

THRESHOLDS

4. ABANDONMENT HVC, Feb. 23, 2020 Esther 4 (NIV)

What come to mind when you think of “abandonment” to God? Any images or stories?

What is your biggest fear about trusting God that totally?

What do you think is the difference between coincidence and providence? How do they relate to one another?

What did you think of the king’s 160-day banquet? What would you think of someone who did that today?

What do you think when you hear of a rap musician who bought a dog collar made of platinum and rubies for \$75,000?

Esther 1:17-18 (NIV)

For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen’s conduct will

respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

Do you think this concern was well-founded? Why/not?

What do you think of beauty contests in general? Why?

Do you think Esther should have participated in this contest?

Why do you think Mordecai advised her not to reveal her Jewish identity?

Esther 2:17-18 (NIV)

Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. And the king gave a great banquet, Esther’s banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

Have you ever won a major contest of some sort? What was that like? How did it help you? Hurt you?

If you had been Esther, would you have been glad to have won this contest?

Esther 2:21-22 (NIV)

During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate... two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.

When have you found yourself in just the right place and time for something good to happen? Did you see God's hand in it at the time? Do you now? How so?

Mordecai received no special reward for his saving the king's life. Are there overlooked moments in your life that you suspect God might be saving to do *greater* things in the future?

Esther 3:5-6 (NIV)

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

Why was Haman so "enraged"?

Why do you think Mordecai would not pay him honor? What would *you* have done?

Have you ever seen anti-Semitism up close? How big a problem do you think it is today?

Esther 3:13 (NIV)

Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews — young and old, women and children — on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

Have you ever felt like you were going to die? What was it like? What went through your thoughts?

Have you ever been threatened by violence? What was that like?

Esther 4:1 (NIV)

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly.

What does this tell you about Mordecai?

What has made, or would make, you cry *your* eyes out?

Can you think of acceptable ways or times to express such deep grief in *our* culture?

Esther 4:8 (NIV)

He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

What would seem contradictory about Mordecai's proposal?

What are Esther's options in this situation?

Esther 4:11 (NIV)

"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to **death** unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

Tally up all of Esther's reasons not to go to the king. How reasonable do you think her objections are?

Esther 4:13-14 (NIV)

...he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as **this?**"

How reasonable do you think *Mordecai's* response is?

Can you think of reasons God might have for putting you in *your own* "position" in life?

What about our current cultural situation causes you the most concern or despair?

What about this story encourages you to look at that in a different way?

Esther 4:16 (NIV)

"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is **against the law**. And if I **perish, I perish.**"

Can you imagine a crisis in which you would go against the law?

"If I perish, I perish." – What do you think Esther's tone was when she said this?

What connection do you see between this statement and the prayer and fasting that preceded it? Why does that make a difference? Have you ever experienced that in *your* life?

If the time every came, do you think you would be willing to be a martyr for God? What would make that hard? Easier?

What makes it hard to believe that God is working in *your* life like this right now? What difference would it make if you really *did* believe it?

Why do you think God has put you where you are in life? Does that frighten you or excite you?

What would “freedom” on the other side of abandonment look and feel like for you? What is appealing about that? Scary?

Is there an area of your life where you feel abandonment is needed today? How can the group pray for you about that?