

How Esther's Life Can Help You Defeat the Giant of Self

D.L. Moody, the famous evangelist from Chicago, once quipped, "I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any other man I have ever met!"

Through all of the struggles we have in life, perhaps our biggest struggle is the one with ourselves; that is, with our fallen human nature. The New Testament calls it "the flesh"—who we are by nature and by birth, and specifically who we resort to being when left to our own devices. Over and over again in Scripture, we see this internal struggle played out in the lives of biblical heroes and heroines, villains and villainesses.

One of those heroines is Esther, an orphaned Jewish girl who was kidnapped from her cousin's home and made the queen of Persia. Esther fought this battle with herself and won—and changed the course of world history.

Most articles today want to tell you to be self-sufficient, self-confident or your best self. But how about overcoming yourself? By examining three pivotal scenes in Esther's story, we can learn how to overcome the tyranny of self in our lives.

A National Tragedy

While we don't know all the biographical details of Esther's life, we do know that she was a Jew raised by her cousin Mordecai, whose great-grandfather was taken from Jerusalem as part of the Babylonian captivity. When Esther was young, her parents passed away and she was entrusted to Mordecai's care.

Esther's life was not dreamy, and soon it became a nightmare.

When King Ahasuerus dethroned his wife, Queen Vashti, he

ordered his men to bring him beautiful virgins from within the kingdom so that he might find a new queen. This involved young women being removed from their homes, taken into the palace for beauty treatments for a year, forced to sleep with the king and then forced to remain as prisoners of the palace if the king rejected them.

King Ahasuerus eventually crowned Esther queen. But evil forces were at work as Haman, the king's right-hand man, plotted to annihilate all Jews in the capital of Susa because of his hatred for Mordecai, who would not bow to him. When the king officially sanctioned the genocide against the Jews, Mordecai and his fellow Jews were "thrown into confusion," and they began "fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes" (Esth. 3:15; 4:3).

While chaos reigned outside the palace, Queen Esther, who had kept her religious and cultural identity a secret, had no idea what was coming. Her life inside the palace was relatively safe, and if she played her cards right, she could be guaranteed a pampered existence in her royal cocoon. But then everything changed, and soon she would have to look in the mirror and decide something about herself.

A Divine Opportunity

A time of intense anxiety followed the terrifying announcement. When Queen Esther heard of Mordecai's distress, she was disturbed and wanted to know what was happening.

She was about to receive yet another shock.

Through a eunuch named Hathak, Mordecai commanded Esther to go before King Ahasuerus and "go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people" (Esth. 4:8).

The price of appearing before the king unsummoned, however, was death.

When Esther intimated her misgivings to Mordecai, he issued her a grave challenge: "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esth. 4:13-14).

As Mordecai reminded Esther, her position would not guarantee her protection, her silence would not prevent their deliverance and her prominence was for a purpose.

Esther had a tough decision to make. Would she risk her life to save her people? Or would she opt to protect herself and watch deliverance arise from another place?

So, she decided to fast for three days and nights and asked Mordecai and her fellow Jews to fast with her. Her battle with the tyranny of self began, and the fate of the Jewish people depended on the outcome.

A Determined Bravery

She risked it all by going to the king against the law.

Esther's environment pampered her and told her to focus all her attention on her skin, looks, beauty and self. Self-beautification, self-preservation and self-promotion were the cardinal values of her pagan culture. So why take a risk?

But then, in a moment of time, she made a life-altering decision to become selfless! Esther conquered the giant of self and suddenly became one of the most self-sacrificing and self-denying women of all time.

If Haman had had his way, the Persian empire would have slaughtered 15 million Jews. By putting her life on the line, Esther became their rescuer.

Jesus said the kingdom of God does not come by outward observation. In His providence, God takes the circumstances of our lives and weaves them together for His ultimate purpose—this is the beauty of Esther's story. God doesn't need any of us. But because He loves us, He invites us to join Him in His redemptive work in the world. And you and I have a choice: we can accept or reject God's call on our lives.

It's been said that there are two significant days in your life: the day you were born and the day you discovered what you were born for. And so, if you wonder why you are in the position you're in, try to discern what your purpose might be because you could be approaching a critical moment where God is going to call on you to make decisions that will benefit a lot of people.

A person wrapped up in himself (or herself) makes a very small package. But a life that pushes away self-interests becomes a life-giving fountain. Invest your life in something that will outlive you and refresh others.

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