Are you there God?

LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER
INTRODUCTION

There are moments when life seems to make absolutely no sense. Why is this happening? What is going on? Why now? The book of Esther tells the compelling and captivating true story of a peasant girl who, amazingly, through a set of strange yet ordinary events, became queen. And just when everything in her world is seemingly falling apart, she understands why she is queen.

Sometimes God works in extraordinary ways. And sometimes He works in ordinary ways—through the small circumstances in our lives—but He is always working. In the story of Esther, you can find encouragement when life does not make sense.

Our time in this series has two main goals:

- **Encouragement**: Provide hope for people in pain, who are wrestling with struggles and sorrows in this life.
- **Education**: Help people understand the story of Esther, and how God is the ultimate hero. And at the same time we have all been given opportunities to represent Him.

Each lesson contains the following sections:

MAIN POINT

Discussions often take on a life of their own, but they typically lack power when they lack focus. The Discussion Leader ought to use the Main Point to keep everyone on the same page. To do this, you might say something like, “That is very interesting and a good topic for another discussion, but today’s study is about...” and ask a question that brings people back to the topic of discussion.
There will be times when it makes sense to ignore the Main Point, for example, when someone in your group experiences a significant crisis. If you decide to move away from the lesson’s Main Point, you want to do so on purpose and not by accident.

**GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE**
These questions will help kick-start your discussion time. The main goal for this time is to get everyone talking and prepare them for the more focused conversation to follow.

**LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD**
The goal for this section is to let the passage speak for itself and stand on its own. This isn’t easy! During this time, you will read the passage out loud (twice) and answer questions focused on the details of the biblical text.

**LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE**
Transformation comes from renewing your mind (Romans 12:2). The goal for this section is to look inward to allow God’s Word to change you from the inside out. Use this time to discuss how your thoughts and feelings are affirmed and/or challenged.

**LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD**
Jesus calls us to love others, just as He loved us. Based on your understanding of the text and how God is transforming your heart, how will you treat others? How will you apply this teaching to all of your relationships, to everyone you will see this week and beyond?
LEADER NOTES
Where needed, each lesson may have several Leader Notes. This material will provide insight on how to steer the conversation and care for your people. Additionally, these notes will provide greater context to help you understand a difficult word, phrase, or verse.

RHYTHM REMINDERS
A prompt will be provided when one of the 7 Rhythms of Rooted has a natural point of emphasis. We want to help everyone continue to grow holistically in their spiritual journeys. Obviously, some rhythms always exist, like prayer, but occasionally it will be helpful to draw fresh attention to or spend additional time in one of the rhythms.

STORIES & CELEBRATION
A few questions will provide opportunities to follow up on comments, commitments, or applications from previous group discussions. This time is also intended to provide space for sharing stories of how God is at work in people’s lives, what the Spirit is showing them, and things they learned or that were timely in the weekend message or Annual Read.

PRAYER
Be sure to close your time together in prayer. You can take requests from the group, invite others to lead, and bring God the needs that stood out to you in your group time.

Remember that you aren’t in this alone! God will help you prepare and lead your group discussion. Make it your goal to keep in step with the Holy Spirit!

Pray and read the passage a few times on your own. Take a few minutes to identify what makes an impression for you and how the passage might impact your group.
Once you’ve taken some time to read the passage on your own, read through the entire Discussion Guide. Make sure you understand the Main Point. Identify which questions you want to use in your group time and rewrite them in your own words.

Once your group time is over, take a few minutes to evaluate the discussion. What went well? What could have been different? If you had a “bad night,” DON’T GIVE UP! Everyone has tough nights. There were times that even the disciples didn’t get what Jesus was talking about!

The following list is updated for each series to help you and members of your group understand and respond to the biblical truth we’re studying as a church. Don’t forget about the Mariners Annual Read and the Gospel Every Day podcast discussing each devotional.

- Mariners Worship: Series Playlist (Spotify Playlist)
- ESV Global Study Bible (Biblical Commentary)
- The Bible Project: Book Overviews–Esther (Video, 9 min.)
- The Bible Project: How to Read Biblical Narrative (Videos, 5 min. each)
- Tim Mackie & Whitney Woolard: Esther: Secular or Sacred? (Blog Post)
- Eric Geiger: God of the Ordinary and the Extraordinary (Blog Post)
- Christine Caine: Light Looking for Darkness (Blog Post)
- Doug Fields (editor): CSB One-Minute Bible for Students (Devotional Previews)

The CSB Study Bible is an excellent resource if you’d prefer a physical copy of the translation used by Mariners Church. It is available for purchase online and in the bookstore at Irvine.

All Scripture references in this guide are from the CSB unless otherwise noted.

CSB unless otherwise noted.
**PREPARE**

Listen and subscribe to the Mariners Life Group Leader Podcast. Each episode includes a quick conversation to help you prepare for your study, discussion, and application. The first week of each series, Pastor Eric will share key thoughts and hopes for your group.

If you missed the weekend message or want to review specific points, you can always watch, listen, and find the bulletin notes here.

**MAIN POINT**

The book of Esther does not mention God’s name. This was a literary device to show us that just because the Lord is silent does not mean He is absent. He is always working, often through the normal circumstances in our lives.

**RHYTHM 🌐 REMINDER**

This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of PRAYER. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

**LEAN IN**

What is the best plot twist or surprise ending of all time?
What makes it the best?

**Leader Note:** Without spoiling any current favorites, share classic examples with your group and have people vote on the best.
Examples might include movies, shows, books, or performances:
  • Shocking backstory reveals in movies like Star Wars or The Sixth Sense.
  • Twists and re-twists in TV shows like Lost or WandaVision.
  • Bad guys not being so bad like Professor Snape in Harry Potter.
  • Open-ended questions like the animals in Life of Pi.
  • Role reversal like the father and son in the song “Cat’s in the Cradle”.
  • Lyrics changing meaning like “not throwin’ away my shot” in Hamilton.

Today we begin a new mini-series with three weeks in the book of Esther. This historic drama is full of tragedy, comedy, suspense, and surprises. Spoiler alert: the main character is never mentioned, but the best supporting role goes to the title character.

Alternate between the selected texts and the related questions. Choose three different people to read out loud when it is time for each passage of Scripture.

**Leader Note**: Since the book of Esther is a narrative, we will touch on a few key themes that are revealed over the course of multiple chapters rather than a verse by verse exposition. The guides for this mini-series will focus on highlights, but you are also encouraged to take notes and share specific thoughts from the weekend messages. Of course, that’s always the case, but especially when covering large portions of Scripture.
Read Esther 1:1–12.
1 These events took place during the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled 127 provinces from India to Cush. 2 In those days King Ahasuerus reigned from his royal throne in the fortress at Susa. 3 He held a feast in the third year of his reign for all his officials and staff, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the officials from the provinces. 4 He displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days.

5 At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were present in the fortress of Susa. 6 White and blue linen hangings were fastened with fine white and purple linen cords to silver rods on marble columns. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a mosaic pavement of red feldspar, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.

7 Drinks were served in an array of gold goblets, each with a different design. Royal wine flowed freely, according to the king’s bounty. 8 The drinking was according to royal decree: “There are no restrictions.” The king had ordered every wine steward in his household to serve whatever each person wanted. 9 Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women of King Ahasuerus’s palace.

10 On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine, Ahasuerus commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas—the seven eunuchs who personally served him—11 to bring Queen Vashti before him with her royal crown. He wanted to show off her beauty to the people and the officials, because she was very beautiful. 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command that was delivered by his eunuchs. The king became furious and his anger burned within him.

How would you describe this opening scene? What is the tone?

Whether or not Vashti was justified for refusing the king, what tension does it introduce here at the beginning of the story?

Leader Note: At first glance, the scene might appear to be a festive utopia. Verses 10-12 quickly reveal the true nature of the king and his empire. The lavish decadence and hedonism paint an ominous picture of fickle desire, abusive power, and self-centered godlessness. It has often been supposed that the king’s command in verse 11 implied that Vashti was to only wear her crown or some other immodest or immoral request. However, the text does not go this far in describing his intent to “show off her beauty,” nor does it provide explanation for her refusal to comply. Regardless of motive, she is clearly objectified since he angrily turns from wanting to show her off to discarding her.
The king is highly impressionable, quick-tempered, and lacking in loyalty or morality. He has her banished and creates a new harem to choose a new queen.

Read Esther 2:1–8.

1 Some time later, when King Ahasuerus’s rage had cooled down, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what was decided against her. 2 The king’s personal attendants suggested, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. 3 Let the king appoint commissioners in each province of his kingdom, so that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem at the fortress of Susa. Put them under the supervision of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, keeper of the women, and give them the required beauty treatments. 4 Then the young woman who pleases the king will become queen instead of Vashti.” This suggestion pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

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 Kish 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.

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.

What tragedies had Esther already endured?

Leader Note: It’s tempting to view Esther as a biblical Cinderella. But there’s no Prince Charming, glass slipper, magic spells, or true love. Point out the following:
Her homeland was conquered and her family taken captive (2:6)
She was living in exile under a pagan empire (2:6)
She was orphaned after both parents had died (2:7)
She was taken away from Mordecai, the cousin who raised her (2:8)
She was gathered with other virgins by the “keeper of the women” for the king’s harem (2:9)
Read Esther 2:19–3:6 to see how things seem to go from bad to worse.

19 When the virgins were gathered a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the King’s Gate. 20 Esther still did not reveal her family background or her ethnicity, as Mordecai had directed. She obeyed Mordecai's orders, as she always had while he raised her.

21 During those days while Mordecai was sitting at the King’s Gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became infuriated and planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus. 22 When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she told the king on Mordecai's behalf. 23 When the report was investigated and verified, both men were hanged on the gallows. This event was recorded in the Historical Record in the king’s presence.

3:1 After all this took place, King Ahasuerus honored Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He promoted him in rank and gave him a higher position than all the other officials. 2 The entire royal staff at the King’s Gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded this to be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage. 3 The members of the royal staff at the King’s Gate asked Mordecai, “Why are you disobeying the king’s command?” 4 When they had warned him day after day and he still would not listen to them, they told Haman in order to see if Mordecai’s actions would be tolerated, since he had told them he was a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage. 6 And when he learned of Mordecai’s ethnic identity, it seemed repugnant to Haman to do away with Mordecai alone. He planned to destroy all of Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout Ahasuerus’s kingdom.

Leader Note: Mordecai is not only overlooked for saving the king’s life, spoiling an assassination plot, but he is then personally targeted as an enemy, himself. Haman deceives the king into signing an order for the death of every Jew in his kingdom.
Have you ever asked, “are you there, God?” If so, what made you wonder if God was real and whether or not He cares about your life?

Leader Note: Encourage people to put themselves in Esther’s shoes. She was an orphan, of an exiled people, under a pagan king, forced into a harem, hiding her religious and ethnic identity from an abusive husband and a manipulative schemer and, now facing government-sanctioned genocide. It would only be natural to wonder if the God she must have heard Mordecai tell stories about as she grew up was either imaginary, indifferent, ineffective, or even vindictive toward her and her people.

If anything, so-called evidence before Esther would suggest that Jewish beliefs had failed, and Persian gods must be superior.

While most of us have never experienced anything this tragic, many in this world have faced such horrors and the rest of us through comfort or hardship have to decide whether or not we’ll believe in a God that we cannot see and doesn’t always seem to be in control—not the way we’d like Him to be, at least.

For some in your Life Group, it may not be tragedy but luxury resulting in questions about the existence and activity of God. Living in a culture of relative ease and comfort with access to technology and medicine can make it hard for some people to even see the need for God. Maybe God is only questioned for allowing bad things in the world but never credited with the good things.

Looking back over your life so far, how have you seen the presence and activity of God?

Leader Note: Keep conversation focused on how people have recognized God’s hand in the past. Next week we will focus on life change. The third and final week in this mini-series will return to Mordecai’s statement to Esther, “Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this” (4:14) and consider what God may want to do now and in the near future.
It’s important to note that just because God was doing good things through Esther’s story, there were tragic circumstances and sinful activities throughout. We never want to minimize the pain and suffering of victims of injustice and abuse, nor justify and excuse the evil and responsibility of those acting selfishly and sinfully. Scripture assures us: “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) It does not say that all things are good; rather, God causes all things to work together for the good…” Our God is big enough to work even things that are truly evil, like orphans in exile taken into a haram before facing genocide and use it for something good!

Read Esther 4:1–3 and 4:15–17. Is anything currently heavy on your heart? If so, what is it and how can we join you in prayer?

**What needs do you have, personally?**

**What needs exist in your immediate family/closest relationships?**

**Leader Note:** Although prayer is not mentioned explicitly, it is implied as part of fasting, lamenting, weeping, and laying in sackcloth and ashes. Even though it was deeply personal, it was not private. This was a public and communal act of crying out to God on behalf of one another.

 ngx Spend time praying specifically for one another. Focus this first time of prayer on the needs of people in your Life Group and their immediate family members. In the next section we will broaden our focus to include other people around us.
Who in your life may not see God’s presence or activity yet? How can you begin praying for them?

What suffering, injustice, or other hardships break your heart for others?

Leader Note: Keep the focus here on burdens people feel on behalf of others. Assure them that they will have time to consider action steps in a couple of weeks. For now, we want to follow the example of Esther and Mordecai, sitting with deep burdens and crying out to God on behalf of others.

How can we pray for the world around us?

Our neighborhoods?
Our community?
Our county/state?
Our nation?
The world?

Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

New prayer requests
Prayer
Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series Spotify Playlist.
WEEK 2: HE REVERSES AND RENews
Group Discussion Guide for: Are You There, God? Lessons From the Book of Esther
Esther 6-10

Prepare

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Main Point

Mordecai was to be killed, but he became an honored hero. Esther was to possibly lose her life, but she was offered up to half the kingdom. The Jewish people were going to be oppressed and killed, but they became victorious. The day of Purim was going to be a day of mourning and defeat and the Lord reversed it into a day of celebration and victory. He will reverse and renew for you too (Psalm 126).

Rhythm Reminder

This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of CELEBRATION. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

Lean In

People celebrate in all kinds of ways, what do you enjoy when it comes to parties and festivities… thumbs up (yes) thumbs down (no)?

Leader Note: Bring to mind a variety of celebratory atmospheres: parties, concerts, sporting events, etc. This is just a rapid-fire style of Q&A to reintroduce a common theme from the book of Esther, parties, and maybe get to know each other better in the process. You may decide to throw your own party if someone gets excited about hosting, cooking, etc.
For example, consider a BBQ or fun time to relax together as a Life Group the first week of July. (The weekend message will be a standalone between series.)

**People**
- Friends and family
- Small community
- Big crowd

**Gifts**
- Give
- Get
- I usually forget

**Decorations**
- Simple
- Extravagant
- Who needs them?

**Dress up**
- Nice
- Costumes
- Face paint

**Food**
- Chef’s choice
- Family recipe
- Grill master
- Sweet
- Savory
- Spicy

**Music**
- Sing along
- Cheering

**Dancing**
- Group
- Partner
- Spotlight
- Awkward
Today we continue our mini-series in the Book of Esther. Last week the stage was set, and tension built. This week, the final plot twists unfold to reveal a happy ending that is still celebrated with the feast or Purim. The annual tradition is full of costumes, puppets, and other ways of telling story of Esther that emphasize the tragedy, comedy, and ultimate victory for the Jewish people.

Alternate between the selected texts and the related questions. Choose three different people to read out loud when it is time for each passage of Scripture. Read Esther 7:1–6.

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 with you, 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 annihilation. 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.

How does Esther model both humility and boldness? Why is this important?
Leader Note: Jesus warned His disciples that they were “...like sheep among wolves. Therefore be shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16). He clarified that they would face unjust punishment and appear before kings because of their faith, yet the Spirit would give them bold words to bear witness among the gentiles. Esther also had to be careful yet courageous in order to speak the truth and be part of God’s plan for the salvation of His people. She patiently waited for the right moment and then spoke and behaved in a way that the king was most likely to receive in her favor.

Now look at the immediate results of Esther’s Christlike intercession. Read 8:1–8.

1 That same day King Ahasuerus awarded Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai entered the king’s presence because Esther had revealed her relationship to Mordecai. 2 The king removed his signet ring he had recovered from Haman and gave it to Mordecai, and Esther put him in charge of Haman’s estate.

3 Then Esther addressed the king again. She fell at his feet, wept, and begged him to revoke the evil of Haman the Agagite and his plot he had devised against the Jews. 4 The king extended the gold scepter toward Esther, so she got up and stood before the king.

5 She said, “If it pleases the king and I have found favor with him, if the matter seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a royal edict be written. Let it revoke the documents the scheming Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces. 6 For how could I bear to see the disaster that would come on my people? How could I bear to see the destruction of my relatives?”

7 King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, “Look, I have given Haman’s estate to Esther, and he was hanged on the gallows because he attacked the Jews. 8 Write in the king’s name whatever pleases you concerning the Jews, and seal it with the royal signet ring. A document written in the king’s name and sealed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked.”

What else did Esther do after saving herself? Why was it important to be specific?
Leader Note: Esther already had won a huge victory over a deadly enemy, but she continued to advocate for others, specifically her family and community. She risked identifying with Mordecai who had just barely escaped execution, blessing him personally and before the king. She also continued pressing the king for specific action to save her people who were still in danger. Haman’s plan had already been set into motion with the king’s authorization and Esther recognized the urgency and clarity needed to work within the system to save other people.

Read Esther 9:16–28 to see the result of her actions on behalf of the people.

16 The rest of the Jews in the royal provinces assembled, defended themselves, and gained relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not seize any plunder. 17 They fought on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar and rested on the fourteenth, and it became a day of feasting and rejoicing.

18 But the Jews in Susa had assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth days of the month. They rested on the fifteenth day of the month, and it became a day of feasting and rejoicing. 19 This explains why the rural Jews who live in villages observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a time of rejoicing and feasting. It is a holiday when they send gifts to one another.

20 Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all of King Ahasuerus’s provinces, both near and far. 21 He ordered them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar every year 22 because during those days the Jews gained relief from their enemies. That was the month when their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday. They were to be days of feasting, rejoicing, and of sending gifts to one another and to the poor.

23 So the Jews agreed to continue the practice they had begun, as Mordecai had written them to do. 24 For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them. He cast the pur—that is, the lot—to crush and destroy them. 25 But when the matter was brought before the king, he commanded by letter that the evil plan Haman had devised against the Jews return on his own head and that he should be hanged with his sons on the gallows. 26 For this reason these days are called Purim, from the word pur.
Because of all the instructions in this letter as well as what they had witnessed and what had happened to them, 27 the Jews bound themselves, their descendants, and all who joined with them to a commitment that they would not fail to celebrate these two days each and every year according to the written instructions and according to the time appointed. 28 These days are remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim will not lose their significance in Jewish life and their memory will not fade from their descendants.

**What elements of the broader cultural impact from Esther’s boldness and God’s favor stand out to you? What details are mentioned in the celebration and why were they significant?**

**Leader Note:** Here we see the ultimate reversal and renewal for God’s people, not just for Esther and Mordecai. Countless lives were changed. History was changed. Gifts and feasting are often part of celebration, but here we also see recognition of the sufficiency and blessing of God. The Jews defended themselves and did not take any plunder. They had been a despised minority group in exile, yet the Lord reversed their lot. They commemorated the anniversary with days of rest and generosity to the poor.

**Last week we discussed times in our lives when we may have had questions about God’s presence, activity, or even His existence. What happened to change your mind? How has your life changed since then?**

**Leader Note:** If you spent most of your time praying for each other and for specific burdens last week, make time to share stories this week about times when you felt like you were asking “are you there, God?” (See Week 1 for more specific questions.)

**How else has God reversed and renewed your own life? Whom or what did God use to bring about life change?**
Leader Note: Take time to celebrate life-changing moments of reversal and renewal. Honor the people God used to work in your life.

Is there an area, circumstance, or relationship in your life in need of God’s intervention?

What would it look like to be both careful and courageous in that part of your life?

Read Esther 10:3, the closing line in the story. How does it challenge, convict, or inspire you? How do we want to be known? What kind of legacy do we want to leave?

God is not only at work in us, He’s at work through us. Pray about how we might join the work of God individually and collectively for the sake of other people’s well-being.

Leader Note: Help people to begin considering how God may want to work in and through their lives. If people struggle with knowing and doing the will of God, consider the following points from *Seven Realities for Experiencing God*. We see each of these in the lives of Esther and Mordecai as God “reversed and renewed” the circumstances of His people.

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.
5. God’s invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.
7. You come to know God by experience as you obey Him, and He accomplishes His work through you.
Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

- Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
- New prayer requests
- Prayer
- Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series Spotify Playlist.
WEEK 3: YOUR “SUCH A TIME AS THIS”  
Group Discussion Guide for: Are You There God? A Walk Through the Book of Esther  
Esther 4:11-14

PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

The Lord has each of us where we are for a reason, for “such a time as this.” While God is the ultimate hero of the story, we can learn that there are moments we must take risks and be bold to represent Christ and His Kingdom.

LEAN IN

What is the best advice you've ever received? When, where, why, and from whom did you hear it? How did it change your life?

In this final week of our mini-series, we’re going back to the most famous line from the book of Esther. Mordecai challenged his cousin with wisdom that rings true even now.
Read Esther 4:11–14. Choose someone to read the passages out loud.

11 “All the royal officials and the people of the royal provinces know that one law applies to every man or woman who approaches the king in the inner courtyard and who has not been summoned—the death penalty—unless the king extends the gold scepter, allowing that person to live. I have not been summoned to appear before the king for the last thirty days.” 12 Esther’s response was reported to Mordecai.

13 Mordecai told the messenger to reply to Esther, “Don’t think that you will escape the fate of all the Jews because you are in the king’s palace. 14 If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father’s family will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.”

**In summary of the story, what crisis did Mordecai and Esther face?**

**Leader Note:** Don’t spend time reviewing every detail of the story. The main point is that Esther is a Jewish orphan living in exile and even after she became queen, she “did not reveal her ethnicity or family background, because Mordecai had ordered her not to make them known” (2:10). The king’s top official, Haman, was later enraged that Mordecai would never bow or pay homage to him. Haman associated this lack of respect (or personal worship) with Mordecai’s Jewish background and consequently manipulated the king into signing an order to kill every Jew in his kingdom. Remember, the Jews were a minority group of conquered exiles in the Persian empire and therefore viewed with contempt and suspicion. According to history, King Xerxes or Ahasuerus, was especially “sensitive to religion as a basis for rebellion and was known to have destroyed many temples in an effort to curb nationalism.”

**In verse 13, how did Mordecai’s general warning against a false sense of security prove true for other non-Jews in the story?**
Leader Note: Esther was surely hyper aware of the fact that she was now queen because Vashti had upset the king and his advisors previously. If a non-Jewish queen hadn’t been spared, why should she expect any different? This false sense of security and privilege was key to Haman’s demise in the end.

What excuses to remain quiet or inactive might a person make in a position of status?

Leader Note: Help group members identify with Esther’s dilemma as one that has a different context and consequence, but the same human thoughts and emotions. People justify doing the wrong thing or not doing the right thing with excuses like...

- My position is more important than my personal feelings.
- If I stay quiet now, I might have more influence later.
- Think of all the good I could do in this position.
- I should just be grateful that God took care of me.
- If I risk my own situation, what good is that for anyone?
- After all that I’ve been through, I deserve this.
- I just can’t handle any more drama right now.
- Don’t rock the boat and maybe everything will just settle down on its own.
- They don’t understand all the things I have to do.
- What if I make things worse?

What does verse 14 reveal about Mordecai’s view of God’s sovereignty and providence?

Leader Note: Mordecai is confident that “relief and deliverance will come” either through Esther or “another place.” Whether or not God is in control and able to save His people is not in question. The question is whether or not Esther will be part of God’s work. Though He can miraculously intervene in any way He chooses, God most often works through people who choose to act in faith, hope, and love.
Though similar and sometimes used interchangeably, one way to think about the theological concepts of sovereignty and providence is authority and activity, respectively. You might say it like this:

- God is God. (Sovereignty) He is the all-powerful King over all of His creation.
- God is good. (Providence) He is always faithful, trustworthy, and just.

When have you made a major decision and wondered about God’s will? What emotions did you experience? How and what did you ultimately decide to do?

Leader Note: Most of the time we experience God’s activity like Esther and Mordecai—no voice from heaven or miraculous sign tells us what to do. We have to apply wisdom and discern the best course of action.

The book of Esther is a constant exchange of advice and action. To whose advice do you listen? How do you determine whose counsel is trustworthy?

Leader Note: For just a few examples of this major theme driving the plot, consider asking people to quickly read the following verses:

- The king (1:13, 1:21, 2:4, 8:7-8)
- Esther (2:10, 2:15, 5:3, 9:32)
- Haman (3:11, 3:15, 5:14, 6:6, 6:10)
- Mordecai (2:22, 4:7, 4:17, 9:23)

Think back to the stories we’ve shared and things we’ve prayed about the past couple of weeks. Have you received any counsel or clarity worthy of taking action?

If so, what counsel or clarity have you received? What do you need to do?
If not, whose advice should you seek? How might you pray more specifically for clarity on your next step?

What stories from your past give you courage to step out in faith or to take a stand for Christ in your current or future circumstances?

Where might God have positioned you for such a time as this? What positive change can you bring to your circles of influence?

Specifically as a Christian, how can you share the truth and show the love of Jesus in your circles of influence?

Leader Note: Our next series after the holiday will be 1 Peter and living as exiles with hope in hopeless times, so don’t spend much time on the topic of “exile” today. You won’t want to miss this series. We have some creative and inspiring things planned!

Sometimes we are more like Mordecai than Esther. Whom can you encourage? What do they need to hear?

What could happen if you and someone you know had the courage to simply have that hard conversation or set the example in word and deed to follow Jesus and fearlessly change the world?

• In your family?
• In your friendships and social circles?
• In our church?
• In our community?

Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:
• Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
• New prayer requests
• Prayer
• Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series Spotify Playlist.