

STAND UP: HOW TO FIGHT INJUSTICE



God chooses to work through ordinary people.

We live in a world of injustice.

- ▶ Over twenty million people are victims of human trafficking.
- ▶ One in nine people in the world suffer from chronic malnourishment.
- ▶ Racism abounds on all fronts.

We've seen great injustice played out on the world stage, but we also know injustice on a personal level. It's easy to ask: "Where is God in the midst of the injustice I see?"

We may even desire to do something about what we see, but other questions threaten to shut down our best intentions: "Who am I? What could I possibly do to make a difference?"

The Book of Esther gives us insight into these questions. In a time of great injustice against their own Jewish people, Mordecai and Esther rose to the occasion and took a stand. It was potentially a costly stand, but it was the right one. As we look at their lives, we see a model for how we can live for Christ as we stand up for others.

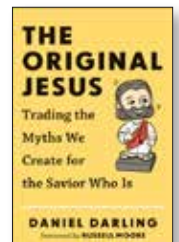
Perhaps you feel the tug on your heart toward the work of justice, but you don't know how you can make a difference. This study will prepare us to first get on our knees in prayer, and then, trusting the hand of God, we can roll up our sleeves and get involved. The same God who worked through Mordecai and Esther is working in the world today, calling ordinary people to an extraordinary mission—His mission.

Let's discover how God is calling us to stand up and work for justice.



Daniel Darling

Daniel is Vice-President of Communications for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and Pastor of Teaching and Discipleship at Green Hill Church in Nashville, Tennessee. He lives in the Nashville area with his wife and four children. He is the author of six books, including *The Original Jesus*.



Stand Up: How to Fight Injustice

Session 1 **Be Ready to Stand** *Esther 2:5-10,15-17*

Session 2 **Stand with Conviction** *Esther 2:21-3:6*

Session 3 **Stand Down** *Esther 4:1-3,10-16*

Session 4 **Stand with Humility** *Esther 5:1-14*

Session 5 **Stand Up and Speak** *Esther 7:1-10*

Session 6 **Keep Standing** *Esther 8:1-8; 9:20-22*

1

BE READY TO STAND



When have you been at just the right place at just the right time?

QUESTION #1

God is always at work behind the scenes.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

History often turns on seemingly small events.

- ▶ What if Richard Nixon had listened to advisors and rested before his televised debate with John Kennedy in 1960?
- ▶ What if Gerald Ford had not accidentally misstated his response to a foreign policy question in his final debate with Jimmy Carter in 1976?

Our lives also often turn on seemingly small events. A lot of people chalk up these moments to “coincidence,” but could it be more than that? Christians often can look back at certain moments in their lives and see that, although they may not have been aware of it at the time, God had His hand on them and their circumstances.

Esther could attest to that. Esther was a young Jewish girl in a strange land, and God was at work in her life, putting her in the right place at the right time. She may not have been aware of it at the time, but God was working behind the scenes to put her in a place of power and significance.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Esther 2:5-7

⁵ Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, ⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. ⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. ⁸ When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. ⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem. ¹⁰ Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

Esther was a Jewish girl who had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. Living in a strange land under a despot, King Xerxes, she was forced to participate in the king's unseemly beauty pageant. She had few choices and few options. Yet, as her story unfolds, we witness her dramatic rise to power.

How did a Jewish girl end up in this foreign place? In 586 BC, the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem, just as the prophets had predicted. God was fulfilling His promised judgment on the rebellious nation of Judah. Then, in 539, the Persians defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jewish exiles to return home. (See Ezra 1:1-4.) Many Jewish exiles made the return trip, but others like Mordecai and Esther chose to stay in Persia.

What about Esther's circumstances catches your attention?

QUESTION #2

Before we go any further with the events in Esther's and Mordecai's lives, note that God was active in what was happening. For some, that statement may seem surprising because, unlike any other Bible book, nothing about God is mentioned in the Book of Esther. Neither His law nor His covenant is mentioned—not even His name! However, the lack of any theological language does not mean God was distant or inactive. God was working to keep His promises to save His people and He was using the unlikeliest of people in the process.

So, as we move through the Book of Esther and see the challenges both Esther and Mordecai faced, we'll be reminded that while it is easy to believe God in the abstract, it can be far more difficult to see His hand in the struggles of life. But God has placed each of us where we are in this moment in history to speak up and speak out, to spread the good news of His deliverance, and to stand for Him wherever possible.

Esther 2:8-10

⁸ When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.

⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem. ¹⁰ Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

When have you found yourself completely outside your comfort zone?

QUESTION #3

GOD-INCIDENCES

Use the timeline below to mark significant moments in your life. Label them with a simple title: birth, school change, first job, big car accident, and so on. Then write a brief description of how you can now see God's hands in those events.



"Nothing is a surprise to God; nothing is a setback to His plans; nothing can thwart His purposes; and nothing is beyond His control!"

— JONI EARECKSON TADA

The Book of Esther begins with the account of Queen Vashti's treatment of the king and her subsequent loss of position. But now the king was without a queen, and he set out to change that by choosing from a number of eligible young women. Hundreds of women were uprooted from their families and communities to live in relative isolation in the king's harem—and that included Esther.

Esther gained the favor of Hegai, the overseer of the king's harem. Out of hundreds of young women, why did Esther get noticed? Verse 7 tells us she was physically attractive, but surely other aspects of her character also caused Hegai to be pleased with her.

Let's not overlook the "silent" hand of God at work. The whole theme of Esther is the invisible hand of God in using flawed men and women at just the right moment to save His people. It was God who endowed Esther with her attractive character and physical traits, and it was God who allowed Esther to gain extraordinary favor in that moment for purposes she didn't yet fully understand.

Have you ever found yourself in a place you didn't expect to be? It happens to all of us in one way or another.

- ▶ A job transfer to another state.
- ▶ A "surprise" pregnancy and birth of child number three.
- ▶ A middle school Bible study group has a new leader—you.

We've all been there, but we shouldn't see these simply as unexpected circumstances; these are unexpected opportunities! Nothing that happens in life is a surprise to God. We can either be caught off guard by new challenges, or we can see them as God's divine appointments—opportunities He has given us. At first, we may not know where this new "adventure" will lead, but we certainly can trust the One who is with us the whole time.

When we seek to please God—no matter where we find ourselves—He will open doors we could never imagine. The opportunity is there to honor Him in our circumstances and do great things for Him.



Esther 2:15-17

¹⁵ When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. ¹⁶ She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Four years transpired between the time Xerxes dethroned Vashti and he made Esther his new queen. During a portion of that time, hundreds of women waited with uncertainty. *When will my turn come? Will I please the king? Will I become the queen?* Esther perhaps felt that same uncertainty, moving along the track from an orphaned Jewish slave to participant in Xerxes's harem to queen of Persia. Yet, of all the young women in Persia, Esther was perhaps the least likely to end up in the palace. She was Jewish with no family name that might propel her to power. And yet she was now the queen—placed in a position of influence and given the resources to serve God's people in ways she was not yet aware. God was at work, moving to fulfill His many promises to preserve His people.

God even works in less than ideal situations. We can't deny that King Xerxes used sinful practices in seeking a new queen. Esther participated in a process that didn't honor God's design for sexuality and marriage. It is important to remember that the Bible records many historical events while not endorsing the sinful behavior in those events. Yet, God always works—even in a fallen, sinful world.

Esther surely didn't realize its full impact, but God was behind her story, putting her in a place of influence. Her position would benefit her, her own people, and ultimately, we would all benefit, for Jesus' family lineage came from the very people she helped to save.

How do we navigate the tension between the messiness of Esther's story thus far and God's sovereign plan?

QUESTION #4

Where has God positioned you right now to be a person of influence?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

God is at work—even behind the scenes. What will you do with that truth? Choose one of the following applications.

- ▶ **Look back.** Reflect on your walk with Christ. What events has God used in your past to bring you to Him—or bring you closer to Him? Consider those events that may have even seemed minor or inconsequential at the time. Thank God for His faithful work in your life.
- ▶ **Make a list.** List the gifts, skills, or attributes God has given you. Ask God to show you how you can use those to honor Him, even in unfavorable situations.
- ▶ **Encourage others.** You may know someone facing circumstances beyond his or her control. Offer your support and encouragement. Help the person see that God is present—and He is at work even if it is not yet evident.

Your personal history is no doubt filled with many forks in the road where things could have been otherwise. But it's good to know that we have a God who works things out for our good—and His glory!

My thoughts

