

ESTHER

A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

STUDY THREE

Strength and Dignity on Parade

Esther 2:8–20

God has given the woman a sense of strength and dignity that is found in no other of His creations.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GOD bestows a special glory to women to uniquely express His image and presence in our world. Among a woman's innumerable traits are:

1. Intuition—sensing what isn't said,
2. Endurance—persevering through trials,
3. Responsiveness—tuning in to God and others,
4. Vulnerability—remaining unguarded and transparent

In the book of Esther, God chose to display these strengths through a young Jewish woman whom He used for the sake of His glory and for the good of His people. It's a real-life Cinderella story. The hand of God, not a fairy's wand, opened the way for Esther, and it wasn't her outer beauty that turned the king's head but her character.

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll follow Esther's rise from her small house to the palace, from being an adopted orphan to becoming the queen of Persia. From Esther's example, women can glean insight for spiritual maturity, and men can learn valuable lessons too—in their own spiritual maturity and in how to encourage and honor godliness in the special women in their lives.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

The vanity of King Ahasuerus stands in contrast to Esther's heart of humility, which the psalmist's prayer reflects:

*Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity,
And revive me in Your ways.
Establish Your word to Your servant,
As that which produces reverence for You.*
(Psalm 119:37–38 NASB)

Personalize this prayer by writing it in your own words. As you study God's Word, pray for the Spirit's aid and His wisdom.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

An often-overlooked character is Queen Vashti, who played an essential role in Esther's rise. Vashti's courageous refusal of King Ahasuerus' command to parade herself indecently before his officials made it possible for Esther to become queen in her place. Vashti stood up to the most powerful man in the kingdom at the expense of her marriage and her throne. She may have lost her crown, but she kept her integrity—a far more valuable prize. Vashti's character was the backdrop on which Esther would display her character, earn the king's favor, and preserve the destiny of the Jewish people. Let's look closer at how Esther stepped into the spotlight and won the hearts of all those around her.

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Observation: Esther's Character on Display

The first phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method is observation.¹ During observation, use only your Bible to focus on the words of the author. Don't consult commentaries or dictionaries. Block out time and find a place without distractions. With pen, paper, and an attentive mind, use this time of observation to commune with God through His sacred text.

Slowly read *Esther 2:8–20*.

Pursued and Discovered—Esther 2:8

King Ahasuerus' search for a queen to replace Vashti in Esther 2:1–4 turned the spotlight on Mordecai and his cousin, Esther, in 2:5–7. Mordecai and Esther lived in Susa because their ancestors were exiled by the Babylonians from Jerusalem.

Esther was one of many young women who were “brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa” (Esther 2:8), which suggests that Esther didn't go voluntarily. She was taken. What do you imagine was going through Esther's mind and heart?

Why would a young Jewish woman want to get involved in a plan that would involve time with a heathen king and the possibility of intermarriage outside her race? Why would Mordecai ever give his permission for such? It's safe to say she went reluctantly. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Prepared and Chosen—Esther 2:9–17

What did Hegai see in Esther, according to Esther 2:9?

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How does Esther 2:10–11 depict Esther and Mordecai’s close relationship?

Peruse 2:12–15. Can you smell those perfumes and feel the ointments? Despite the pampering, Esther didn’t let the special treatment go to her head. What admirable qualities do you observe in Esther’s attitude and actions?

This is a chance of a lifetime for Esther to have whatever she wishes. She just simply stands on her own character and the advice of the man who knew what seemed to be best. It was a real unselfish modesty, a withdrawal from extravagance, an authenticity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

According to 2:16, in what year was Esther taken to King Ahasuerus? How many years had passed between Ahasuerus’ argument with Vashti and Esther’s entrance (see Esther 1:3)? No mincing words—the author gets right to his point. What happened in 2:17?

According to 2:18–20, what does the author tell us about Esther’s new status? How did the king honor her—unlike the way he dishonored Vashti? What new role did Mordecai receive? What does the author repeat in these verses which was mentioned in 2:10?

Esther went to the king without fear. She had no driving interest in the entire process. Her life did not revolve around her physical appearance or simply making a king happy. She knew who she was. And she knew that God’s hand was on her life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Qualities Worth Modeling

Behind the scenes in our passage, we see God intertwining the lives of an inconsequential, young Jewish woman with the most powerful man on earth, the king of Persia. As Esther willingly yields to God's sovereign plan, God helps her find favor with others.

In Esther 2:9, the phrase “she found favor” (NASB), uses the Hebrew word, *chesed*, which also means “goodness and kindness.” What insight into Esther's character does this word give?

What might be a reason for Mordecai wanting to keep Esther's Jewish identity concealed (*Esther 2:10*)?

Imagine the competition that may have existed between the women in the harem and the lifestyle described in *2:12–14*. What qualities made Esther stand out, according to *2:15–17*?

The phrases, “Esther was finding favor” (2:15 NASB) and “she found favor” (2:17 NASB) repeat the same Hebrew word, *chen*, which also means “grace, charm, elegance, acceptance.” What insight into Esther's character does that word give you?

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In Esther 1–2, the author answers the question, “How did a young Jewish girl become queen of Persia?” Let’s list six qualities Esther displayed:

1. *Grace-filled charm and elegance*—“Hegai was very impressed with Esther” (2:9)
2. *Unusual restraint and control*—“Esther had not told anyone of her nationality” (2:10)
3. *Continually teachable spirit*—“because Mordecai had directed her not to do so” (2:10)
4. *Unselfish modesty and authenticity*—“she asked for nothing except what [Hegai] suggested” (2:15)
5. *Winsomeness regardless of her surroundings*—“she accepted the advice of Hegai” (2:15)
6. *Humble respect for authority*—“she was still following Mordecai’s directions, just as she did when she lived in his home” (2:20)

God used Esther’s charm, elegance, teachable spirit, and her authenticity along with her beauty to win the heart of the king.



Correlation: Mirroring God’s Goodness and Grace

Esther 2:17 says Esther “found *favor* and *kindness*” with the king (NASB, emphasis added). Ahasuerus viewed Esther with both *chesed* and *chen*, goodness and grace. This is the first place where both Hebrew words are used to emphasize Esther’s effect on the king. Both words are often used of God throughout the Old Testament.

Write down the descriptions of God’s goodness and grace that you find in the following verses:

Genesis 39:21: _____

Psalms 33:4–5: _____

Psalms 103:8: _____

Psalms 107:13–16: _____

How did Esther uniquely reflect God’s image and presence in the pagan world in which she lived?

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Application: Growing in Goodness and Grace

Begin applying our passage by, first, *asking God to cultivate character within you* and, second, *by trusting God to control the circumstances around you*.

Let's look at specific ways that women and men can apply these principles.

Women—Growing in Godliness

As Esther endured uncontrollable circumstances—taken from her home and placed in a harem—she focused upon what she knew to be right and wise. She even asked Hegai for advice (Esther 2:15). Are you in a season where you focus too much on what you can't control? Write a prayer expressing your confidence in God's goodness and your commitment to do what you know to be right and wise.

When Esther had the opportunity to lavishly adorn herself, she didn't. She didn't embrace the added superficiality in an already superficial environment but remained humble and loyal. She displayed a depth of character that caused others to notice. For this week, what can you put into practice to foster your own spiritual growth? Ask God to cultivate your character.

Men—Encouraging Godliness in Women

Men, think of the special women in your life. First, simply write a prayer of gratitude for those women.

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Take time to think seriously about one or two things you can do this week to encourage them in their journey toward godliness and spiritual depth. Record what comes to mind.

Finally, apply the principles to your walk with the Lord. In a closing prayer, ask God to cultivate your character and express your trust in Him to control the circumstances around you.

Reflective Wrap-Up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write down one thing to *remember* about God.

Write down one way you can *respond* to God's Word.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how great it is to see You exalt into high places those who choose not to exalt themselves—like Esther. So I pray for humility. I ask for a greater awareness of Your control in my circumstances and for a deeper assurance of Your goodness toward me. Conform me, dear Father, into the image of Your Son, Jesus, and use me as You will—whether as a royal on the earth or as one who’s despised. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*”

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and revised by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 1989, 2018, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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