

MAKING CHOICES... TAKING RISKS

“Making Choices...Taking Risks”

Youth Bible Study

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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!