

# Brave

WEEK 2 • GROUP GUIDE • MESSAGE BY SHAWN JOHNSON

## START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

Pick one:

If you won 10 million dollars, what would you do with it?

If you could get into a time machine and travel back in time, what period of time would you go back to and why?

## SHARE

Welcome to the teaching series called “Brave.”

We are going to take a serious look at what biblical and boundless bravery looks like. All of us face challenges. Some feel small and others feel insurmountable. Each one of us needs strength and courage to be able to face those head on.

In this series, we are going to look at some of the bravest exploits that we find in the scriptures, and what makes this series so unique, is that we will look at the brave exploits of women in the Bible and what we all can learn from them.

This week we will be looking at a powerful story about a ferociously brave woman named Esther. God put her in a unique position with a big decision to make. This decision -- this window of opportunity -- had an expiration date and she knew she had to be brave for God or shrink back quietly, retreat and betray herself. The book of Esther was written to the Jewish people sometime after 460 BC and describes how the Jews of Persia were saved from certain destruction through divine providence. Like each of us, Esther is faced with a difficult choice that will require unrelenting boldness.

## **Let's have a few people read this summary of Esther:**

Richard's Teacher's Commentary gives us a great synopsis of this drama that will help all of us remember the storyline of Esther:

Xerxes (Zurk-seez) was holding one of the drinking parties for which history tells us he was famous. When his wife ignored a command to visit the party, Xerxes set her aside. There would be no "women's lib" in Persia!

Immediately a search was begun for a new queen, while the king gave his attention to the four-year process of gathering an army to invade Greece. It was not until after his defeat in the west that Xerxes finally chose a new queen. When he did, he chose Esther, the adopted daughter of a minor court official named Mordecai.

The book then tells of the anger of a high court official named Haman when he thought he had been slighted by Mordecai. Haman determined to have his revenge. He would not only have Mordecai executed: he would have his entire race exterminated! When Haman asked Xerxes for permission, it was granted casually!

But Mordecai had earlier warned the king of a plot on his life, and somehow his reward was overlooked. One night Xerxes could not sleep, and had the record of his rule read. Mordecai's act was reported there, but no reward was mentioned.

Meanwhile, Mordecai had urged Esther to speak to the king for her race. She was afraid, but risked the anger of Xerxes, who was known for his instability and rages. She asked Xerxes and Haman to her apartments for dinner the next day. At that dinner, she requested the king's and Haman's presence at a second dinner the following day.

The morning of the second dinner, Haman came to the palace and was asked advice on how to honor someone the king wished to reward. Haman, thinking he was the one to be honored, outlined what should be done—and then was commanded by Xerxes to personally lead Mordecai, clad in the king's own robes and riding a royal horse, through the capital, shouting loudly that this was one the king wished to honor.

Then at dinner Esther accused Haman of wickedly plotting against her race, and revealed that she was a Jew. When one of the king's servants volunteered that Haman had actually had a gallows erected on which to hang Mordecai, whom the king had ordered him to honor, Xerxes had Haman and his sons hanged there instead.

According to custom, once a royal decree had been published, it could not be revoked. So Xerxes gave Mordecai his seal and told him to write any decree in Xerxes' name that would correct the situation. The new decree simply gave the Jews the right to organize, and to protect themselves by killing those who planned to kill them. No victims could be plundered, so the motives of the defenders could not be greed.

When the appointed day came the Jews did defend themselves and many of their enemies were killed. Mordecai became a powerful figure in the empire, and used his position to promote the welfare of his people.

The great deliverance reported in Esther is celebrated today by the Jewish people on March 13 and 14, and is known as the Feast of Purim.

**After listening to Shawn's message this weekend, why do you think the story of Esther is so powerful?**

**Haman tried to manipulate and lie to gain power, but in the end was exposed and fell into his own trap he set. What can we learn from Haman?**

## **GROW**

Providence is biblically defined as “the doctrine that God is in full control of all events” and is taught—and illustrated—fully in the book of Esther. Esther bravely chooses to put her life on the line for the Jewish people. The future existence of God's chosen people—and ultimately the appearance of the Redeemer-Messiah, Jesus—was jeopardized by Haman's desire to kill all the Jews, but God had a plan. God placed Esther in a very unique position, where she had a choice to make.

**Let's read Esther 4:6-17**

**Mordecai's counsel to Esther was recorded here, “who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.” Why is the timing of all of this important?**

**If Esther would have decided to shrink back and not do anything, what did Mordecai say would ultimately happen?**

No matter what, God's deliverance was going to “arise” for his people, because God is sovereign in working out his purposes and fulfilling his promises to his people. God wanted to use Esther at a time like this and delighted in her choosing to be a part of the plan.

**Why is it so important for Christians today to understand that God is faithful to his people and in complete control?**

**Do you see persecution like in Esther's time happening in our world today?**

## **MOVE**

Esther and Mordecai had a choice to be a part of God's plan or stand by the wayside and watch God's deliverance come from another place. They both chose to act with great faith amidst difficult and terrifying times. In the end, the enemy, Haman, was punished by the king and impaled on the exact pole that Haman set up for Mordecai. God delivered Esther and Mordecai along with all of the Jewish people. There are some principles about bravery that Shawn talked about in the message that we find in this powerful story:

**Bravery...**

1. Invites God into the process, Esther fasted and prayed in order to hear from God before

she acted. Acts now, when you know God is prompting you for “such a time as this.”

2. Looks for opportunities to obey and do the right thing.

3. Acts now, when you know God is prompting you for “such a time as this.”

Do you think God has put you in a particular situation today where he can use you for “such a time as this?” Perhaps God has given you an opportunity to have a voice where others don’t.

Is there an area of your life that you know God is asking you to be brave?

## **PRAY**

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women’s groups to talk more freely.

## **TO GO**

**Esther 4:14**

And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?