

MAKING CHOICES... TAKING RISKS

“Do Something”

Sample Sermon

Written by Dan Carlton,
Spring Hill Baptist Church, Ruckersville, VA



Have you ever been in a meeting where the question was asked, “What are we called to do?” or “What has God called us to do?” I remember the question being asked one night in a beautiful retreat setting, as a group of church leaders met to try to rediscover what God had called them to do as a church. I recall thinking how creative the ideas were and how passionate the church leaders were. As we ended the night, I asked the group, “What is keeping you from doing these things?” Their answers trailed off . . .

Does that scenario sound familiar to you? There seems never to be a shortage of creative and God-centered ideas about what we should be doing. Is the problem not that we have trouble hearing God’s call, but that we have trouble doing God’s call? Is the greatest sin of the church today the sin of “not doing?” Let’s look at Esther’s call. It is a call to risk her throne, her title, her life and to DO something.

The book of Esther opens up with a party. During this party, the King summons the Queen to his chambers to display her beauty. She does not come. The King throws a temper tantrum and banishes the Queen. He then has the empire search to find his next queen. Many girls are brought to the palace and are treated to a year’s worth of pampering, facials and more. Esther receives the DELUXE spa package. At this point in the story we are saying “Oh, to be Esther.” Esther advances through the preliminary rounds of this beauty contest and gets to meet the King. And when that moment happens we are told, he “loved Esther more than all the other women...so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen...” (2:17).

Now Esther has a guardian, her older cousin Mordecai, who as a minor court official is also in a position to win the King’s favor. Sitting at the King’s gate one day, Mordecai hears about a plot against the King’s life. He is quick to tell Esther so she can tell the King, and the would-be assassins are tracked down and executed.

Mordecai is considerably less popular with one of the King’s chief advisors, Haman. Haman conceives a rich hatred for Mordecai because Mordecai refuses to show him what he considers proper respect. Haman is pompous as well as villainous, so he considers it beneath him to deal with Mordecai’s insolence man to man; instead, he conceives a plan to exterminate all the Jews in the royal city of Susa. He gets the King to issue a decree ordering their destruction by telling him that the Jews are people who “do not keep the King’s laws” (3:8). After making this agreement, the King and Haman “sat down to drink,” which we know is the favored activity in the Persian court – “but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion” (3:15).

All the Jews begin weeping, lamenting and fasting; like many of them, Mordecai puts on sack cloth and sits at the King’s gate. Esther is unaware of this up in the palace. She is comfortably distant from the needs of the world. But her comfort is interrupted by the news that Mordecai is running around in sack cloth. Esther is upset to hear this. She doesn’t act like the heroic queen we hope she will be. She simply sends down some clothes to Mordecai. She wants to deal with the immediate problem – my cousin is embarrassing me – but not change society! How many times is that true of us? So often in our lives and in our churches we attempt to do the “little” thing so we don’t have to deal with the “big” thing.

Key Passage: Esther 4:12-14

Mordecai refuses to change his clothes or to keep quiet. Esther then calls for Hathach, one of the court eunuchs, to find out what is going on. Hathach gets a copy of the King's decree from Mordecai, and goes to ask Esther to plead with the King for the lives of her people.

Mordecai's challenge to Esther is to let her know that lives other than hers were at stake. His gift to her is to let her know that she is not powerless. "The King may see you as an ornament and plaything," Mordecai implied, "but God has purposes for you far greater than you have imagined." This sudden awareness transformed Esther from a timid beauty queen into a real queen, a decisive, courageous strategist who was ready to risk her own life to save her people.

On this day when we are "considering our call," let's consider Esther's call for a moment. Her calling lacked so many things. It is a brief story. There is no mention that her Granddad pastored a Baptist church or that she played Lottie Moon in the missions play when she was a child. There is very little certainty about what she is doing.

Think about what happens when we answer the call today. We know we are going to show up every Sunday and teach a class or we are going to go to seminary or do missions training or sing. Esther doesn't seem to even know that she is called until the task is pushed on her. Esther didn't have any models to follow. To our knowledge, no one else in all of human history had been called to be a queen to save people from a crazy king. So often when we are called today, we can think of other pastors, missionaries, youth ministers, Sunday School teachers, Deacons, Building and Ground chairs, etc., that have done these jobs before us. From their examples we can kind of get a sense of what we are supposed to do. But not Esther. So often we talk about our calling matching our personality, but that is not the case with Esther. She is timid, shy, not one to make waves. It seems like she would be the last one called upon to give the youth mission trip report to the church. She did not know about political speech and how to lobby the government. Ultimately Esther's calling is about doing something. Doing something that was unheard of, doing something that was unknown, doing something that was unnatural, doing something that she was greatly unprepared to do. Can you imagine how she must have felt?

A Call is about urgency and risk. You might be the first one – you might be the only one. We have created seminaries, missionary training centers, Sunday School teachers meetings and other places so that people of similar calling could be together. I think that the greatest benefit of these is so people can remind themselves they are not crazy – that God has called other people to do the same thing that they are doing.

What if at the end of today's service or at your small group this week we started to say to each other, "This might sound crazy but God is calling me to _____" or "This might sound crazy but I believe God is calling our church to _____." And then someone in the group needs to be "Mordecai" and say "God has put you here for such a time as this – DO IT!"

Sometimes we miss what God is trying to do. Esther could have spent the rest of her life saying, "How lucky I have been!" or "Isn't it just weird how things work out." She could have chalked up all that had happened to coincidence. Esther could have said, "If God can make me queen, certainly God can help out those people of Susa. Why should I need to do anything?" That is still heard in the false piety of our day, "If God wants to reach people, God will just do it." While certainly God is far bigger than any of us can imagine and can do immeasurably great things, for some reason God called on Esther to act and today, for some reason, God calls on us to act.

As we think about our calling today - can we agree that there are key places God has put us? That there are key things God has called us to do? How can we put "words" to our calling? A lot of people today are going to hear a sermon on calling and will check out because they have limited God's calling to what we have words to describe. What's the price of Esther "not doing" anything? Thankfully, we don't know. What is the price of our church not doing what God has called us to do? What has been the personal price of you not doing what God has called you to do?

You might have a calling if you have ever said, "Pastor, someone needs to do something about . . ." Try this experiment this week: As you walk around, be a "noticer" – notice the people around you, notice the needs – then ask yourself, "What is God calling me to do about this? What is God calling the church to do about this?" And then call a friend and discuss it.

“Who knows if you have come to the king’s palace for such a time as this.” Who knows if God has put you in your workplace, school, neighborhood for such a time as this.

Esther was a servant who did something. She was a servant who took a risk. May we live lives that risk doing something for the kingdom of God.

MAKING CHOICES... TAKING RISKS

“A Late-Night Call”

Sample Sermon

Written by Michael Cheuk,
Farmville Baptist Church, Farmville, VA



NRSV 1 Samuel 3:1-10: Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” 5 and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

They were living in dark times. In the days when the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli, they were living in dark times. The twelve Hebrew tribes had settled in the Promised Land, but things looked anything but promising.

After the death of Joshua, the tribes were besieged from the outside by enemies like the Moabites, Midianites, and Canaanites. Now, the Philistines were multiplying in number and in power, and they were masters of the region. But the Hebrew tribes did not just have to contend with outside enemies; they also had to deal with internal discord. The tribes were bickering among themselves. They had no unity. What’s worse, they were chasing after Canaanite gods, and their disobedience and infidelity brought bitter consequences. Things would get so bad that from time to time the people would cry out to God for help, and God would raise up a leader to straighten things out. But once things got better, the Hebrew people would fall back to their old, rebellious ways where all the people did what was right in their own eyes.¹ No wonder the word of the Lord was rare in those days and visions were not widespread. They were living in dark times.

In those days, there lived a priest named Eli. He was a long-time priest in a long line of priests going all the way back to Aaron, Moses’ brother. Eli was old and his eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see. One gets a feeling that his failing eyesight was not just a matter of his advanced age or macular degeneration. In the previous chapters of first Samuel, we see that Eli also lacked spiritual vision and that he more or less turned a blind eye to his sons’ gross misconduct. We’re told that Eli’s sons, in line to inherit his role as priest, were wicked, corrupt and immoral. They brought upon themselves and the priesthood distrust, disgrace and disgust. But Eli only half-heartedly reprimanded them, and his tepid rebukes were to no avail—the sons took no heed of the old man. No wonder the word of the Lord was rare in those days and visions were not widespread. They were living in dark times.

Yet a glimmer of hope flickers. During the waning hours of the night, when it was darkest just before the dawn, the lamp of God still burned in the temple and it had not yet gone out. As a son of Aaron, Eli was required to keep the

Key Passage: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

lamps burning in the temple throughout the night until morning.² But Eli was not tending to the lamp; he was lying in a dark outer room of the temple. Instead, that duty rested upon a boy named Samuel, who was lying next to the Ark of God, near the very presence of God, in the inner chamber of the temple, where the light of the lamp of God shone upon him.

Several years back, Samuel was brought to the temple by his mother Hannah when he was only about three years old. Before Samuel was born, Hannah was barren, and it was in this very temple that Hannah silently cried out to God for God to give her a son. She promised that if she conceived a son, she would give him to the Lord in permanent service. The Lord heard Hannah's prayer, and Hannah and her husband Elkanah had a baby boy. Hannah kept her promise and when Samuel was old enough to be weaned, she took her first-born son to the priest Eli so that Samuel could live and serve before the Lord for the rest of his life.

Now on this dark night, a voice called out: "Samuel!" Samuel thought Eli was calling, so he ran to him and said: "Here I am, for you called me." A sleepy and groggy Eli muttered, "I did not call; lie down again." But the voice summoned again in the darkness: "Samuel!" Again, Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Now a little more awake, Eli lovingly replied: "I did not call, my son; lie down again."

One can hardly blame the lad for not knowing who was calling. Oh, he certainly heard something, but Samuel did not yet know the Lord. And the knowledge required to recognize God's voice is like the personal, perceptive understanding that exists between a husband and a wife.³ Or between a son and a loving father. But like an orphaned child who hears someone calling his name for the first time but doesn't recognize the voice, Samuel ran to the only person, the only father figure, that he knew. But it was not Eli who called Samuel.

The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. By now, if I were Samuel, I would just assume that I was either being prank-called or that some sleepy dolt was dialing the same wrong number over and over again. Samuel picked up twice, but didn't recognize the voice, and didn't understand the words. There is a difference between hearing and listening. We hear with our ears; we listen with our brains. Hearing is simply the act of receiving sound by the ear. Listening however, requires concentration so that your brain perceives the words and sentences and processes their meaning.⁴ Hearing without listening is mere gibberish in the night. If you can hear but do not understand, you might as well be deaf. And poor Samuel was caught between this persistent caller and his inability to understand a word, for the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And he didn't have the luxury of pulling the plug or putting the receiver off the hook.

So Samuel did the only thing he knew how to do. He went to Eli. By now, Eli was fully awake. Who could be calling Samuel? This child, who was more of a son to him than his own flesh and blood—who could be calling him at this time of night? And gradually, in the dark recesses of Eli's mind, a dying ember slowly rekindled to chase away the night that had been his constant companion for these many years. He wondered if the voice that Samuel heard was the same voice he also heard but had long since forgotten, a calling that now echoed faintly in his consciousness. He had experienced something like that years back. It was a voice simultaneously quiet but compelling, like a little child that silently tugged at you and wouldn't let go until you paid her some attention. And at that moment, the old priest who was blind briefly regained his spiritual vision, and he perceived, and he understood. Samuel had thought that he heard the voice of his priestly father. Instead, Eli now perceived that it was the voice of their Heavenly Father calling. It was the voice of God.

How ironic it was that the one who had ears to hear couldn't understand, while the one with blind eyes finally perceived. But even more ironic was the fact that at the moment that Eli finally perceived a word from the Lord, he realized that the calling was not for himself. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; God had not spoken for so long. And now all of a sudden, God spoke, but not to him. God spoke, but not to his sons. God was speaking to this boy, who was not from his priestly lineage. The mantle of responsibility—and power and prestige—was about to pass from Eli, the old, experienced priest, to this young, inexperienced lad.

I wonder how Eli felt? Used up? Washed up? Hurt? We don't know, for the Bible does not say. But in his moment of clear vision, perhaps Eli realized the fact that as long as a word from the Lord was being heard again, it was a good thing. And even though he was not the recipient of the word of God, he could still direct others to rightly perceive

God's voice, to receive God's word, and to respond to God's call. God was calling, and this meant that God had not abandoned the world in its darkest hour. God was not slumbering in the night. God was still at work calling people to join in God's mission. And so Eli responded with grace. He said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

It is the mysterious working of God's grace that could use even an old, blind and tired priest to point another to the call of God. In this sense, the aged Eli was not used up. Not washed up. Samuel needed Eli to train him in the ministry to the Lord. Without Eli, Samuel would not have known that the voice he was hearing was actually God's. Eli pointed the way for Samuel to hear and perceive God's call.

If God could use Eli to enable Samuel to receive the call of God, how much more so can God use God's followers today to point others to God's calling? Will we spend time teaching our Samuels about what it means for all of us to serve the Lord in the temple that is our church? Now more than ever, we need those experienced in the faith to help our Samuels to recognize the voice of God. Will we be on the lookout for those whom God may be calling into the ministry? Will we look for and receive with gratefulness the emerging leaders that God may place in our congregation? Will we accept them and love them as if they were our own children? Will we pass the mantle of responsibility and leadership on to them even if they may pronounce a word of God's judgment upon us, just as Samuel did later upon Eli and his sons?

I want to be very clear: this story is not about an age thing. This story isn't about senior adults transferring leadership responsibility to those younger. Because as Christians, we believe that no one is too old to have a vision from God. We believe that no one is too old to hear a call from God. For we remember in Acts, at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' disciples to establish the church, Peter quotes the prophet Joel: "Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."⁵ God's Spirit continues to make known God's will to young and old, male and female.

Furthermore, this story is not about how sharp your eyes are. Your physical vision may be deteriorating, but spiritual vision is not dependent upon your eyes. The Holy Spirit can open the eyes of your heart to see clearly God's will and plan for your life. Conversely, you may have 20/20 vision, and yet be blind to the vision that God wants to show you for your life and for the church. While we may not be physically blind, we may be spiritually near-sighted. We tell ourselves: "We want to see and hear and follow God's call, but I just can't see beyond my schooling. I'll wait until I graduate from high school or college." Or, "I just can't see beyond my kids. I'll just wait until they are grown." Or, "I just can't see beyond my job right now. I'll wait until I'm retired." While it's never too late to respond to God's call, too many times, we miss out on the fullness of God's plan for our lives because of our spiritual near-sightedness.

Finally, this story is not about physical hearing. You may not hear as well as you used to. But God does not need physical ears for you to hear God's call. Conversely, you may have perfect hearing. But, like Samuel, you may hear voices, but you may still not be able to perceive a word from God. In our culture, we are bombarded with many calls and messages—from telemarketers, commercials, pop-up ads, mailings. Like God, these calls are persistent, even relentless.

Unlike God's still small voice, they are loud, blaring, and in-your-face. So ubiquitous, they become part of the background noise of our lives, and when we hear these messages, we are tempted to run over and respond:

Money! Here I am, for you called me. Success! Here I am, for you called me.

Power! Here I am, for you called me. Security! Here I am, for you called me.

While Eli was at least honest enough to tell Samuel that he didn't call, money or success or power would gladly be your lord with you as their servant. But there is only one true Lord, and when God calls, will we hear God over the din of the other voices? And when we hear, will we listen? We need to listen, with our ears, yes, but even more so, with our hearts and minds so that we may perceive, understand and obey.⁶ God continues to call God's people to deeper levels of discipleship and to new areas of ministry. I hazard to guess that when it comes to the call of God, instead of being "hard of hearing," most of us are "hard of listening."⁷

Some say that we live in dark times today. We live in a society where many people do what's right in their own eyes. The church no longer occupies the same status and standing as before as a result of a changing culture, but also because of scandals, mismanagement, controversy and in-fighting within the church itself. Our clergy are getting older. Bright and talented young people no longer consider church ministry as an attractive vocation. And the word of the Lord is rare in these days; visions are not widespread even in some of our churches.

But I believe that the lamp of God has not yet gone out. It still flickers and burns in the night, searching, beckoning a new generation to take on the mantle of leading God's people. The Lord still comes and stands there, making late night calls.

Shh! Do you hear something? Is God calling out your name? We know how Samuel responded. How will you respond?

Benediction

*Go now and may God bless you and keep you as you go
with open ears, open eyes and open hearts . . .*

To hear the voice of God the Father

To see the vision of God the Son

To follow the call of God the Spirit . . .

in our lives, in our church and in our world. Amen.

Footnotes:

¹ Judges 17:6; 21:25.

² Exodus 27:21; cf. Leviticus 24:3, Numbers 18:23.

³ The Hebrew word for know (yada`) also means to perceive. It is the same word used in Genesis 4:1.

⁴ See www.melmartin.com/html_pages/Articles/listening.html for the distinction between hearing and listening.

⁵ Joel 2:28.

⁶ The Hebrew word for listening (shama`) also includes obedience as part of its meaning.

⁷ www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/ss_hearing.html

MAKING CHOICES... TAKING RISKS

“Esther Trusts God”

Preschool Bible Study

Written by Becky Kaiser,
Bon Air Baptist Church, Richmond, VA



Session Bible Thoughts:

- Help one another. Gal. 5:13
- God has plans for you. Jer. 29:11
- God is my helper. Ps. 30:10
- Sing thanks to God. Ps. 147:7
- A friend loves at all times. Prov. 17:17
- Be kind to one another. Eph. 4:32
- We are helpers. 2 Cor. 1:24
- Do what is right. 2 Cor. 13:7
- I thank God. 2Tim. 1:3

Preparation:

1. Read the story of Esther from your Bible.
2. Review the suggestions from this lesson.
3. Choose which learning centers to lead. Gather the resources you will need.
4. Look through picture files for pictures of Esther and other community helpers
5. Locate books on Esther; stories of trusting God; and helping others.
6. Print these Bible verses on different colored strips of construction paper and place them in the appropriate places in your Bible. Verses to use:
 - (2 Tim 1:3) I thank God.
 - (Eph. 4:32) Be kind to one another.
 - (2 Cor. 1:24) We are helpers.
 - (Gal. 5:13) Help one another.
 - (2 Cor. 13:7) Do what is right.
 - (Ps 147.7) Sing thanks to God.
 - (Prov. 17:17) A friend loves at all times.
7. Choose appropriate preschool music for this lesson.
8. Pray for yourself (as you prepare), your preschoolers and their families, and for your teachers.



Teacher Bible Study:

Read the book of Esther. Esther is the only book in the Bible that God is not named, yet God's work is being done. Esther answered the call to be a part of God's work. Esther was a Jew and raised by her uncle, Mordecai. Then when she was of age he took her before the King and the King found Esther beautiful and made her his Queen. Later, Mordecai calls out to Esther to help him and all the Jewish people because they are in danger. Haman, one of the King's men, is out to destroy all the Jews. Mordecai asks Esther to help. At first Esther does not know what she could do to help. Mordecai reminds Esther she is not entirely safe just because she is living inside the palace. Esther sends Mordecai a reply saying she will help and

Background: Esther 4:1-17

Key Passage: Esther 4:12-14

Purpose: To help preschoolers learn they can make good choices and they can choose to be a helper.

Bible Story: Esther Made a Good Choice

wants all the people to pray and fast for three days as she will. I often wonder what her prayers were. Was she praying for strength and courage? Did she pray for the King to accept her and not punish her? Or perhaps she prayed for God's will to be done? Esther knew the consequences for going before the King without permission. She knew she could be put to death. She stepped out in faith and trusted God with the results. Do we ever do that? Sometimes we are too busy analyzing all the ins and outs of a decision trying to figure out if our effort is worth it. Esther shows us no matter the outcome we need to step out in faith. God will never fail. God does ask us to answer the call to be God's helpers. The question is do we trust God to be in control of the fruits of our labor?

Learning Centers: (35-45 min.)

The learning centers are designed to encourage preschoolers in making good choices. As preschoolers move about and investigate the activities, teachers may retell parts of the Bible story, share Bible truths, and use Bible phrases.



Blocks

Place a teaching picture of a Bible-time palace in your block area. Encourage your preschoolers to build palaces or homes. Talk with them about how Esther lived in a palace because she was a queen. Our homes are different. Share ways our homes are different. We all make choices everyday; some of our choices are good, and some of our choices are bad. What are some good choices God wants us to make in our homes? You may also want to cover some blocks with paper and write words from one of the verses above on the blocks for the children to put in order. Be sure to have the verse displayed on a sentence strip for them to copy from.



Homeliving (bible costumes, bible)

In your home living center have Bible costumes available. Tell the preschoolers about the banquet Queen Esther had for the King and Haman. Queen Esther wanted to ask the King to help her people. Esther made a good choice. The preschoolers may pretend they are at the banquet with Queen Esther and practice serving one another. Look for opportunities to praise good choices such as sharing, taking turns, listening to one another and so forth. Show the Bible and where they may find the story of Esther.



Bible phrase: Do what is right.(2 Cor. 13:7)

Puzzles (a variety of teaching pictures and/or wooden puzzles)

Place appropriate puzzles in your center. Some good choices are puzzles of healthy food, community helpers, people going to church, people giving an offering, families at home, Bible-time homes or a palace, or a picture of Esther. Using teaching pictures cut them into several pieces (10-12) for the preschoolers to put them together. Lead the preschoolers in a discussion about their pictures, and how the people in the pictures are making good choices. Talk about God wanting God's people to make good choices. Tell of Esther's good choice to ask the King to help her people. Look for opportunities to praise preschoolers for the good choices of sharing, taking turns, listening, etc.



Place a Bible in the center with bookmarks at these verses: 2 Cor. 13:7, Gal. 5: 13, Jer. 29:11 and Esther 4.

Art (construction paper geometric shapes, white paper, glue, teaching picture of Esther, bible, verse book marks)

Play appropriate preschool music. Set out construction paper cut into different geometric shapes, 12"x18" pieces of paper, and glue on a small plate with q-tips. The children may create a picture by gluing different shapes on to their paper. As they create, share with them that they will be learning about Queen Esther today. You may talk about what they might think the home of a queen looks like. They may want to create this on their paper. As you share with the children about Queen Esther, show a teaching picture. Show in the Bible where we find the story of Esther. Esther was a queen and needed to help her friends. She chose to ask the king to help; and Esther made a good choice.



Bible thought: God is my helper. (Ps. 30:10)

We are helpers.(2 Cor. 1:24)

Reading and Writing (appropriate books, pencil, paper, word cards)

Have appropriate books which illustrates good choices families make like going to church, giving an offering, having a healthy meal, children sharing, people showing kindness. Let the children lead the learning. If they ask you to read then sit with them and have them choose a book. Be sure to acknowledge their choice. They may choose to also read to you; if so encourage their efforts with this also. You might even encourage them to think of their own story to share. Tell the preschooler they will hear a story today about Queen Esther, who made a good choice to help her people.



Also have available words related to the topic for preschoolers to copy if they are interested. Older preschoolers may try to copy words or they can trace them. Young preschoolers may try matching small words. This could be a game where they turn words over; you read the words; and they match the words to a word on a sheet. Good words to use would be God, Esther, Love, Kind, Choice, Good, friend, share. Be sure to use these in a sentence. For example, God wants us to make good choices. You may choose to be a good friend.

Science and Nature

Provide fruits such as grapes cut into fourths, raisins, dates, dried figs. Have the children use their senses to describe characteristics of the fruit. Tell them how Queen Esther provided a banquet for the King and some of these fruits would have been served. Talk with the preschoolers about making good food choices for healthy bodies.

Bible truths: God has plans for you. Jer. 29:11



Clean Up Time: (5 minutes)

Preschoolers need a 3-4 minute warning to finish their activities and prepare to clean up. Sing a familiar clean up song. Teachers and preschoolers should work together to clean up all the learning centers.



Group Time: (10-15 minutes)

Bible Story: Esther Made a Good Choice (Esther 4)

1. Lead the preschoolers to large group area by playing follow the leader.
2. Ask the preschoolers to share how their moms and dads or others choose to help them.
3. Open your Bible to Esther 4 and lay it in your lap. Tell the preschoolers today's Bible story is about Esther. She had to make a choice to help her people. Let's listen to learn how Esther chose to help. Tell the Bible story in your own words.



Esther Made a Good Choice

When Esther was a little girl she lived with her uncle Mordecai. Esther grew up and Mordecai took her to see the King. The King made Esther Queen and loved her very much. Esther was happy living in the palace.

However, one day she received a message from Mordecai asking for her help. Esther's people were in danger. One of the King's men, Haman, was angry with Mordecai. Haman wanted to hurt Mordecai, Esther and all their people.

Esther sent a message to Mordecai asking him what she should do. Mordecai told her to ask the King for help. She remembered the law that no one could see the king unless he asked for them to come. Esther had to make a choice. She could either go to the king and ask for help or tell her uncle Mordecai she could not help.

Esther made a good choice. She chose to help her people. Esther asked Mordecai and all their people to pray for three days and she would also pray for three days. After Esther prayed to God she was ready to go to the King and ask for his help.

When Esther went to the king, he was happy to see her. The King told Esther, "Whatever you want I will give it to you."

Esther told the King she and her people were in danger. She asked the King for help. The King chose to help Esther. He made a new law that would help keep Esther and her people safe.

Based on Esther:

Recall the Bible Story

Show a teaching picture of Esther. Ask the preschoolers who chose to be a helper?(Queen Esther) Who did Esther ask for help?(the King)

Pray: "Thank you God for Esther who chose to be a helper."



Bible Verse Activity

Verse Hunt: Have the verses printed on different colored strips of paper and placed about the room. Have enough for each child to find one. Have a matching set of verses places in your Bible. As the preschoolers return to the circle, have them come to you with their colored strips. Find the matching colored bookmarks in your Bible. Read the verse with the preschooler.



Verses to use:

- (2 Tim 1:3) I thank God.
- (2 Cor. 13:7) Do what is right.
- (Eph. 4:32) Be kind to one another.
- (Ps 147:7) Sing thanks to God.
- (2 Cor. 1:24) We are helpers.
- (Prov. 17:17) A friend loves at all times.
- (Gal. 5:13) Help one another.

Transition/Closing Activity:

Bean Bag Toss game

Set out pictures of community helpers. (doctors, mail carrier, firefighter, police officer, moms, dads, children etc.) The preschoolers toss the bean bag onto a picture, naming the helper and telling how the helper makes choices.



Ex. Mail carrier chooses to help by delivering the mail.

MAKING CHOICES... TAKING RISKS

“A Queen’s Choice”

Children’s Bible Study

Written by Becky Johnson,
Rivermont Baptist Church, Danville, VA



Bible Background:

The story of Esther occurred while the Jews were captives in Persia (modern Iran). Mordecai and Esther were cousins, but Mordecai was more like a father figure to Esther, since he raised her after her parents died. God is never mentioned in the book of Esther, nor is Esther ever referred to in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the book of Esther is a powerful testimony of God’s protection of the Jews, his chosen people.

In our focal passage, Mordecai’s faith in God is evident as he realized that deliverance of the Jews would arise from elsewhere if Esther chose not to act to save them. He also surmised that it might have been God’s plan for Esther to be queen for just that purpose. Since fasting is usually associated with prayer, we may assume that Esther and Mordecai prayed fervently for the three days of fasting prior to Esther approaching the king.

Esther made the right choice, even when facing possible death. Teachers and children studying this lesson may never face a situation where making the right choice would endanger their lives. Children probably will not be able to identify conceptually with having their lives endangered, yet they will be able to identify with choices that trigger punishment from parents/teachers or rejection by their peers.

Reflect on why adults and children make wrong choices or struggle with making the right choice. Is it for peer approval? Is it to fulfill fleshly desires? Is it for perceived convenience or comfort? What other reasons come to mind? Matthew 6:33 provides the compass for making choices. Choices should be based on what pleases God and on what enables a person to be more like God. The goal for this lesson is to help children realize that it is more important to obey God and suffer any consequences, than to disobey God.

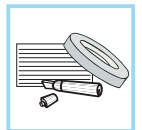
Because this lesson concerns making choices, offer the children several choices in available learning activities.

Observe the behavioral choices children make during class. Commend good choices (sharing, politeness, etc.) and use instances of bad choices as a learning opportunity. For example, if a child will not share the markers, say “One choice we can make is to keep the markers and not share. Can anyone think of another choice we could make?”

Preparation:

Preparation for Introductory Activities

1. For What Choices Have You Made Today?: Place a strip of masking tape on the floor. It should be long enough for all the children to stand on it. On a white board, chalkboard, or posterboard, draw the blanks and the first letters from the crossword puzzle found on the Activity Sheet 1. Provide sharpened pencils, strips of paper, and a basket or container to hold the strips of paper. On some



Background: Esther 2-5

Key Passage: Esther 3:8-13; 4:1-16

Purpose: To help children understand that making good choices means obeying God and trusting God with the results.

Memory Verse: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.” (Matthew 6:33a)

Bible Story: Queen Esther Makes a Choice

of the strips of paper, write “comb hair,” “make up my bed,” “eat breakfast,” “be grouchy,” “tease my brother or sister,” “not get up the first time I was told,” “tell family members good morning,” “obey parents,” “be nice,” “pray,” “be happy to come to church,” and “greet my Sunday School teachers with a smile.” Make sure there will be enough Bibles for every child to have one.

2. For Picture Choices: Collect pictures that show situations where a choice has been made or needs to be made. (A picture showing a child who sees another child hurt is an example of when a choice needs to be made. A picture of a child visiting a sick person is an example of when a choice has been made.) Use pictures from the teaching picture file, magazines, newspapers, old Sunday School literature, etc. Place bookmarks at the appropriate pages to identify pictures in books. Pictures should represent good choices and bad choices. Provide blank paper and markers or colored pencils.
3. For Choices in the Bible: Draw a line down the middle of a piece of poster board. At the top of one side draw a happy face. On the other side draw a sad face. Copy the Bible references from Activity Sheet 2 on to index cards. For younger children, place some of the cards in a Bible at the reference. Provide Bibles, markers, and tape.

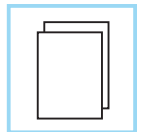
Preparation for Bible Study Time (Large Group)

1. To use listening assignments, copy Activity Sheet 3, “Listening/Review Questions.” Cut apart the questions. Provide enough for each child to have a question, even if repeats are necessary.
2. To use the “Esther Story Card” activity, make enough copies of Activity Sheet 4, for each child to have one. Provide popcorn kernels or pony beads in small paper cups for each child. Copy Activity Sheet 3, “Listening/Review Questions.”
3. To use drama, provide simple props such as a crown (paper) and scepter (foil-covered dowel) for the king, a scroll (for the decree being read), a purple (or blue or red) plastic tablecloth to drape over a chair for a throne. Use simple costumes or signs hung around necks to identify characters. (Esther, Mordecai, King, and Haman) Copy Activity Sheet 3, “Listening/Review Questions.”
4. Write Matthew 6:33a on index cards, one word per card. Tie a piece of yarn between 2 chairs and use clothespins to attach the cards to the yarn.
5. Secure a copy of “Seek Ye First,” The Baptist Hymnal, #478. Copy the words for an additional verse from Activity Sheet 5, “Song Sheet,” onto large paper. Be familiar with singing the additional verse to the tune of “Seek Ye First.”



Preparation for Application Activities

1. For Good Choice/Bad Choice: Use poster board to cut out “crowns,” one per child, leaving them flat. Crowns should be approximately 23 inches long. Look for models of crowns with church costumes, in the GA room, or at a local fast-food restaurant. Provide neon self-stick circles, plastic beads, glue, glitter, bright markers, and tape. Copy Activity Sheet 6, “Good Choice/Bad Choice Situations.” Cut apart the numbered situations and place the strips in a cup.
2. For Choices God Wants You To Make: Using the 22-inch side of a piece of 22” x 28” poster board as the top, write “Choices God Wants You To Make” in 1-inch tall letters. Down the left side of the board, write 9 of the 18 Bible references from Activity Sheet 7, “Choices God Wants You To Make.” Allow 3 inches per reference. Write the other nine references down the middle of the poster board. Leave enough room to attach an index card beside each reference. Write the matching phrases from the Activity Sheet on index cards. For younger children, use Bible markers to mark the references. If possible, highlight the verses. Provide tape, Bibles, one blank index card per child and pencils.
3. For What To Do?: Copy Activity Sheet 8 and cut apart the open-ended stories. Cut card stock into 2”x 3” cards, allowing one card per child. Provide markers, colored pencils, and blank paper. The option would require blank paper for drawing.



Introductory Activities: (10-15 minutes)

Choose and prepare the introductory activities and options that best suit the age and interests of the children. Greet the children as they arrive, tell them about the available activities, and let them choose one to do.



1. What Choices Have You Made Today?

As children arrive, ask them to write on strips of paper some of the things that they have chosen to do that day. If they need help with suggestions, say “Did you choose what clothes to wear? To brush your teeth? To bring your Bible with you?” Allow a few minutes for writing and then collect the strips in a basket. Be sure to include the strips that you prepared, also. Ask the children to stand in a line on the masking tape. Say, “I will read one of the choices from the basket. If you made that choice today, raise your hand.” Read one of the strips. Say, “Now, for those of you with your hands raised (because you made that choice today), step to the right of the tape if you think that choice was a good one. Step to the left if you think that choice was not good.” After reading all the strips, have the children return to their seats and say, “Today we are going to learn about a queen who had to make a difficult choice. It was important to many people for her to make a good choice.” Direct their attention to the crossword puzzle that you prepared. Say, “We are going to discover the names of the main characters in today’s story.” Ask the children to find Esther in their Bibles. Give help as needed. Proceed to ask the clues from Activity Sheet 1, giving the children the reference needed to discover the answer. Allow the child who finds the answer to fill in the blanks of the crossword puzzle.

2. Picture Choices

As the children arrive, encourage them to choose a picture and tell what choice has been made, or what choices could be made. Get more than one response. After discussing the pictures, allow the children to choose a situation to illustrate a good choice being made. Option: children may prefer to act out a situation rather than illustrate it. Before dismissing to Large Group, tell the children to listen for what choice a queen made in today’s story.

3. Choices in the Bible

Encourage children to take an index card, find the reference and read it. Write the name of the person who made a choice on the index card. (In some cases it may be “anyone,” “the crowd,” or similar answers.) Decide if it was a good choice or a bad choice. If it was a good choice, tape the card under the happy face. If it was a bad choice, tape it under the sad face. Before dismissing to Large Group, tell the children that many people were depending on the queen in today’s story to make a good choice. Tell them to listen to find out what that choice was.

Transition:

If the class worked on introductory activities as small groups, give the teachers a two-minute signal before time to move to large group. Play music when it is time to transition, and ask the children to move their chairs into a semi-circle facing the focal wall.

Bible Study Time (Large Group): (25-30 minutes)

Choose which approach to active listening is best suited for your class for the Bible story and make any needed preparations.



1. Listening assignments. Give each child one of the questions from Activity Sheet 3 and instruct him to listen for the answer and be ready to tell the class that answer. After the Bible story, let each child read his question and give the answer.
2. Esther Story Cards. Have the children sit on the floor. Give each child a story card and a small cup with popcorn kernels or pony beads. Read the names on the card so the children will know how they sound. Instruct them to keep the card and the cup on the floor at all times. They are to place a kernel (or bead) on the square with the name every time they hear that name. After the story, ask how many times they heard some of the names. Show the children how they can curve the card to funnel the kernels back into the cup.
3. Drama. Tell the children that they should listen to the story paying close attention to the actions so that they can act it out afterwards. After telling the story one time, let the children choose characters to act as you read the story a second time. Pause to allow time for actions and to allow characters to repeat their lines after you read them. Option: older children may be able to act out the story with minimal prompting. A good reader may be able to read the story the second time, with some guidance about when to pause. Make any assignments or distributions based on your choice.

Prepare for Bible study. Ask, “What were you discussing in your small groups?” “Was there ever a time when you had a choice to make, and you knew that doing the right thing might cause something to happen that you wouldn’t want? Today we are going to hear about a queen who had a very difficult choice to make. Many people were depending on her, but doing the right thing could have caused her death.”

Tell the story. With your Bible open to Esther, tell the following story.

Queen Esther Makes a Choice

There were many Jews that had been taken captive to the land of Persia. Mordecai and his cousin were two of the Jews living in Persia. Although they were cousins, Mordecai had raised Esther ever since her parents died.

One day, the king of Persia, King Xerxes, decided to look for a queen. He finally chose Esther, but he didn’t know that she was a Jew. King Xerxes had a nobleman named Haman. All the royal officials had to show honor to Haman. Haman knew Mordecai and hated him because Mordecai would not bow down before Haman. Haman knew that Mordecai was a Jew, so he not only hated Mordecai, but he hated all Jews.

Haman tricked the king into signing a law that ordered all Jews to be killed. Men were sent all over the kingdom to read the new law. When Mordecai heard about the law, he was very sad.

Mordecai sent word to Queen Esther that she must go before the king to try to save the Jews from being killed. Esther sent word back to Mordecai, “Everyone knows that nobody can go before the king unless the king invites him. Not even I can do that. Anyone who goes uninvited can be put to death! The only way to avoid death is if the king holds out his royal scepter to the person.”

Mordecai responded, “Don’t think that you will escape this law. You are a Jew, too, and will be killed. What if you have become queen for this very purpose—to save the Jews?”

Esther replied to Mordecai, “Gather all the Jews in town and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days. I will do the same thing, then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. If I die, I die.”

Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews in town all fasted for three days. On the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in front of the king’s hall. When King Xerxes saw her, he was pleased. He held out his royal scepter and Esther was permitted to enter and touch the tip of the scepter.

King Xerxes asked her, “What do you want? I will give you whatever you want, even half of my kingdom.” Esther invited him to a banquet. She also asked for Haman to attend. Haman felt very important to be invited to a banquet with just the king and queen. At the banquet the king again asked Esther what she wanted. Esther replied, “My request is this: If it will please the king, come with Haman to another banquet tomorrow and then I will tell you what I desire.”

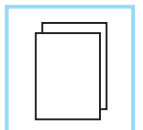
At the banquet the following day, King Xerxes said, “Queen Esther, what do you desire? I will give you up to half of my kingdom.” Queen Esther responded, “O king, if it pleases you, save my life and the life of my people!” She told the king about Haman and the law to kill the Jews. The king was very angry with Haman. King Xerxes could not change the law, but he passed another law allowing the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies.

All the Jews in Persia could be thankful that Esther made the right choice to go before the king so that they could be saved.

—based on Esther 2:7,17; 3:5-9; 4:8-17; 5:1-8; 7:3-6; 8:11

Review. For choice 1, let the children report on their listening assignments. For choices 2 and 3, after finishing those activities, using the questions from Activity Sheet 3 to review the story.

Application. Ask the children these questions: Who made bad choices in the story? (Haman). Who made good choices? What might have happened if Mordecai had not gone to Esther to ask for help? What might have happened if Esther had been too afraid to go to the king? How did Esther have to trust God when



she made her decision? When have you had to make a difficult choice? Allow time for several responses. Ask, “What happened when you made the right choice? What might have happened if you had not made a good choice? Have you ever trusted God to help you when it was hard for you to make a choice?”

Learn a Verse. Ask children to find Matthew 6:33 in their Bibles. Encourage children who need help to use their Table of Contents or to ask a friend for help. Assist as needed. After everyone has found the verse, read it. Direct their attention to the memory verse cards hung on the yarn and read the verse together. Allow children to remove the cards, one at a time, reading the verse aloud after each card is removed. Ask, “What does this verse mean? What does righteousness mean? How can you seek God first?” If children are slow to respond, help with a few examples like “choosing to pray in the morning,” “choosing to give my offering instead of spending it,” and “choosing not to do something wrong even when my friends want me to.” Think of things to do and not to do. After the children share, point out that seeking God first means that we should care more about what God thinks than about what anyone else thinks.

Sing. Sing the first verse of “Seek Ye First.” Show the words to the alternate verse and sing it, too. If the children enjoy singing, the song can be sung as a round, with the second group starting after the first group sings “righteousness.”

Pray.

Application Activities: (25-30 minutes)

Choose to prepare as many activities as there are teachers. Describe the activities to the children and let them choose which one to do.

1. Good Choice/Bad Choice (decorate a crown)

Tell the children that they will add “jewels” to their crowns as they decide on good choices. Allow each child, one at a time, to choose one of the prepared choice situation slips. After reading the situation, the child should decide if the person made a good choice or a bad choice. If he says it was good, ask if everyone agrees. Then everyone should add one jewel to the crown by placing a self-stick circle or drawing one or gluing on a bead or a little glitter. If he says it was a bad choice, then he should suggest what a good choice would have been. Give others a chance to offer ideas. Then add a jewel to the crown. Proceed in like manner, discussing a situation, then adding a jewel. After all the situations have been discussed, tape the crown into a circle that fits the child’s head.

Ask, “Have any of these situations made you think of a time when you made a bad choice?” Say, “We all sometimes choose to do something that is wrong. God will forgive us if we are sorry and ask him to forgive us. Let’s take time now to silently ask God to forgive us of anything for which we need forgiveness.”

Close with a prayer asking God to help the children know what right choice to make when faced with a difficult decision. Thank Him for being a God that we can trust.

2. Choices God Wants You to Make (poster)

Ask, “What are some good choices that the Bible tells us to make? Allow time for responses. Say, “We are going to find 18 things that we should choose to do, but the Bible tells us many more.” Distribute the index cards to the children. Have a child read one of the references. Ask, “Who has the card that matches what this verse tells us to do?” Allow the child with the correct card to tape it to the poster. Proceed to the next reference.

After all references have been matched, or when it is almost time to end, ask, “Which one of these verses indicates something that you need to do that you are either not doing, or you are not doing well?” Encourage each child to choose a verse from the poster that he needs to remember, take a blank index card, and write down the reference and the accompanying statement for that verse. Suggest that he place the card in his Bible or keep it in a place where he will see it often.

Close with a prayer asking God to help the children remember the choices that he wants them to make. Thank him for the Bible.

3. What to Do? (open-ended stories)

Ask a child to choose a story, read it, and tell what he thinks the child in the story should do. Allow others to respond, also. After discussing these six stories, ask the children to make up a story where the child has to make a choice. Tell them to think of times when they or their friends actually faced a difficult decision. Let those who would like to share their stories do so. Remind them to leave the story open-ended so that someone else can tell what choice to make.

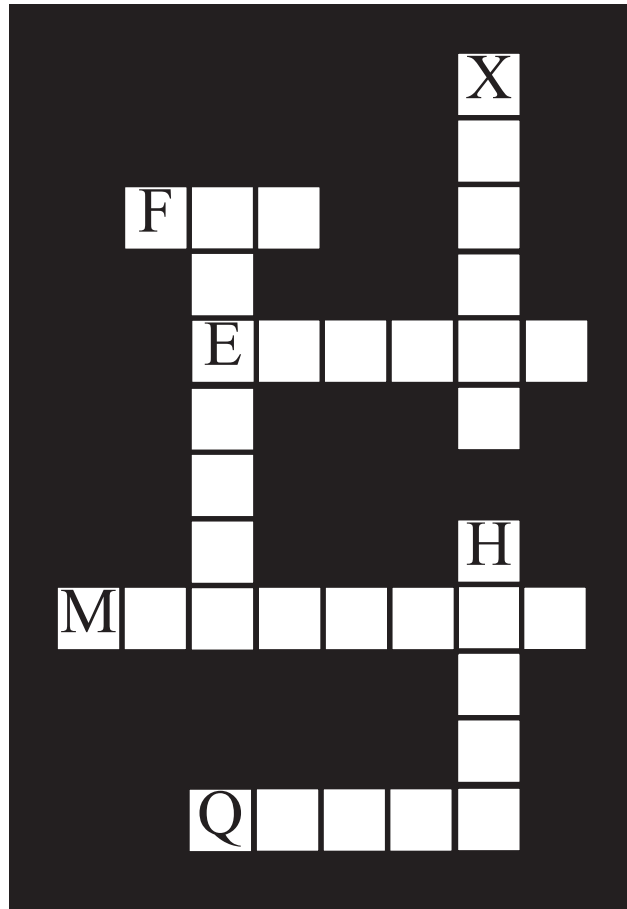
Option. Children could act out a story demonstrating a good choice or could draw a picture to illustrate a good choice.

After the children have expressed their stories demonstrating good choices, say, “Think of a situation you are facing now, or have recently faced, where you need to make a difficult choice.” Pause to let them think. Ask, “When you have to make a difficult choice, would it help you to remember our memory verse?” Together, repeat the memory verse (Matthew 6:33) aloud. Challenge the children to use “Seek God first” as a motto. Ask them to say it when they first get up in the morning, and every time they are tempted to make a bad choice. Suggest that every time they wonder “What should I do?” they repeat the motto “Seek God first.”

Make a reminder card by writing “Seek God first” on a 2”X 3” card. Suggest that the children keep the card where they will see it every day.

Close with prayer, asking God to help the children remember to always seek God first and to be more concerned about pleasing God than pleasing others.

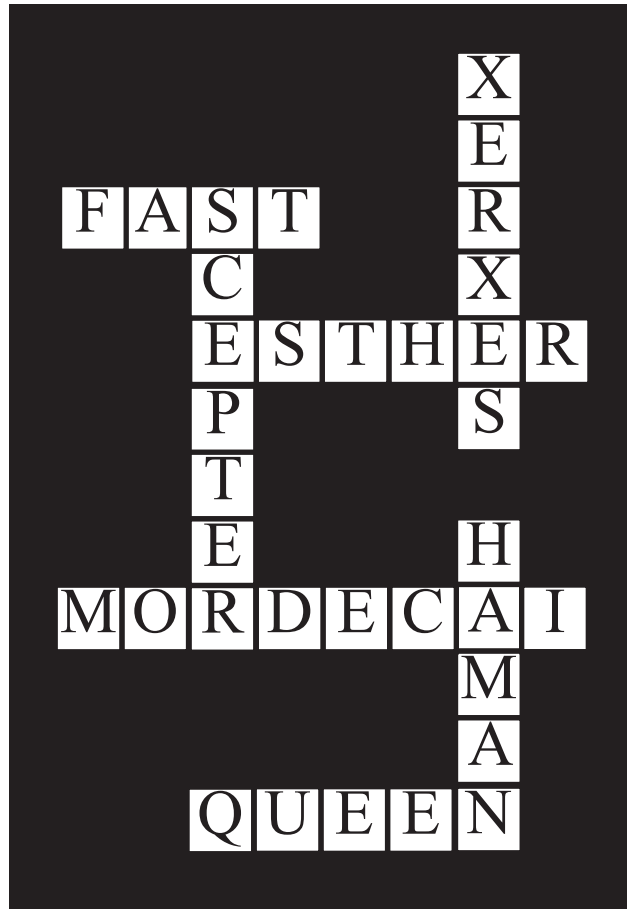
Esther Crossword Puzzle



Clues:

- M_____ A man who was a Jew. Esther 2:5 (Mordecai)
- E_____ A cousin to Mordecai. Esther 2:7 (Esther)
- X_____ The king of Persia. Esther 2:16 (Xerxes)
- Q_____ Esther was chosen to be this. Esther 2:17 (queen)
- H_____ A man who hated the Jews and wanted to kill them. Esther 3:6 (Haman)
- S_____ What the king held out to Esther. Esther 5:2 (scepter)
- F_____ What Queen Esther and Mordecai did for 3 days. Esther 4:16 (fast)

Esther Crossword Puzzle (Answer)



Choices in the Bible

Joshua 24:15	Joshua chose to serve the Lord.
Genesis 13:8-11	Lot chose the better land to the east.
Luke 10:39, 42	Mary chose what is better.
Genesis 3:2-6	Adam and Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit.
Luke 8:43-48	The bleeding woman chose to touch the garment of Jesus.
Luke 7:3, 9-10	The centurion chose to send men to ask Jesus to heal his servant.
Proverbs 8:10	(Anyone) Choose God's instruction and knowledge.
Acts 8:26-27, 29-31, 35	Philip chose to obey the angel & to explain the Scriptures.
Acts 9:10-17	Ananias chose to obey the Lord and go to Saul.
John 7:17	(Anyone) Choose to do God's will.
Luke 19:8	Zachaeus chose to give to the poor & to repay those whom he cheated.
Matthew 19:16-22	The rich young man chose not to give up his wealth to follow Jesus.
Matthew 26:14-16, 47-49	Judas chose to hand Jesus over to the chief priests.
Matthew 27:20-23	The crowd chose to crucify Jesus.
Matthew 27:27-31	The soldiers chose to spit on and mock Jesus.
Luke 22:56-62	Peter chose to deny Christ.
Luke 23:40-43	The repentant thief chose to trust Jesus.
Genesis 50:15-21	Joseph chose to forgive his brothers.
2 Kings 22:1-2	Josiah chose to do what was right in the eyes of the Lord.
Acts 5:1-5	Annianias chose to lie to God.
Isaiah 6:8	Isaiah chose to tell the Lord that He can send him.
Mark 1:16-18	Simon and Andrew chose to follow Jesus.

Listening/Review Questions

1. How were Esther and Mordecai related?

2. Who raised Esther after her parents died?

3. Who was chosen to be queen?

4. Why did Haman hate Mordecai?

5. What did Haman ask the king to order?

6. How did Mordecai react when he heard about the law?

7. What did Mordecai ask Esther to do?

8. What did Esther say could happen to her if she went before the king uninvited?

9. What warning did Mordecai give Esther?

10. What did Esther choose to do?

Esther Story Cards

ESTHER	MORDECAI
HAMAN	KING XERXES

Esther Story Cards

COUSIN	MORDECAI	JEWS
LAW	ESTHER	SCEPTER
HAMAN	KING XERXES	FAST

Song Sheet

(additional verse for “See Ye First”)

Always choose to do the right thing
No matter what may happen
And trust the Lord to take care of you.
Allelu, Alleluia.

To get the timing, here is a guide comparing the first verse with the additional verse:

Seek ye first the king-dom of God
Al-ways choose to do the right thing

And his right- eous- ness
No matter what may hap-pen

And all these things shall be added un-to you
And trust the Lord to take care of you

Allelu, alleluia.

Allelu, alleluia.

Good Choice/Bad Choice Situations

1. Madison is a new student at Emily's school. At recess, Emily sees Madison standing alone. Emily runs over and invites Madison to join Emily and her friends.
2. Jeremy and Josh are on the same soccer team. Jeremy always seems angry and calls the other players bad names. Josh starts thinking about some even worse names to call Jeremy.
3. Abby is taking violin lessons. She is asked by the Minister of Music to play her violin in a worship service. Abby agrees to play.
4. Sonja is a visitor in Kristin's Sunday School class. Sonja doesn't speak English. Kristin's teacher asks her to be a special friend to Sonja. Kristin sits beside her in Sunday School and in worship. Kristin smiles at her often.
5. Adam is playing outside when he hears his mother call him. Right away, he runs inside to see what she wants.
6. Peyton is taking a test in school. There is a question that he doesn't know. He notices that the person beside him, who is very smart, has his test paper close to the edge of his desk. Peyton could probably see the answer, but he decides to keep his eyes looking straight down at his own paper.
7. Brandon hears other students on the school bus making fun of a student. Since Brandon likes to make people laugh, he joins in.
8. Jordan enjoys singing. She sings in the children's choir at church and enjoys music in school. At recess, she hears some of her friends singing a song with bad words. Since she likes to sing, she starts singing the song, too.
9. Caitlyn is visiting Morgan. Morgan turns on a TV program that Caitlyn knows she is not allowed to watch. Caitlyn thinks to herself, "My parents won't know," so she watches the program.
10. Aaron finds a baseball cap in the hallway at school. He likes it, so he puts it in his backpack and takes it home.
11. Scott got involved in a video game and forgot to study for his spelling test.
12. Mrs. Jones did not see the card that was being passed around the classroom. It was a birthday card for Mike, the oldest student in the class who had severe learning disabilities. The card was making fun of Mike for being so slow. Because everyone else in the class had signed it, Alvin decided to sign it, too.
13. Caleb accidentally broke his mother's favorite coffee mug. He cleaned up the mess. That evening, Caleb heard his mother ask his father if he'd seen her mug. Caleb was glad she hadn't asked him.
14. Christina's sister had surgery. She wondered what she could do to help. Christina made a card for her sister and prayed for her to get well.

Choices God Wants You to Make

Psalms 136:1	Give thanks to God.
Micah 6:8	Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God.
Proverbs 3:5-6	Trust in the Lord.
John 7:17	Choose to do God's will.
Deuteronomy 6:6-7	Keep God's commands in our hearts.
Matthew 6:33	Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.
John 3:16	Believe in Jesus.
John 14:15	Obey Jesus.
Matthew 28:19-20	Go and make disciples of all nations.
Luke 10:27	Love the Lord. Love your neighbor.
Hebrews 10:25	Meet together and encourage one another.
Galatians 6:10	Do good to all people.
Psalms 100:2	Worship the Lord with gladness.
Philippians 4:4	Rejoice in the Lord.
Philippians 4:6	Pray about everything.
Philippians 4:8	Keep thoughts on what is pure.
1 John 1:9	Confess our sins.
1 Thessalonians 5:15	Always be kind.

What to Do?

1. Judy's parents have taught her about the dangers of internet chat rooms. She has heard stories about other students meeting people online and getting in trouble. Judy has just received an email from a boy she met online who wants to meet her and talk about going to church with her. What should she do?
2. Harley is one of the most popular boys in school. Harley begins to make friends with Melvin, who doesn't have many friends. Melvin likes the attention, but soon finds that Harley has been sneaking cigarettes into school. Harley asks Melvin to hide some of the cigarettes in his backpack, because the principal is getting suspicious of Harley. What should Melvin do?
3. Roger is visiting his friend Joel. Joel has a game system and lots of games. Roger and Joel start playing a game that has a lot of violence, even earning points for "killing" people. What should Roger do?
4. Carrie's friend Amber asks her to spend the night with her Saturday night. Carrie asks her if they will go to church Sunday morning. Amber says her family doesn't go to church. What should Carrie do?
5. Bethany is secretly planning a party at her house one evening when she knows her parents will be away. She's inviting friends at school, including Andrea. Andrea knows that Bethany has gotten a friend's brother to provide beer for the party. Andrea has heard that Bethany is also planning other activities that Andrea knows are wrong to do, but Bethany is so popular, and all of Andrea's friends are going. What should Andrea do?
6. Michael is with his friends at the mall. They start talking about how they are hungry, but don't have any money. One of the friends says he is going to take some candy bars from the drug store and he dares the others to do it. Michael says they shouldn't steal, but the other boys start teasing him and calling him "chicken." These are Michael's best friends, and, after all, they are hungry. What should he do?

MAKING CHOICES... TAKING RISKS

“Making Choices..Taking Risks”

Youth Bible Study

Written by Joan Faison-Foster,
Mathews Baptist Church, Mathews, VA



Bible Background Narrative:

Summary of the Book of Esther

Esther's calling to become a courageous hero whose selfless actions ultimately saved her Jewish people is the focal message of The Book of Esther. Chapters 1 and 2 provide the setting with the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) ruling Israel around 475 B.C. and offers insight into a kingdom led by a weak man whose priorities featured his constant desire to show off his wealth and power. Refusing to be placed on display along with his other possessions, Queen Vashti was banished from the kingdom for all time. Enter the lovely, young, and Jewish (though unknown by anyone but Esther and her family) Esther, whom the king selected from many beautiful candidates to become his next Queen. Barely two months into this new union, evil becomes even more pervasive through Haman, whom the king promoted to be head of all the princes in his kingdom. Esther's uncle Mordecai who was like her own father upon the death of her parents remained close to the palace daily to stay apprised of Esther's well-being, however, refused to bow and give homage to Haman because Mordecai was a Jew. Thus unfolded the power-hungry destructive plans of Haman, who received report of Mordecai's heritage, to wipe out Mordecai's and Esther's Jewish family and hang Mordecai on the gallows. (Esther 3) Enter the brave and willing-to-risk-her-life Queen Esther who, after much fasting and praying by others and herself, approached her husband the king uninvited (a crime punishable by death) to bare her soul of her Jewish race, to reveal Haman's corruptible plot, and to request the saving of her people from sure death due to Haman's evil plans. (Esther 4-7) Esther's choice to answer God's call affirmatively, though God's name is never once mentioned overtly in The Book of Esther, resulted in the deliverance of her people, the death on the gallows of Haman, and the appointment of her Uncle Mordecai to a prominent position in her husband's kingdom, along with the establishment of the Jewish festival of worship called Purim. (Esther 8-10)

Esther 4:1-17 Bible Commentary

We focus our attention upon Esther 4:1-17 which is the text of our study for our “Consider Your Call” Sunday, October 29, 2006. Queen Esther did not know of her husband's decree to destroy all the Jews in his kingdom per Haman's evil plans. Obviously, the king did not consult with his wife on such matters nor did he keep her informed of upcoming proclamations to the people. Mordecai's mournful response to the decree was what prompted Queen Esther to know that something was terribly wrong. Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs saw Mordecai dressed in

Background: Esther 4:1-17

Key Passage: Esther 4:12-14

Central Bible Truth: Making good choices is often difficult and requires us to take risks even when we don't know the outcome. Sometimes we have to do what is right, take the risks and trust God for the results.

Teaching Aims:

To help Youth see that we will face many situations where we have to make choices.

To lead Youth to understand that many times it might be risky to make the right choices, but we, as Christians, must see that the challenge is to trust God and step out on faith and leave the results up to God.

Focal Passage: “When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: ‘Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?’” (Esther 4:12-14)

sackcloth, fasting and weeping outside the king's gate. They reported this to the queen. Queen Esther was distressed over her uncle's state of mourning and sent clothes to him to dress in rather than the sackcloth, but Mordecai refused them. In these actions we see that Esther put forth her best efforts to try to help Mordecai despite her limited knowledge of what was going on.

Esther needed more information and was determined to get it. Her concern and choice of action to get to the bottom of the situation were just the beginning of Esther's willingness to answer God's call in her life in this circumstance. The following brief outline may more clearly cast light on Esther's call to save her people:

- I.) Esther's ultimate choice involved other people's lives. (4:1-3)
- II.) Esther tried to help Mordecai with the limited information she had. (4:4)
- III.) Esther sought more information about the situation. (4:5-9)
- IV.) Esther considered the facts of the situation in light of her own circumstances and consulted with Mordecai. (4:10-12)
- V.) Esther acknowledged the challenge set before her and accepted God's call to her to make some risk-taking choices about what she would do. (4:13-14)
- VI.) Esther requested fasting and prayer from all the sources she could get word to and engaged in fasting and prayer herself along with her maidservants, seeking the divine help of God, even though she never mentioned God's name overtly. (4:15-17)

God's call to us is often very much like that of Esther's. We may have little or no information in the beginning. God knows what He wants accomplished, but we do not have that knowledge oftentimes when He calls us to carry out His mission. The unknowns involved in some situations where we accept God's call in our lives translate into true risks. God still wants us to do the right thing, however, and make the choice to answer His call anyway, despite the risks involved, known or unknown. At times, we may not understand our part in God's plan until much later in life. Sometimes we may not realize the part we played or know the outcome at all. Depending upon God's plan, we might be like Esther and see the results of our faithfulness in answering God's call in our own lives right away.

The Lord also often uses other people to help us recognize His call in our lives, just as he used Mordecai to help Esther acknowledge her sense of call to save her people. Like Esther, God's call in our lives requires making choices, too, sometimes with big risks involved. That's where faith comes in. Trusting God to lead us in carrying out His will despite the outcome requires faith on our part and the prayers of others. How much of our faith would really be involved in God's call to us to serve Him and carry out His mission wherever He places us at different times in our lives if every detail was spelled out for us and we had guarantees of the outcomes? The Lord does not work in that way and we should not expect to work in that way either. Daily faith and a close, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ creates the ongoing conditions/settings for sensing and answering God's call in our lives. A hit and miss relationship with the Lord can allow for too many holes, areas of confusion, and a barrage of questions. Close relationship with the Lord diminishes the possibility of thoughts that God only calls other people to serve Him. Such thinking creates a barrier to sensing God's call in our lives. The following four statements may provide a clearer understanding in sensing and answering God's call in your life:

- 1.) Sometimes we think that God calls other people to serve Him and we have difficulty believing that He would actually want to use us to accomplish a mission for Him.
- 2.) Sometimes we "think" way too much and over-analyze situations rather than doing what is right and trusting God to help us and to bring about the best results that are within His will.
- 3.) When we are in right relationship with God, we understand that He has a purpose for our lives and that He does call us to do His will and carry out His mission in our lives.
- 4.) When we are in right relationship with God, we live expectantly, knowing that any opportunity could be God's calling to accomplish His specific mission in a particular situation.

Your mission today, as a Youth Bible study leader, is to help communicate these truths to your teenagers. The suggested teaching plan accompanying this session can help to guide you as you work to make that happen with the teens whom God has entrusted to your care.

Summarily, Esther felt “called” to save her people, despite the risks involved. Going before the king uninvited was against the law, yet Esther approached him with respect and honor, trusting God, whose name she never mentioned, for the results. The remaining chapters of the Book of Esther share the unfolding events which took place because of Esther’s courage in making some risk-taking choices and taking actions to carry them through, even if it cost her own life. Queen Esther revealed Haman’s horrifyingly evil plans and saved her people in the process. Her life was spared, too, even though she put away thoughts of self-preservation to the greater cause of saving the lives of her Jewish family and the Jewish race in her husband’s kingdom. Her Uncle Mordecai was raised to a position of honor by the king. The Jewish people were able to fight for their lives and were even helped by the king’s servants all because of Esther’s courageous actions. Mordecai prospered, the Jewish people prospered, and Esther prospered – in ways that money and riches could never buy! God issued the call to Esther and she accepted it. She not only answered Mordecai’s question, “Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” but beautifully proved through her self-less actions that she had been called and had answered God’s call in what seemed to be some most strange circumstances.

Adult leader of Youth, what is God calling you to do for Him in your life? What choices are you being challenged to make as God calls you out for His Kingdom’s service? What is God calling you to risk for Him in your life? Considering each of these questions will help you in answering God’s call in your own life as well as helping you to lead your Youth to sense and answer God’s call in their own lives.

Gaining Youth’s Interest In This Bible Study:

Step 1: (5-10 mins.)

As Youth enter, direct their attention to the large graffiti sheet which you have displayed in a focal area of the room and labeled “Game Shows Where Contestants Make Choices And Risks Are Involved.” Provide felt-tip markers and instruct Youth to list the names of some games shows fitting this category. (Possible Responses Are: “Let’s Make A Deal,” “Deal Or No Deal,” “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?” “Fear Factor,” “Price Is Right,” etc.) When all Youth have had the opportunity to do this, debrief quickly their written responses, selecting one or two of the game shows to provide some specific choice-making and risk-taking examples. Enlist one Youth to hold up the sentence strip or small sign on which you have written the following: “Life is not a game show!”

Step #2: (10 mins.)

Group the Youth into four teams and give each team one of the manila envelopes containing one each of the following “Your Mission, Should You Choose To Accept It!” Case Studies Team Assignments, (Item A-D) attached with this session. Play the “Mission Impossible” theme music which you have secured ahead of time for use in this session as the teams read and work on their assignments.

- **“Your Mission, Should You Choose To Accept It!” Team 1:** Your church’s Youth Group will be going on a mission trip to Haiti December 26th through January 1st to work with the children there, teaching Bible stories to share the love of Jesus with them, and helping to fix up their poorly-built homes. Your father is extremely racist and discourages you from going on the trip. Your mother wants you to take part in the mission trip, yet seeks to keep the peace in your family as best as she can. You sense God is calling you to go to Haiti and make a difference in the lives of the people there, especially the children. Your mission, should you choose to accept it is to do the right thing, take the risks and trust God for the results. What will you do? List your plan of action on this sheet of paper and select one spokesperson in your group to present your response to God’s call in your life in this situation.
- **“Your Mission, Should You Choose To Accept It!” Team 2:** You believe a fellow student has been displaying some risk-taking behavior lately and possibly considering getting into a gang. You sense that God is calling you to speak to this guy to help him realize what he’s doing is wrong and to try to keep him from getting more involved and making such a fatal mistake in his life. Your mission, should you choose to accept it is to do the right thing, take the risks, and trust God for the results. What will you do? List your plan of action on this sheet of paper and select one spokesperson in your group to present your response to God’s call in your life in this situation.

- **“Your Mission, Should You Choose To Accept It!” Team 3:** You sense God’s call to befriend a new teenager at your school who has no friends and of whom others make fun and play hateful tricks, because of the individual’s physical appearance and disability. Your mission, should you choose to accept it is to do the right thing, take the risks, and trust God for the results. What will you do? List your plan of action on this sheet of paper and select one spokesperson in your group to present your response to God’s call in your life in this situation.
- **“Your Mission, Should You Choose To Accept It!” Team 4:** You attend a school where crime is rampant and most students choose to keep quiet about what they see and hear. You sense God is calling you to be one of the student speakers against school crime at the next assembly focusing upon this issue at your school. Your mission, should you choose to accept it is to do the right thing, take the risks, and trust God for the results. What will you do? List your plan of action on this sheet of paper and select one spokesperson in your group to present your response to God’s call in your life in this situation.

Allow teams 3-5 minutes to develop their plan, then call for each team to present their report. Praise teams for their work and encourage Youth to do the right thing in life’s situations where God calls them to make choices and take risks.

Engaging In God’s Word:

Step #3: (10-15 mins.)

Provide a brief summary of the events surrounding Esther becoming the wife of King Ahasuerus, using the following narrative:

“Around 475 B.C., King Ahasuerus ruled Israel. He was a weak king who loved hosting elaborate parties to show off his power and his riches. His wife, Queen Vashti disobeyed his beckoning of her to wear her royal crown and parade around in front of the guests at one particular social event and she was banished from his kingdom. Her fall to this misfortune resulted in Esther’s call to the fortune of becoming the next Queen. But the call to be Queen was not the most significant call of Esther’s life, though it surely created the setting for God’s call to her to do the right thing, take the risks, and trust Him for the results. Esther’s Uncle Mordecai had raised Esther as his own daughter after the death of her parents. Upon hearing of the search for a new queen, Mordecai had brought Esther to be one of the beautiful candidates.

“Mordecai had instructed Esther not to reveal her Jewish heritage for it would certainly create some complications and when Esther was ultimately crowned Queen, her uncle was thrilled. Two months after Esther became Queen, her husband the king promoted a man named Haman to be leader over all the princes of his kingdom. Haman allowed this position and its power to go to his head and, upon finding out Mordecai’s Jewish heritage, created an evil plan to destroy all of Mordecai’s and Esther’s Jewish family members. These details will assist you now in your understanding and the completion of your assignments as you study the fourth chapter of the Book of Esther.”

Group the Youth into two teams and give each team one of the following group assignments:

- **Group #1: Mordecai’s Crisis**
Read Esther 4:1-9 in your Bible and write a monologue on the paper provided voicing Mordecai’s crisis and mourning and his request of Esther to intercede on her family’s behalf in an attempt to save her people. Be prepared to share aloud your monologue.
- **Group #2: Esther’s Crisis**
Read Esther 4:10-14 in your Bible and write a monologue voicing Esther’s crisis due to Mordecai’s request to intercede on behalf of her people in an attempt to save their lives. Be prepared to share aloud your monologue.

Allow teams sufficient time to engage in their assigned Scripture passages and to write their monologues, then call for Mordecai’s monologue to be presented, followed by Esther’s monologue presentation.

Step #4: (5-10 mins.)

- **Younger Youth Teaching Plan Suggestion For This Step:**

Give each Younger Youth the “Cell Phone” handout, (Item E) provided with this session and a pencil. Direct Younger Youth to read Esther 4:15-17 in their Bible. Ask: “Had cell phones been available in Esther’s day, what “text message” might she have sent to Mordecai?”

Lead Younger Youth to create and record on the cell phone screen on the handout a possible short “text message” showing Esther’s response to Mordecai’s request as revealed in the Scripture verses just read. Upon completion, call for Youth to share aloud their Esther text messages.

- **Older Youth Teaching Plan Suggestion For This Step:**

Provide paper and pens to the Older Youth and instruct them to read Esther 4:15-17 in their Bible and to create a “How-To Brochure” based upon Esther’s courage titled “How To Make The Right Choices, Take Risks, and Win For God!”). Upon completion, call for Youth to share aloud their how-to brochures. (Note: Older Youth should do a thorough job in identifying and listing Esther’s actions in making her choice and taking risks to answer God’s call in her life in this situation. However, following their presentations, reemphasize Esther’s consideration of the facts, Esther’s request for fasting and praying and doing so herself, Esther’s evaluation of the risks involved, and Esther’s choice to do the right thing, despite the risk of losing her own life.)

Point out that the remaining chapters in the Book of Esther report the outcome of Esther’s courage resulting in Haman’s evil plot being revealed and her people being saved.

Integrating God’s Truths into My Life:

Step #5: (10 mins.)

To help Youth focus more on taking risks for God, share the following: It is normal to consider the risks involved when making choices in life. When we sense God’s call in our lives to accomplish His mission, it is normal to consider whether or not there are risks involved as well. Some of God’s calls, in different situations in our lives, involve more risks than others and may give rise to some of the following questions or reflections on our part.

- 1.) “If there are no real risks involved, I may ask ‘why am I doing this?’”
- 2.) “If there are no real risks involved, I may say ‘why bother?’”
- 3.) “If there are no real risks involved, I may not take it seriously.”
- 4.) “If there are no real risks involved, I may take it for granted.”
- 5.) “If there are no real risks involved, I may lose interest.”
- 6.) “If there are no real risks involved, I may choose not to do it.”

Sometimes we may hesitate to answer God’s call in our lives because we feel there are too many risks involved and we may struggle with the following:

- 1.) “If there are real risks involved, I may be frightened.”
- 2.) “If there are real risks involved, I may think of self-preservation.”
- 3.) “If there are real risks involved, I may ask ‘why me?’”
- 4.) “If there are real risks involved, I may try to come up with an easier way out.”
- 5.) “If there are real risks involved, I may walk away from it.”
- 6.) “If there are real risks involved, I may make excuses why I shouldn’t do it.”
- 7.) “If there are real risks involved, I may write down a “pros” and “cons” list to help me with my decision.”
- 8.) “If there are real risks involved, I may look for someone else to do it.”
- 9.) “If there are real risks involved, I may look for others to talk me out of it.”
- 10.) “If there are real risks involved, I may trust God and do it anyway!”

Give each Youth a copy of the “Making Choices . . . Taking Risks” handout sheet, (Item F) included with this session and instruct them to complete it. If time permits and if any Youth desires to share his or her sense of God’s call in their lives right now, call for sharing. Encourage Youth to keep this sheet to remind them and to help them in answering God’s call in their lives. Close the session with sentence prayers from the Youth, seeking God’s help in considering the call He may be placing in their lives right now.

Preparing to Teach this Session/Items Needed:

For Step 1:

- 1.) Display large sheet of paper labeled with the heading, “Game Shows Where Contestants Make Choices And Risks Are Involved” leaving space for Youth to write their responses.
- 2.) Provide felt-tip markers for Youth to use.
- 3.) Prepare sentence strip or small sign with “Life Is Not A Game Show!” statement printed on it.

For Step 2:

- 1.) Secure four (4) manila envelopes and place inside one each of the “Your Mission, Should You Choose To Accept It!” Case Studies Team Assignments, (Item A-D) attached with this session.
- 2.) Provide pens or pencils for Youth to use.
- 3.) Secure CD or Cassette Tape of “Mission Impossible” Theme Music to play in background during this step.
- 4.) Secure CD/Cassette Tape Player for use in this step.

For Step 3:

- 1.) Familiarize yourself with the summary narrative which you will present to set the tone for this study.
- 2.) Print on index cards the two group assignments, “Mordecai’s Crisis” and “Esther’s Crisis” for use in this step.
- 3.) Provide 8 ½” by 11” sheets of paper and pens or pencils for Youth to write monologues.

For Step 4:

- 1.) Provide each Younger Youth one of the “Cell Phone” handout sheets, (Item E) attached with this session.
- 2.) Provide 8 ½” by 11” sheets of paper for Older Youth to design how-to brochures.
- 3.) Provide pens or pencils for both Younger Youth and Older Youth to use in this step.

For Step 5:

- 1.) Provide each Youth with a copy of the “Making Choices . . . Taking Risks” handout sheet (Item F) attached with this session.
- 2.) Provide pens or pencils for use in this step.

“Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It!”

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Item E

“Cell Phone”

Esther’s “Text Message” Based on Esther 4:15-17

[ART: SKETCH OR USE CLIP-ART OF CELL PHONE FACING FORWARD
WITH LARGE ENOUGH SCREEN FOR YOUTH TO WRITE SHORT TEXT MESSAGE ON.]

“Making Choices..Taking Risks”

What do I sense God calling me to do for Him right now in my life?

What right choice do I need to make in a particular situation in which God is calling me to accomplish His will?

What is God calling me to risk for Him in my life?

How do I make the choice to follow God's Calling in my life?

Remember that Esther took some very important steps in making her choice to answer God's call to save her people even at the risk of losing her own life. Esther followed a process very similar to this one in making her choice and taking the risks involved. You may find this process helpful as you seek to answer God's call in your life.

1. Consider all the facts (past and present and seek more information as possible.)
2. Determine the desired outcome.
3. Set specific goals.
4. Evaluate the risks involved.
5. Determine your willingness to achieve the goals.
6. Identify what will be required of you to achieve the goals.
7. Consider your options.
8. Seek God's help and pray for His guidance throughout the situation.
9. Seek help from others whom you trust.
10. Do the right thing and GO FOR IT, trusting God for the results!

MAKING CHOICES... TAKING RISKS

“Making Choices..Taking Risks”

Adult Bible Study

Written by Sharon James,
Franklin Baptist Church, Franklin, VA



Setting the Stage:

Corrie Ten Boom was born in 1892 into a Christian family in Holland. Her parents owned a small jewelry store in the heart of the Jewish section of Amsterdam. Corrie and her older sister, Betsie, were living with their father when Holland surrendered to Nazi Germany. The family's love for their Jewish neighbors was tested as entire families were marched off to concentration camps. In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie tells of an incident in which she asked a pastor who was visiting their home to help protect a mother and newborn infant. The pastor emphatically declined to help, noting that they could lose their lives by helping a Jewish child. Corrie's father took the baby into his arms and declared that losing their lives for the sake of the child would be his family's greatest honor.

Thus began the Ten Booms' involvement in the Dutch underground. Their home developed into the center of an underground ring that daily managed to spirit Jews out of the city to safer places. Corrie dealt with hundreds of stolen ration cards to feed the refugees. She had a false wall built in her bedroom so that there was a hiding place in case of a raid.

In 1944, a fellow Dutchman turned them into the Gestapo. The Ten Boom home was raided and Corrie and her family were arrested. Corrie's father died within ten days of his arrest. Corrie and her sister, Betsie, endured a series of prisons and concentration camps in Holland and Germany. Finally, they were sent to Ravensbruck, one of the most notorious of the concentration camps. Betsie became ill and died there. Because of a clerical error, Corrie was released one week before all the women her age were killed.

After the war ended, Corrie established a home for those who had survived the concentration camps—a place of healing. As Corrie traveled all over the world telling her story, she became an instrument of healing for many people who had experienced the atrocities of the war. (Recommended reading: *The Hiding Place* and *Tramp for the Lord*, both by Corrie Ten Boom.)

Corrie Ten Boom's story may seem a great deal more exciting than our humdrum, day-to-day lives but it is instructional in its message about choices. We all are faced with making choices in our lives – some are easily made because we are certain of the outcome while other choices can place our very lives at risk. Every choice comes with consequences. The challenge to our faith is to risk making just and loving decisions and trust God with the results. If our fear prevents us from taking a risk, then God will do what God needs to do without our help but we will have missed the blessing of participating with God in Kingdom work.

Key Passage: Esther 4:1-17

Central Bible Truth: Making good choices is often difficult and requires us to take risks even when we don't know the outcome. Sometimes we have to do what is right, take the risks and trust God for the results.

Teaching Aim: Help adults to see that we will face many situations where we have to make choices. Many times it might be risky to make the right choices, but we, as Christians, must see that the challenge is to trust God and step out on faith and leave the results to God.

The threat of annihilation of the Jewish people is an age-old story. Adolf Hitler was not the first person in history to try it. More than two thousand years before Corrie Ten Boom was born, another woman chose to risk her life to save the Jews. Unlike Corrie, Esther was herself a Jew but that did not make her decision any easier. Hopefully, her story will lead 21st century Christians to risk everything for the sake of the Gospel.

The Drama:

The best way to read the book of Esther is from beginning to end like a well-written novel. It is a story full of palace intrigue, lavish parties, a beauty contest, treachery, revenge and, at the end, celebration of deliverance from enemies. It is set in the third century BCE during the Persian Empire. The events revolve around the winter palace of the Persian monarch, Ahasuerus.

The story begins with the description of a great feast at the palace. Queen Vashti refuses the drunken king's command to be shown off to the male guests. Livid at the queen's refusal of his command, Ahasuerus has her deposed and organizes a Miss Persia contest to find a replacement. Among the beautiful young maidens brought to the palace for inspection by the king is a young Jewish woman named Hadassah, the cousin and adopted daughter of Mordecai. Two events occur in quick succession: Hadassah (renamed "Esther" to protect her Jewish heritage) finds favor with the king and is crowned queen and Mordecai discovers a palace plot to assassinate the king. Mordecai tells Esther who tells the king and the plotters are quickly done away with.

Meanwhile, Haman, the villainous prime minister, becomes enraged because Mordecai is the only person in the kingdom who refuses to bow down to him. Mordecai remains loyal to God's commandment not to bow down to anyone or anything except God. Because Haman feels it is beneath him to deal directly with Mordecai, a plot is hatched to punish Mordecai by destroying his people...the Jews. As a trusted and close confidant of the king, Haman had no trouble getting Ahasuerus to sign an edict against the Jews.

When Mordecai heard about the plot, he went immediately to Esther to enlist her help. After all, she had access to the king and certainly was in his favor. The problem was that if she approached the king without his invitation, she could be put to death. She was completely reluctant to place herself in such danger. Mordecai reminded her of her responsibility to her people and the opportunity that was hers alone to save them. Esther approached the king, was granted an audience, and invited the king and Haman to a banquet.

At the banquet, Esther pleads for the lives of the Jewish people. The king, confessing ignorance about the edict he has signed, demands to know who is trying to do such a terrible thing. Esther reveals the enemy to be Haman. Shocked, the king leaves the room. Haman falls on Esther's couch, pleading for his life. When the king returns, he thinks Haman is making advances on his queen. The king orders Haman to be hanged on the gallows that had been built for Mordecai.

Esther and Mordecai convince the king to issue an edict reversing Haman's plot. The Jews are given official permission to defend themselves. Thousands of their enemies are killed and thousands more become converts to Judaism.

Bible Background:

The Purpose of Esther

Esther is probably the most "secular" of biblical books. It makes no reference to God's name, to the Temple, to prayer, or to any distinctive Jewish practices. Yet, Esther is highly esteemed in the Jewish canon because it describes the origin of the Jewish festival of Purim. Still celebrated by Jewish communities in February or March, Purim is a festival of freedom, remembering the time when Jews scattered throughout the world were given respect and recognition and the power to defend their way of life.

Purim can be a raucous celebration. The book of Esther is read in the synagogue and whenever the name of Haman is said, children shout and stamp their feet and shake noise makers. Special cookies called hamentaschen ("Haman's hat") are eaten in disdain of the villain. Adults are supposed to drink so much wine that they can no longer tell the difference between "Blessed is Mordecai" and "Accursed is Haman."

Nationalistic in focus, Esther has a definite “us” versus “them” feel. Esther and Mordecai were clever enough to overcome a terrible threat to their people. The salvation of the Jews involved the execution of Haman and the slaughter of thousands of people. Many Bible scholars believe that reference to God is omitted from Esther because of the overt violence described and/or because of the way the festival of Purim is celebrated.

Other scholars explain the omission as “the hidden face of God”. That is to say, God plays a crucial role in the Purim story, but it is behind the scenes. God’s name may not be mentioned, but God seems to be at work at every turn of the story.

The Focus Passage - Esther 4:12-14

In light of the grave consequences of approaching the king without a proper invitation, Esther’s reticence to reveal her identity as a Jew is understandable. In fact, she is embarrassed and perturbed at her cousin Mordecai for making such a public display of himself. When he heard of Haman’s edict to kill the Jews, Mordecai put on sackcloth and ashes and walked through the streets wailing out his grief. Mordecai had placed himself in mourning over an event that had not even happened. His torn garments stood in stark contrast to the beautifully refined and festive garments that Esther wore inside the palace. She had become acclimated to palace life and saw Mordecai’s behavior as an embarrassment, even though no one knew that she was related to him.

As Mordecai pressured Esther to reveal her true identity and appeal to the king for relief from the edict, Esther tried to hide behind court regulations which permitted no one to see the king uninvited. To do so would put her relationship with the king and her life in jeopardy.

Verse 12: Mordecai’s response to Esther is the fulcrum of the entire book. Everything that is to come rests on Esther’s decision. Mordecai certainly would not wish for any harm to come to Esther, but the situation calls for Esther to be able to put aside concern for her own safety in order to save God’s own people.

Verse 13: Mordecai makes very clear to Esther that when violence against the Jews finally is carried out, she will be no safer inside the palace than he will be outside the palace. The instigator of the plan to eliminate the Jews is a high authority in the government. Haman’s hatred will not be satisfied until anyone related to Mordecai in any way is eliminated. It would only be a matter of time before someone would tell him of Esther’s connection to Mordecai.

Verse 14: Even though God’s name is not voiced, this is a clear declaration of divine intervention and justice. Mordecai made it clear that, ultimately, Esther had a personal decision to make. She had the option to keep quiet or to speak up. Either decision carried a great deal of danger for Esther. There was no assurance that doing the right thing would save her life. Her choice would have to be made on the basis of what is right rather than what is safe. If Esther chose not to be a part of the deliverance of her people, Mordecai assured her that help would come from somewhere else and she would lose the opportunity to be part of something larger than herself. But even more, there would be divine judgment upon Esther for neglecting her responsibility to her people.

Here is also a clear statement of divine providence. Perhaps she had become queen because that is where God needed her to help in this particular time of crisis. Mordecai called on Esther to look at the big picture. Becoming queen of Persia was a big deal for Esther. It defined her life from that point forward. But in the big picture, becoming the queen of Persia was not about Esther—it was about God saving God’s people from destruction. The God of Israel had found countless creative ways throughout the millennia to preserve his covenant people. Queen Esther was the instrument of choice on this occasion.

Making the Passage Contemporary

Every day of our lives we are in the process of making decisions. Some decisions come easily and automatically such as what to have for breakfast or what clothes to put on. We may not even realize we are in decision-making mode. Other decisions are more difficult—what college to attend, who to marry, how to invest our savings. The decisions that call for complete trust in God are the choices God calls us to make. God is constantly at work in us and through us but we are not always willing partners. Our human instinct for self-preservation tells us to avoid danger or at least be in control of the situation. When God calls us to a task, the first thing we have to do is relinquish control. God works in surprising ways—ways that we cannot second-guess. The outcome may be completely outside our comprehension but in the big picture that God sees it makes perfect sense. Faith calls us to trust God’s vision. When God calls us to take a risk, God asks us to make an individual choice. He made us with the ability to choose

right or choose wrong. But God will not coerce anyone at any time. Every person must come to an internal conviction that making this choice is the right thing to do, and then each person must find the courage to follow through.

Deciding to take a risk for God does not place us in a protective bubble where nothing bad will happen. God has not promised our protection but rather, our peace. Corrie Ten Boom spent months in prison camps. Her sister and father died. Their decision to risk all for the sake of Christ ultimately led to their deaths. The same can be said for Paul, the Apostles, Stephen and a multitude of Christians down through the ages who have made the risky decision to do what was right rather than what was safe. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, declared that through Christ we have peace while we boast in our sufferings. (Romans 5:1-5)

Beginning the Lesson:

Option 1:

Invite a woman with a gift for story telling or acting to become Corrie Ten Boom. Introduce her to your class as a guest who has come to tell her story. As she tells the story of Ten Boom's life, encourage your guest to place emphasis on how difficult it was to make a decision to place herself and her family in danger to save people who were not like her ethnically or religiously. Ask learners to consider this question as they listen: Has there ever been a time in your life when you had to make a decision that would require you to take a risk on behalf of someone else? How big of a risk was it?

Option 2:

Divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 people. Ask each group to generate a list of five things they consider to be the most important things in life. Have the groups rate the items on their list from greatest importance to least importance.

Bring the groups together and make a list of the top two items from each group. By vote of the class members, determine the top five things that are most important to your class.

Developing The Lesson:

Option 1:

Today as we consider what it means to be called by God, we will pay particular attention to making right choices that may place us at risk. Queen Esther is a prime example of someone who is called to make a tough decision with potentially hazardous results. The focus of our study is Esther's point of decision found in Esther 4.

Give a brief synopsis of the events in Esther leading up to 4:12-14. Because there are multiple characters which can become confusing, write each character's name on the board or flip chart as you come to them in the story. Beside each character, write a descriptive word to help identify their role in the story. For instance: Vashti – Former queen; Mordecai – Cousin/father; Haman – Villain; Ahasuerus – King of Persia; Esther – heroine/queen.

Ask learners to read Esther 4:12-14.

- What is Mordecai asking Esther to do?
- Mordecai uses two main arguments to persuade Esther to action. What are they?
[She will be no safer inside the palace than outside; Perhaps God has placed her in the palace for just this occasion.]
- If Esther fails to act, deliverance will come for the Jews in some other way. What are the consequences for Esther?
[She will perish, ending any hope of continuing the family blood lines. If Esther dies, her whole family dies.]

Ask someone to read 4:15-17 to find out what Esther decided to do.

- How will Esther find the strength to carry out her task?
- Does her attitude change or does she simply give in to Mordecai's pressure?

Continue the synopsis of the story to its end.

- The name of God is never mentioned in Esther. What evidence is there of God at work behind the scenes?

Option 2:

Ask two people to play the parts of Esther and Mordecai in a talk show format. They will need to read the book of Esther ahead of time and be able to answer questions about the story. As the host of the talk show, the Bible study leader will ask leading questions about the plot, the people and the motives. Pay particular attention to how and why Esther made her decision to place herself in danger to help her people. Invite the “audience” to ask questions or make comments about the events.

Applying the Lesson:

Option 1:

Recall the story of Corrie Ten Boom presented at the beginning of the class. Ask: How were the risks faced by Corrie Ten Boom and Esther similar? How were they different? What was the outcome of each story? Was the outcome worth the risk made by each woman? How was God at work in each story?

Divide the class into groups of five. Ask each group to discuss the following:

Think about the circumstances of your life as it is now. What do you think God is calling you to do? How do your circumstances impede that call? What decision might you have to make to answer the call?

Option 2:

Using the list generated in Option 2 from “Beginning the Lesson”, ask the learners these questions:

1. For which of these five things that we said are the most important things in life would you risk your life or well being? Why?
2. How do you evaluate the risks of alternatives you face? If you knew that God was asking you to take the risk, would your decision be different?
3. What if God asked you to risk everything for something not on your top five list or even your top ten list. What criteria would you use to make a decision about your involvement?
4. Our vision tends to be myopic. We can see no further than our own life at this moment. How do we see God’s big picture?