QUEEN ESTHER

"And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:14"



"TIME" - Fast 2023

Schedule

Date	Day#	Topic	Verses				
	Week 1						
1/15	1	Absorb the Word	Chapters 1-5				
1/16	2	Absorb the Word	Chapters 6-10				
1/17	3	God knows you by name	1:10-14				
1/18	4	What you do affects others	1:15-18				
1/19	5	Preparing to go before the King	2:1-4; 5:1-2				
1/20	6	Planning your time with God	2:12-13				
1/21	7	Advice – good and bad	2:15; 5:14				
	Week 2						
1/22	8	Belief dictates action	3:1-4				
1/23	9	The world's reaction to God	3:5-9; 5:9-11				
1/24	10	The enemy's plan for destruction	3:12-15				
1/25	11	Fasting – desperate before God	4:1-9				
1/26	12	Such a Time – Why not you? – Why not now?	4:10-14				
1/27	13	Doing what is right	4:15-17; 7:3; 9:13-15				
1/28	14	5:4-8; 2:17-18; 8:3-6					
		Week 3					
1/29	15	Positioning yourself before God	5:1-2				
1/30	16	The Word	6:1-2				
1/31	17	Deceitful hearts	6:5-11; 7:9-10				
2/1	18	Light exposes darkness	7:5-6				
2/3	19	Defending yourself – knowing how to fight	8:11-14; 9:1-10, 16-17				
2/4	20	Remember – Celebrate – Pass it on	9:20-28				
2/5	21	Speak Peace	10:1-3				
2/6		Miracle Sunday – Celebration Sunday					

Week 1

1/15	1	Absorb the Word	Chapters 1-5
•			

Take time to carefully read through the first 5 chapters of Esther. Tomorrow you will read the rest of the book. (If you want to absorb a little more read the entire 10 chapters both days.) Today and tomorrow are about getting familiar with the whole story before we dive into the practical learning moments on this journey of prayer and fasting.

At the end of each day's lesson, I am asking that you take a few moments to reflect and make a plan based on each day's teaching. For today, as we just get started, take some time and write down some goals for the next 21 days. Remember, set goals which will stretch you physically and spiritually. How you start this time of deep spiritual formation will dictate what you come out of this fast learning and how you personally will benefit for walking through this with your church family. In your writing, it would also be good for you to take notes on your personal observations for each day.

Please remember that you are not walking this pathway alone, there are others praying for you and your spiritual growth every day.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

1/16 2 Absorb the	ord Chapters 6-10	
-------------------	-------------------	--

Well, you survived the first day! During the next 2-3 days you will find yourself settling into your new routine. Let me challenge you to strengthen the goals you have made for yourself and solidify your plan for the remaining days ahead.

Today as you read the last half of the book of Esther, try to get very comfortable with the entire story. As you read, please take time to start looking for lessons on your own and allow the Holy Spirit to begin guiding you to the truths that will change your life. Take a few moments to write down some of the things you learn today. And maybe even some of the ways that you can apply what you have learned to your life.

This is also a great time for you to do some spiritual evaluation and spiritual cleansing. Ask Holy Spirit to look deep inside your life and point out to you any of your habits or actions that will hinder you from getting closer to God during this time of fasting. This is where it gets really serious. This is where you must decide how much you are going to lean into the process of prayer and fasting and how real you are going to be with His Spirit as He speaks to you. Allow God to do His work inside of you, listen closely to Him as he speaks, and then have courage to do what He says.

Make sure to take notes on anything God speaks to you for two reasons: so that you might remember what he says and that it will be recorded so you have this as a reference to look back on in the days to come.

NI	0+00	
IV		١

<u>-</u>	·	·	·	·
<u>-</u>	·	·	·	

From today's reading in the book of Esther I want to point out two versus. Take note especially a verse #10 and verse #14. Both of those verses have a list of names. The first list in verse #10 is the naming of seven of the servants that served the king. This is the only place that you will see their names appear in scriptures. In verse #14 you will see listed the names of seven of the princes of Persia and Media. These seven had special permissions to come into the King's presence.

The point of these verses is not necessarily so that you can acquaint yourself with these 14 individuals. The lesson that I draw from these verses is very simply, no matter what your status in life God knows your name. It should bring much comfort to you to know that the creator of the entire universe knows you personally.

As it has to do with this time of prayer and fasting, you can be assured that the almighty God not only knows your name but knows exactly what you are going through, and he knows exactly what you need today. As you take time to have your conversation with God be mindful that you are not praying to a God who cannot hear you, nor are you praying to a God who doesn't know anything about you. The reality is, you are praying to a God who knows every single intimate detail about your life; how you think, what you need, and even what you think you need. The reality in this then, is that God truly knows and cares about you intensely.

So today as you speak with Him do not only picture him as the great Elohim, but also as your ABBA father. When you come to Him in prayer today let your prayers be conversational and relaxed. Let your prayers be honest and open. Also remember to take some time to simply worship at the feet of the great Almighty.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

So, today's topic comes from chapter one verses 15 through 18. Allow me to point out the things that really caught my attention. Verse 15 - what should we do with Queen Vashti because she did not obey the command of the king. This day's devotion starts with the queen not obeying the rules that the king has set forth. But it quickly escalates from something that is personal, to something that spreads. In verse 16 we read Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also the princes, and all the people. Then in verse 17 it says the queen's behavior will become known to all women and cause them to despise their husbands. At the end of verse 18 it says, "thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath."

In this portion of the story, we see that one person's behavior very quickly spreads and is going to have an effect on many. That can happen in our lives also. The decisions that you make today will have an impact on the people around you for the good or for the bad. Take a few moments to think about your decisions, actions, attitudes, and the words that you have spoken over the last few days. How has that influenced the people around you?

The point for today is for us to pay attention of how we are following after Christ. How we "do" Christianity will affect those around us. Although we need to look to our past and evaluate how we are doing, the point of this day's devotion is to cause us to look forward to seeing how we can positively influence those around us. Realize that what you do, your actions, and your attitudes can be used in a positive and spiritual manner to influence those around you toward Christ. Take these moments and make a few notes in the space below of your action plan for how your behaviors can shed a positive light for others to see your relationship with your King.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

110103			
	·		·

Notos

In our story today we look at the preparations that eventually are going to lead to Esther becoming the queen instead of Vashti. In the first four verses of chapter 2 you see the details of the process of selecting a new queen. I start today at the end of verse number 3 where the Word says let beauty preparations be given to them then the young woman who pleases the king will become the new queen. This caught my attention in reference to our time of prayer and fasting. Part of fasting is all about preparing our heart to come before God. The ladies in our story were preparing themselves in a very specific manner hoping their appearance would be pleasing to the king. But in fasting we, in a very specific manner, are preparing our hearts and our minds to go into the presence of the Almighty.

The next portion of your reading for today comes from the first two verses in chapter 5. A portion of verse #1 says that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the outer court of the King's palace across from the King's house. I think it's very interesting that not only had Esther prepared herself physically but she has also positioned herself so that she might be recognized by the king. The details in verse number one are very specific, she stood in a place where she knew the king would see her in hope that he would call her in for a meeting with him. In fasting when it is coupled with prayer and also with a spiritual cleansing, we position ourself before the very throne of God. However, we do not do this so that we might be given honor. Esther was doing this so she might become queen. Instead, we go through the process of cleansing our hearts and minds so that we might go before God to hear Him more clearly and become closer to Him.

Today, in response to this reading I encourage you to take time for spiritual cleansing and paying very specific attention to the way you approach God. This also applies to how we come to a worship gathering, to come and sing, and learn of God. I encourage you to begin preparing yourself now for the next time we come together as a church and worship the almighty God. Take a moment and jot down a few practical steps that you can take to make sure that you are ready to step into the presence of God whether you are at your home all by yourself or stepping into a gathering of other believers.

Notes		

Today's reading, although it is very short, is a follow up to yesterday's reading. In chapter #2, these two verses, 12 and 13, let us see the intensity and the plan that these young ladies had to follow before they were allowed to step in the presence of the king. A quick look at verse #12 shows us a portion of their plan. 12 months of preparation went into this whole process. Six months they were to soak themselves with oil of murr and six months with perfumes, and what the text calls "preparation" for the things which make women beautiful. Verse 13 starts by saying that each one of the young women who did this were then allowed to step before the king.

I want to be perfectly clear about this lesson. We do not have to come before God wearing certain clothes or having our hair arranged in a certain manner, but the Bible does give us instructions on how to approach God. Numerous scriptures tell us things like approach God with humility, approach God with a pure heart, approach God with clean hands. These are just examples that tell me that the correct way to come into the presence of our God is with a plan and to not just haphazardly approach His throne.

Today I am asking that you first examine the manner in which you approach God on a daily basis. Are you approaching God with humility? Are you approaching God having had your sins cleansed? Are you approaching God with a pure heart and pure motive? The answer to those questions will lead you to the second thing I am asking you today, to make a plan for your personal time that you spend with God.

You may want to take the Lord's prayer as an outline for coming before Him. Starting with worship, including Thanksgiving, and then lay your petitions before Him, all before you once again finish your time with God by worshipping Him. Whatever your plan is, whatever it looks like, just be sure that it is fitting for whom you were talking to. Take a few moments and write down some ideas for a whole new plan or for improving the plan that you have now, but do not let this day pass by without making sure you have a good plan to go before God.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

7

Congratulations! You have made it to day 7 out of the 21 days of fasting and prayer. I trust all is going well for you and that you are making progress in your spiritual journey. You have also most likely faced some of your fears, some of your doubts, and maybe even some discouragement brought by our enemy. But you have overcome and pressed on taking the next few steps on your spiritual journey. I want to take a moment and celebrate your accomplishment to this point. I would also take this time to encourage you to dig in a little deeper and press in a little more diligently than you already have. There is still much to be learned and much to be accomplished in the 14 days that follow.

We turn now to the lesson for today which once again follows closely after yesterday's lesson. In chapter #2 verse 15 it is now Esther's turn to go in before the king. I find something that she does very fascinating. It says that she requested only the jewelry but what was advised to her from the King's servant who is in charge of all of these women. Why would she do that? Don't most of us have an idea of what is pleasing to the king? The answer is the core of this lesson today and that is getting advice both good and bad. The servant that is closest to the king knows best what the king likes. So, it only stands to reason that Esther would go to him for advice in what would be pleasing to the king. In this case she took good advice and in the end of first 15 it was effective because she obtained favor in the sight of everyone who saw her.

Later in this story we find a piece of advice that is not so good. In chapter 5 in verse 14 Hayman is very upset about Mordecai. His wife and all his friends give him, what is going to be, the worst possible piece of advice, in a moment when he is very upset. To quote chapter 5 verse 14 they simply advise him to, "let a gallows be made." Terrible advice!

The lesson for us today is not about making an instrument of punishment or what jewelry you need to wear, but it is about listening to the right people, and seeking advice from the right people when you need it. It seems that in our world bad advice is everywhere. I have spoken with people who get their theology from Facebook or other social media, a very terrible idea. So, my thought for today is to stop and evaluate who you personally are listening to and also evaluate the advice that you are giving to others.

There are examples of this several times throughout scripture. A great example of bad advice can be found in the story of Job. His wives' advice is to "curse God and die." Not very good advice.

My encouragement for you today is simply, careful who you are listening to and be careful of what you say to others.

Notes			

Week 2

1/22	8	Belief dictates action	3:1-4
------	---	------------------------	-------

Welcome to week #2.

Our lesson today begins in the first four verses of chapter 3. This is a very simple lesson, a very simple example, of our beliefs being put into action. In this passage Mordecai refused to worship Haman. The very end of verse four gives us the simple explanation, it says "he was a Jew." his belief system restricted his worship only to Jehovah.

So today our lesson is short and very plain. It comes in the form of a question. Are you truly following what you say you believe? If you say you are a Christian, then how is your belief affecting the way you speak to others? How is it affecting the way you treat each individual that you cross paths with every day? How does it change the way you view your finances? How does it change your behavior when no one else is looking? What does your belief have to do with your daily disciplines? The answer to these questions and many others like them is our simple evaluation point for today.

As we begin week #2 take some time to take a careful look add whether your actions and attitudes are truly reflective of your beliefs. My expectation for you is not that you live perfectly, but that you live your life absolutely oriented toward God. We all make mistakes and stumble along the path that leads to God but the way we are oriented determines whether we will fall toward Him or away from Him. Ask Holy Spirit to help you evaluate yourself and then spend some quiet time listening for Him response. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit will also give you the courage to make the changes that are necessary that will lead you closer to God.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

Today's lesson comes as a reminder that the standard of Christianity is not accepted in our fallen world. There are many that are around us that do not like what we stand for. And just like we will find in the story today many can become openly hostile toward God and anyone who follows Him.

Today we go to chapter number three beginning in verse #5 when Haman finds out that Mordecai is a Jew, he is so mad. As a matter of fact, verse five says that he was filled with wrath and verse 6 tells us that he then sought to destroy all of the Jews who were in the whole Kingdom. Later in chapter 5 Hayman believes that he is going to be highly rewarded by the king but then he sees Mordecai who does not bow down before him and once again according to the Word he is filled with indignation.

The carnal world that we live in is self-serving, self-indulgent, narcissistic, self-promoting, etcetera, you get the idea. This should come as no surprise. The surprising part is that just like Hayman the godless world wants to totally destroy Christianity.

So, what does all of this mean to us today? It means that more than ever before we must remain stable in our faith, consistent in our witness, and diligent to watch for danger. We should always rest in the safety of God but also be on the lookout for satan's snares. Our Christian life needs to be one of consistency which is lived before others as an example of the peace that comes from serving God. The stability that we find in our faith is desperately missing in the world around us. As we become believers who are more and more stable all the time, the world around us will take notice that there is something different about us. Of course, this all comes from our personal relationship with God. So today, let me encourage you to take steps that will solidify your faith and belief system. Take steps today that will make your relationship with God more solid than ever before. Ask Holy Spirit to guide you in your search and then take a few moments to write down the results of your conversation with God and his Holy Spirit today.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

	 	_	

Again, today our lesson comes in the way of a warning of sorts. We find in chapter #3 versus 12 through 15 that Haman has managed to get the king to issue a decree which will destroy, kill, and annihilate all of the Jews. As a side note the end of verse #15 tells us that many in the city were perplexed or they simply didn't understand what this was all about.

The warning here is for every believer to truly understand the enemy. Our enemy makes promise this is that all sound good and will at times be profitable, at least for a while. The Bible tells us that the pleasure of sin will last for a while. But every time that pleasure comes to an end. We also are told that the enemy comes for only three purposes to steal, to kill, and to destroy.

I once heard a preacher preach an entire sermon about "poor satan," he seems to get blamed for everything. This minister went on to almost make it sound like he felt sorry for how Christians view satan. I could not believe what I was hearing. Today I boldly say that there is a real enemy, his name as we know him is Satan or Lucifer, and he really does wander about the world, he and his unholy angels, their sole intent is to destroy everything. He gets no sympathy from me, but we must be diligent and be aware that he is not just a passive bad guy, but he is a powerful adversary whose sole intent is the destruction of individuals and families and even the Church of Jesus Christ.

The encouragement for you today is that the God that you serve, who lives down inside of you, is greater than any of his schemes and devices. We as followers of the most high God do not have to dip our banner and acknowledge the enemy's power over us at all. We do however have to stand up and fight for our faith and our relationship with God. No doubt just halfway through our time of fasting and prayer you have been challenged and you have been tempted to slack off and maybe even quit in this quest to get closer to God and to hear His voice plainly. You may have even come up against attacks, which are challenges to your faith, and our challenges to your determination. I trust that you have met these challenges and have overcome. May I remind you that the way that believers overcome the attack of the enemy is by putting on the full armor of God and rely on the shed blood of Jesus Christ to sustain us, to keep us, to protect us, and be our standard of hope. The word of God has been given to you as an offensive weapon to defeat every single attack that comes against you. This is why it is so vitally important that you invest yourself in God's word.

Take a few moments today to solidify your plan of fighting back when you feel that you are under spiritual attack.

Notes			

On day #11, which is right at halfway through our time of fasting and prayer, we finally run across the topic of fasting. In chapter #4 in the very first verse, we find out that Mordecai finally learned about the decree that Haman had sent out from the king. The result of this information caused him to tear his clothes, put on sackcloth, poor ashes over his head, and go out into the city crying with a loud voice and a bitter cry. We find in verse #3 that everywhere this decree from the king went that there was great morning among all the Jews. But it was also accompanied by fasting, weeping, and wailing. This was going on in all 127 of the provinces that were under king Ahasuerus. Verse #4 tells us that queen Esther was so distressed that she sent fresh garments to Mordecai to take away the sackcloth covered with ashes, but he would not even accept them. The passage for today ends with Mordecai sending to Esther a copy of the written decree and the message asking her to go before the king and plead for the Jews.

Sometimes fasting is motivated by desperation or some life impacting event. The fast that I have proclaimed for the church is not out of the desperate event like the one we read about in the book of Esther, but we go before the Lord wanting desperately to hear from Him, draw closer to Him, and to clearly hear His voice. The fact that we have not had some monumental event in our lives does not diminish the reality that we come before God desperately seeking His face. Let me encourage you today to understand how desperately we need to have an active relationship with God. He alone is our source of knowledge strength and wisdom. He alone is the answer 4 the desperate spiritual condition of our city state and nation. I have proclaimed this fast because it is time for God's people to cry out earnestly to Him both for each individual and for the fires of revival to once again sweep across our land.

Take a few moments today to look at the desperate spiritual condition of the world around you and let that motivate you to cry out desperately <u>before</u> Him and <u>for</u> Him today. In the space below record some of your feelings, your emotions, and a portion of your conversation with God from today.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

1/26

From the reading today we get a hint of the law that was present during the time of the writing of this story. Even though Esther was the queen she still did not have permission to approach the king anytime she wanted. Legally speaking, the best she could do was stand at the back of the throne room and wait for the king to extend his scepter toward her. If the king did this, then she would have the right to approach the king and present her request. If the king did not extend his scepter to her then there was a real chance that she would be taken out and killed.

Yesterday we read that Mordecai had asked Esther if she would go present herself to the king on behalf of the Jews. In the conversation between Esther and Mordecai he reminded her that because she is a Jew that she should not presume that she would be able to escape the king's decree. Verse 14 is really the motivation for this lesson today. Two things stood out to me as I was reading this passage.

The first is that if Esther will not respond, even though her life is in danger, Mordechai tells her that deliverance will come from another place. the second statement that stands out to me from this passage, again from verse #14, is a question from Mordecai to queen Esther in which he says, "who knows whether you have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?"

So today I present you with the same type of questions. We do not always know exactly what God is up to in our world and in particular in our own life. But we can be assured of this, that God has a plan for each one of us that he intends to fulfill through us. our enemy would have us believe that we are not valuable to God and that we are not qualified to do His work. But I would contend that the reality is, Why not you? The Bible tells us the ones that God calls He will also equip for the task at hand. We read in another place that King David understood that he was called by God to minister to the people around him during his generation. We cannot go outside of our lifetime slot to minister to others. God has called each one of us to minister during the time that He has set us here on the earth. When our time is over we pass the torch of ministry on to the generations that are following us. But for right now, for your time, God wants to use you!

So take a few moments today and write down some of the things that you believe God would have you do in your time slot and for the people that are around you. Ask Holy Spirit to guide you to understand your particular purpose and also the purpose that you can fulfill within our church family.

notes				
	•	•	•	•

Our passages today are really at the heart of why God has chosen the story of Esther for us to glean lessons from during this time of prayer and fasting. The verses you read today are some of my favorites in the entire book. To me it shows the courage of those who dare to follow after God. Let's take a look at what truth we can find in these passages today.

Starting in chapter 4 after the conversation that Esther has with Mordecai, we find the most quotable words in this entire book. Queen Esther says to her uncle Mordecai that she will go into the king even though it is against the law, and she says this quote, "if I perish, I perish!" I have also put together a couple of other passages from the book for us to consider with this topic of doing what is right. In chapter #7 in verse #3 Esther says to the king if she has found favor and if she has pleased him then may she give her petition to the king. Then once again in Chapter 9 beginning at verse 13 she again she says if she pleases the king then would he grant a decree from the king on behalf of her people the end result of that in verse #10 was that yes, the sons of Haman were hung on the gallows.

So, what does this speak to us for today? The answer is very short and very simple, that no matter what the circumstances are, <u>do what is right</u>. Sometimes it is easy for us to do the right thing, especially when we know there is a reward for doing what is right. But at other times, maybe when no one is seeing us, it is more difficult for us to always do the right thing. But the most extreme of these circumstances occurs when, if we do what we believe is the right thing to do, then we may suffer some adverse consequence of our actions. The lesson that we should take away from this portion of scripture is that, <u>the right thing to do is always the right thing to do</u>, no matter what the surroundings look like. Whether we are being watched and applauded or whether we, like Shadrack Meshach and Abednego, are staring at the face of a fiery furnace, <u>it is always the right time to do the right thing</u>.

Today may serve for you not just a time of getting closer to God but also it may serve as a time for you to evaluate is going on in your life currently to see if there are some actions that you have taken or that you need to take which should be corrected so that you are doing the right thing. Let me encourage you to make a list of the things in your life that you may need to do despite what the circumstances are surrounding those things.

Notes			

Several times in this story we find Esther saying the phrase, "if it pleases the king." The result that Esther is looking for every time she says this is an audience with the king. It happened back in chapter #2 well in verse 17 it says of Esther that she obtained grace and favor in the King's sight more than all the other women and when she obtained that favor the end result was the king put a crown upon her head and made her to be the queen of his empire. After Hayman had been found out for his evil plot to kill the Jews we find Esther once again uttering this phrase to the king, "if it pleases the king." This time what she is asking if she has found favor before him that this decree, that Haman had made under authority of the king, would be revoked, and the Jewish people saved. There is one word that keeps coming up in each one of these instances and that is the word "favor."

I believe one of the lessons that we can learn from this is a principle or concept that comes from God, <u>pleasing him and finding favor</u>. When we put ourselves in a position of walking in obedience and doing as we are commanded, we also put ourselves in a position to receive favor or blessings from God. It reminds me in the book of Malachi where it is speaking of giving to the Lord. We are instructed to test Him by our generosity of giving and the end result will be that He will bless us with blessings that we cannot contain. The opposite of that is if we are not walking with God, if we are not walking in obedience to His commands, then we should have no expectation of gaining His favor or His blessings. So the question then seems to be very simple, <u>are we walking in obedience to God?</u> the answer then shows us our reasonable expectation from God. There are times when we do not believe that we deserve God's favor, but our reality comes from His Word not from our ideas. Our God is a loving caring God that is truly set on blessing His children. The enemy lies to us and tells us that God will not bless us because we do not deserve it. But the truth is found in grace. Even though we don't deserve His blessings yet we know that we can receive them because He himself has empowered us to walk in obedience to Him.

Let me encourage you today to make sure you are aligned with the purposes that God has given to you, and make sure that you are aligned with His will and walking in obedience, and then receive what God has for you today. As you receive from God make a note of what he says and what he has done especially in the last 14 days.

Notes			

Week 3

1/29	15	Positioning yourself before God	5:1-2
_,		r controlling your serior c cou	J

Well, look here. Look what you have done. You have reached week #3 of three weeks of fasting and prayer. Perhaps you're one that has never entered on this long of a prayer and fasting journey before. If that is you, then congratulations, you have achieved more than you ever have in the past. I also trust that God has met you in a way that you have never met with him before. But maybe this is not your first prayer and fasting rodeo. If that is the case, then you know that a scheduled intense time with God always nets you benefits.

I remember several years ago when at week #3 someone came to me and said this has been the most difficult time of fasting that they had ever done. But a couple of weeks after that that same person came back to me and said that this was the most productive time of prayer and fasting that they had ever participated in. No matter whether this is new to you or a regular apart of your spiritual disciplines, we all realize that there have been difficult moments but also moments of great accomplishment.

As we enter these last few days of this corporate time of prayer and fasting, I take you back again to the first two verses in chapter #5 where Esther is positioning herself in a place where she can be seen by the king. These last few days can really be a, make it or break it moment in your life. For some it is easy in these last few days to take the foot off the accelerator and kind of coast into the finish. But let me encourage you instead of lifting the foot off the gas pedal, to press that pedal all the way to the floor and lean hard into these last few days. Lean in strong so that you might finish what God has started in your life in these three weeks.

Take special attention and don't get relaxed or sloppy in your approach to God in the days that come. Instead, go back and review your plan for coming before the King, make any adjustments that you need to, and position yourself where you can both be heard and that you can hear what God is speaking to you. I truly believe that these last few days can be the most monumental days of this year so far. Take a few moments, adjust your plan as needed, write down the details, but also take a few moments to make a record of what you have accomplished so far.

notes				

1/30 16 The Word 6:1-2	1/30	16	The Word	6:1-2
------------------------------	------	----	----------	-------

Here on day 16, we find the first two verses of chapter 6 to be very interesting. It seems like in the story that the king, because of all these events that had taken place, was having trouble sleeping. So, he thought that having the law or the records read to him that would help him to relax and go to sleep. So, he called for the Book of Records or the book of the chronicles to be brought to him and for someone to read those stories to him. Verse #2 opens up with these words, "it was found written." You have read what comes after this, so I will not recount that portion of the story for you.

My focus today is simply on the Word. Of course, I am not speaking of the events or Chronicles of a king and his Kingdom, but I am speaking to you today of the words of God Himself. We started on the first two days focusing in just upon the story of Esther and reading the Word over and over. There have been some that in the 21 days of fasting who have read the entire Bible, the entire record of God from Genesis to Revelation. If you are one of those, then congratulations you will be better because of that. But whether you have read the entire Bible or just portions of it let me remind you that the Word of God is quick, it is powerful, it is sharp, and most of all it is alive. The Word of God is not a static document that was written hundreds or thousands of years ago that has become out of date and antiquated. The word of God is alive and is active for your use today. When you read the Word it opens up to you the heart of God. When you read the Word and the stories of the individuals who have pursued after God or ran away from God. What you find is a picture of yourself. You also find in those stories about individuals the details of how God interacts with mankind. There are those who would say that once God created and established humans on the planet that He has set back on His throne and just watches it happen with no interaction with mankind. That has to be one of the most ridiculous theories that I have ever heard. Because the word of God is given to us in such a manner, and it itself is of such character, it transcends all generations, all time slots, and all of the division in between the throne of God and mankind itself.

Let me encourage you to make a plan for consuming the word of God. Maybe you want to go find a read through the Bible in a year type program. Perhaps you would rather start at the book of Genesis and read straight through to the Book of Revelation. Whatever your technique is, just make a plan to make it happen. The Word of God is without argument the most important information that you will ever put into your memory that has ever been written in the history of mankind. Treat it as the most precious treasure that you could ever imagine.

Notes			

1/31	17	Deceitful hearts	6:5-11; 7:9-10
------	----	------------------	----------------

The passage for today leads us to the place where Hayman is going to be deceived by his own thoughts. In verse #6 we find that the scripture says Hayman, "thought in his heart." What follows is that he is going to be the one that is honored by the king. And so, when he answers the king on what should be done to a man who is honored by the king, he lets his imagination go crazy and paints a picture of being led through the streets on one of the King's own horses and being worshipped and celebrated by everyone in the streets. But in verse 10 of the story, it takes a terrible turn, at least for Hayman. This man that Hayman despises, winds up being the very same man that is to be honored by the king. So, Heyman himself has to lead Mordechai around through the city and listen to him being honored. The end of this portion of the story is found in verses 9 and 10 of Chapter 7, where at the King's own words and because of what he has done, Haman is hung on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

Our lesson today is one of the deceitfulness of the human heart. It almost every Hallmark movie ever, at some point in the story, one of the lead characters is encouraged to simply "follow their heart." But the word of God tells us that our human hearts are desperately wicked and that our hearts should not be trusted. So, if our hearts cannot be trusted then who shall we turn to? I take you back to yesterday where we spoke about the Word of God. If our hearts cannot be trusted, then our trust should be placed upon the very words of the creator of the universe and the maker of mankind. The Bible also tells us that we as humans are, "fearfully and wonderfully made." Any study of any of the sciences having to do with human beings shows that we are intricate and complicated creatures that even defy understanding by some of the greatest of our scientists and doctors. But the Bible also tells us that God knows every single detail about us. He knows our thoughts before we think them. He knows our prayers before we even ask. He even knows how many hairs we have left on our head. You see, when our human emotions will not allow us to make a solid decision for so many reasons, the God who created us has the answer for us.

For your writing exercise this day I encourage you to find at least 5 concepts in the Word of God that speak life into your existence today. Those may be verses of encouragement, or they may be verses of correction for you. Ask Holy Spirit to guide you two verses that you can use to walk you through your spiritual journey both while we are fasting and beyond.

Notes			
_			

I think I may have said this before, but today's passage is one of my favorites. In chapter #7, just two short verses, five and six, is where we find the remedy for the terrible circumstances that queen Esther and the Jewish people find themselves in. We finally come to the moment where wicked Haman is exposed for all that he has done. It is not by coincidence that a young Jewish woman named Esther has been found the most beautiful and favored woman in the entire Kingdom. God had placed her there for a very special mission. When the king finds out that his beautiful queen is also set to be destroyed by the evil plotting of someone in his Kingdom, he is obviously upset. In verse #5, the king asks, "who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing." And here is my favorite verse, verse #6. Queen Esther finally utters the phrase who will save her people by simply saying, in answer to the King's question, "the adversarial enemy is this wicked Haman." I have to think that she was also pointing right straight at the man who is about to destroy the kings new prize queen. There is also this addendum at the end of verse #6 that explains to us that Haman was, "terrified before," look at this, "both the king and queen."

As much as I love speaking about this portion of the story, I have to make a lesson for us today. So, that lesson would have to be, "light always exposes the darkness." Many times, it seems like the world is winning and that Satan is crushing down upon us. But the Bible tells us that not only is Jesus the light that has come into the world, but that we are the light that goes out into the world, and we specifically are to be reflecting the light of God into a World of Darkness. John said that when the Light came into our world, in other words when Jesus came and was revealed as the Messiah, that the darkness could not comprehend it. And that word comprehend really means the darkness could not overtake or overwhelm the Light. In simple terms the Light always wins. Let me say this again, let me remind you one more time, you are children of Light.

Take a few moments and write down ways that you can go about spreading the light in your circle of influence. Each one of us has a pathway that we take through life that involves us rubbing shoulders with people who need Jesus Christ. The question for us to answer, and the steps for us to take, and the plan for us to make is, "How are you going to go about spreading the light in the midst of darkness." Wright down some of the items that Holy Spirit speaks to your heart today as you are talking with God.

Notes			

19

Welcome to day number 19! Our lesson for today it's just one of the many lessons that could be learned about defending yourself or, as I put in the title for today, "Knowing how to fight." Today I take you to three separate places in the last few chapters of the book of Esther. In chapter #8 beginning in verse #11 the king has run upon a difficulty. By royal decree, which by law cannot be rescinded, the Jews on a certain day are to be annihilated. But at the request of queen Esther the king, now by decree, has permitted the Jews in every city, that is in all of the 127 provinces, to gather together to protect themselves. But it doesn't stop there. He goes on to allow the Jews to "destroy, kill and annihilate all that would come and assault them," and also to, "plunder their possessions."

In chapter #9 the first 10 verses are a recounting of what happens when that day came about. Verse #1 says on the day that the enemies of the Jews had, "hoped to overpower them" but the opposite occurred. The Jews actually overpowered those who hated the Jews. First two says no one could withstand them and fear fell upon all the people. That is because the Jews we're defending themselves under the power of God. In verses 16 and 17 it tells us that the Jews had rest from their enemies and they actually went ahead and made a festival or feast day to commemorate this event.

Time will not allow a complete dissertation about how a believer should defend themselves against the attack of the enemy. so let it suffice for me simply to say you need to have an attack plan in order to defend yourself against the enemy of your soul. You need to be able to defend yourself, your family, other believers, and even your nation against the attack of the enemy which we learned earlier was meant to utterly destroy. It may be too simplistic to say write down the steps that you we'll take to defend yourselves. But for today I encourage you to at least begin making a written plan that you can use, that is generated from the word of God, by which you will defend yourself from attack. Knowing that the shield of faith will quench all of the fiery darts of the enemy.

Notes			

NI____

20

Once again in chapter #9 the Jews established what will become known as the feast of Purim. That feast is a yearly celebration of the events we spoke of yesterday, but it also celebrates the rest that came after the enemy was defeated. As it says in verse 22 it also included days of feasting and joy and they sent presents and gifts to one another and to the poor. In verse #28 it records that this feast and commemoration should be kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city show that the memory of this event might not go away after generations had come and gone.

So, what does this have to do with us today? Over the last 19 days you have accomplished things, you have made spiritual progress, and you have drawn closer to the Lord than you ever thought possible. But this is not just to make you feel warm and fuzzy and show that you can pat yourself on the back at your accomplishment. Do not misunderstand, you should celebrate what you have accomplished through this time of prayer and fasting. But you should also use this the notes that you have written over these three weeks to remind you of both the struggles that you have faced and the victories that you have won during this time of fasting. But the last thing implications of this is that this should be passed along to others.

I do not expect that you will make a decree or have a plaque made that hangs on the walls of your home. I wouldn't really expect you to pile rocks in your front yard to make an altar of remembrance for these last few weeks. But I would encourage you to make some kind of plan whereby you can remember the things which have happened spiritually in your life over these last 19 days and also some type of a concise statement that you can pass on to the generations behind you. It reminds me of when Paul was writing to Timothy, a young pastor, and he mentions to Timothy the faith that is found in timothy's mother and grandmother. May we as parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, be faithful to pass our faith relationship with God onto the generations behind us. May we do this as we interact with our own family and, also as we interact with the other families in our church. May this be a regular part of our spiritual responsibilities and that is to pass on a rich heritage of godliness on to those around us.

I encourage you to take a few moments and begin making your plan in the space that is provided below this devotion so that as you go on in life those that come after you will know definitively of your relationship with the king of all kings.

notes			

2/5	21	Speak Peace	10:1-3
-----	----	-------------	--------

So, here we have arrived at day number 21, the last day of the fast, and also the last chapter of the book of Esther which is really only three verses long. My lesson for you today comes from the very last verse and actually only the last half of that last verse. These three verses are simply a short historical recounting of what happened after the story in chapter #9 ends. Verse #3 says this Mordecai the Jew was second to king Ahasuerus and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, and this is the most important part, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

On this very last day that we will be fasting together anticipating tomorrow's worship experience where we also have faith to experience miracles, let me encourage you to always be one who speaks peace to those around you. We live in a world that is filled with and is ashamedly accustomed to chaos. You cannot watch a news broadcast without devastation and destruction of some kind being paraded and praised in our world. Child of the most high God, enough is enough. It is time for the people of God to be people that speak peace rather than chaos. We are reflections of the very Prince of peace, so therefore, let us be known for speaking peace into our world.

I do not know how you feel about personal prophecy. I am not Speaking of the kind that tells people what is going to come in a life that is days or years ahead. I am Speaking of making a prophetic utterance of peace and joy in a world that does not seem to understand what that means. Our world thrives on chaos, but at the same time is starving for peace. In the Book of Revelation we even find that there is a cry for peace and the book records that there is no peace. But that does not restrain us from serving the people in our generation by being a mouthpiece of the most high God to declare peace in a world of chaos. I challenge you to take what you have learned over these last 21 days and change somebody else's life with those lessons that have changed your life. One last time I ask you to take a few moments and write down some of the things that God has done for you in the last three weeks and also make a plan for using these for the future.

May God bless you today. May you sense the guidance of His Holy Spirit. My prayer for you is that your fasting will be effective, and you will take another step closer to His presence this day!

notes			

2/6	Miracle Sunday – Celebration Sunday	
Notes		