

Even though Esther was famous and powerful, she still remembered Mordecai, and moved to action to help him. She used all of her power to help others.

- Jesus said, 'People are gonna want to get to know me because of the way you treat people' (BSV). Is that a plausible statement describing you? Is God calling anyone to mind for you to intentionally, actively love well? (Beware, it might be someone you don't enjoy...)
- How do you use your resources to help others?
- Sometimes we have to work hard to get others to open up or accept help. Hathach went out to where Mordecai was. Is God calling you to pursue anyone relentlessly? Is there anyone you are denying access to who is trying to love you well?
- Mordecai expected Esther to be brave and boldly asked her for help? Are you afraid to ask for help? Of whom? Why? What is God calling us to be like in community? Always the helper or sometimes the helpee? Which is harder for you? (I hate to go there....but what example did Jesus set?)

Day 3 and 4: Esther 4:9-14

The plot thickens. Mordecai speaks boldly to Esther. He is NOT afraid to tell her this is NOT about her, but what about God might be doing!

- As you evaluate the things you “give yourself to” (the passions you develop, the people you help, the places you volunteer), do you approach it like a burden you have to do? Will it “not get done” without you? What is God’s approach here? Mordecai is convinced that God is at work and wants Esther to be a part of it. What areas of your life need this fresh perspective?
- Esther evaluates her chance of success. How often do you (Honestly!) make decisions based on fear? Especially when it comes to the big stuff (boys, babies and geography).
- Mordecai reminds Esther that abuse is abuse and prejudice does not respect a person’s position. Why was Esther easy to convince that this was not just Mordecai’s problem? What does it take for you to see the abuse of others as “your problem”? What does God say about it? (Again...I hate to say it...but what example did Jesus set?)
- Do you have a responsibility to care for others—even if you are safe—when they are in trouble? Is the Lord calling you to a situation or person who might need your help? Where do you see the status quo as unacceptable, even if you are not the primary victim? Is God calling you to take action?

Day 5: Esther 4:15-17

Esther is brave and strong because she has asked God and her community to help carry her.

- What does she do? She humbles herself publicly and asks God to intervene. How can you ask others to help carry you? What is God’s design for community? Where are you rejecting his plan?

Week 5 Questions

Day 1: Esther 5:1-8

Esther was very brave.

- Have you obeyed God when something was hard and scary? Take some time to remember how God has equipped you for the things he sometimes asks you to do.
- Is there anything you are feeling called to do now? Talk to God about why you are afraid, and ask God to open your eyes to the opportunity he might be giving you to follow through.

Day 2: Esther 5:1-8

Esther does not directly ask the King for the help she needs.

- Is she deceitful?
- If you are convinced your point of view is Godly do you barge in and demand people correct mistakes and apologize? Do you sit back and ask God to fix it with no help from you?
- Do you think it is okay to go into a tough situation with a strategy? Where does honesty fit into this? Be as specific as you can if it makes sense for a situation you are in.

Day 3: Esther 6:1-3

This King Remembers

- Throughout the Old Testament, God commands his people to remember. Why do you think this important for us to do? Do you regularly reflect on your own life? When is it helpful to you?

- How often do you thank people? Think about the way you function in community. Are you someone known for “telling it like it is?” or are you a good listener? Or are you an explicit encourager? Where do you need to improve?

Day 4: Esther 6:4-9

Haman Steps in it...and what Haman meant for bad, God meant for good.

- How does Haman’s answer to the King reflect his heart?
- When are you LEAST likely to be self-obsessed? When are you most able to be unmindful of yourself? Is it possible? Is it required of you if you want to be present with others?

Day 5: Esther 6:10-14

The Tables Turn

- What is the big picture take away for you here?
- What happens when you line up your value based on comparing yourself to others?
- Are there relationships in your life where you chronically compare? Can you feel real joy for them?

Week 6 Questions

Day 1: Esther 7:1-4

Esther was thoughtful in the way she prepared to ask.

- When you pray for things, do you find yourself overlooking opportunities God might give you to answer your prayer? In other words, do you sometimes get used to the asking/praying/whining/getting advice from friends/living in Crisis mode instead of actually taking action with the Lord's blessing? Ask the Lord to help you evaluate the way you pray, deal with desires, and resolve concerns.
- How does Esther's boldness and clarity in asking for what she wanted a model for you? How would you describe her moment with the King?

Day 2: Esther 7:5-8:2

Justice is Served....

- We are often known through our actions, which often lead to us being known by stereotypes of our worst or best moments. Haman was known as a power hungry, vengeful name dropper. Mordecai was known for his faithful service. Here God allows the true colors to come out for these men (His truth always finds the light). Do you stereotype yourself or others? Are you waiting to be exposed for your true self? Take some time this week and pray God would empower you to confess your true self to Him and to the people pursuing you on His behalf. (It could change your life...)
- Esther is in the process of saving the ENTIRE Jewish nation (and therefore Christianity as we know it on down the line!). What did she actually have to do?

Day 3: Esther 8:3-6

Expand your us.....

- God often calls us to look out for others. When you practice the discipline of gratitude, you often become aware of your privilege, and then actionable compassion for others arises! It makes me weep! Where are you on this continuum? Where do you want to be?

Day 4: Esther 8:7-17

Mordecai's judgment was trusted because he waited patiently and trusted God to defend him. They are permitted to assemble, protect themselves, and to destroy and plunder anyone who attacks them.

- The law of the King is irreversible, and yet God absolutely reverses and redeems it. Mordecai is given (wait for it) the SAME DAY slated for them to die! God is absolutely capable of redeeming every single thing. Are there any hopeless situations surrounding you? Believe that God can "bring life to the dead and call things into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:17). God's character is that He is the guy who can make the impossible possible (Luke 18:27). Admit in your secret heart that the God who loves you is NOT controlled by the reality you sense around you. Is He calling you to hope?

Week 7 Questions

Day 1: Esther 9:1-4

God protects and blesses Mordecai and the Jews.

- Mordecai becomes a total rock star. Why? Simply because God chose him and he decided to be faithful no matter what happened. Does this encourage you? How and why?
- Sometimes God uses you to bring others to Christ. People became Jews because they were scared and others left them alone or even helped them because of God's movement in their lives. When you know Christ, it is no longer about you, but also about what God might be doing to others through you. Think about how your faithfulness affects all the people in your life.

Day 2: Esther 9:5-17

Mordecai tells the people to finish the job. This is hard to take, but they are simply blotting out the “-ites” that the Jews who first entered the Promised Land of Canaan generations ago were supposed to destroy.

- The reason the Jews got in trouble, asked for a King, and were sent into exile in the first place was because they mingled with the “-ites” instead of driving them out of the land God gave them. Are willing to ruthlessly destroy anything that causes you to stumble or dishonor the person God is calling you to be? How do you approach the things in your life that clearly damage you? Do you see how close you can get? Is ruthless destruction appropriate here in your own life? Name the thing and get after it!!
- Again...God redeems even the date...God is the God who makes the impossible possible. Is this reality sinking in or changing your perspective?

Day 3: Esther 9:18-32

Remembering. It matters to God. So much so that God constantly tells his peeps to remember.

- It changes us. How has it changed you? What have you forgotten that you need to remember?
- It provides context. Where do you need context in your life? Is there a narrative of hope you need to remember? Tell yourself the story of Jesus in you!!

Day 4: Esther 10:1-3

God's complete redemption came to Mordecai, and he never lifted a finger to defend himself. He simply prayed, did the next right thing, and asked Esther for help.

- What should you remember here? From your own life?
- Mordecai's salvation blessed others. The kingdom and the Jews. When God has blessed you do you use it to condemn others or to bless them? How are you an active blessing to others? Do you see yourself as being rescued by Christ? (This is where the discipline of gratitude comes in handy 😊)
- As you meditate on this study of Esther, is there a principle here for you in thinking about what responsibility God has given you for the people around you? What responsibility do you bear when a member of the community falls behind?