

Meet Carol

My name is Carol Warren. My name means song of joy. My mother often told me I was her song of joy when I was born and growing up because of my easy-going nature. When I came to know Jesus as my personal savior at age 24, Jesus' song of joy was born in my heart and has been my life's song ever since.

I was born in 1954 in Santa Rosa, CA. I was the second of four children (three girls and one boy). My older sister was one year and nine months older than me, my younger sister was six and a half years younger, and my brother was a year younger than her. We lived in a coastal town until I was four and then moved inland to Healdsburg. My family moved to the Redding area when I was six. My dad was an entrepreneur—very driven and smart. He was a small business owner. (He came to the Lord at age 79!)

My formative years were spent in Anderson, living in the country. My sister and I shared a horse. Life was good. My parents were not rich, but they worked hard, and we always had what we needed. They were good people, and though they did not know the Lord personally, they always tried to do their best. Our neighbors took my older sister and me to Sunday School with them when I was in 2nd and 3rd grade, and the songs I learned are still in my heart, but I didn't hear about accepting Jesus as my savior.

My family heritage is Scandinavian, English, and Dutch. I remember my mom's mom making Swedish pancakes, and she was very sweet. Recently, I came across some of her things, and there was a prayer pamphlet she kept in her Bible that was very powerful. I know she always prayed for me.

We lost my older sister in a car accident when I was 19. I was very dependent on her, and this left a huge hole in my heart. I tried to fill it with all kinds of wrong things, yet the songs we had sung in Sunday School were always in the back of my mind. I went through five years of very "lost living," during which time I was married and divorced. My ex-husband had been a Vietnam vet and suffered PTSD, so you can imagine the turmoil for us both without Jesus. I lived a lost and searching lifestyle for a few more years.

I was desperate for peace and fulfillment and liked new adventures, so at the suggestion of a friend, we visited a church in Palo Cedro where you could wear blue jeans. (God works in mysterious ways.) The worship was scripture verses, and the Bible was taught verse by verse. (This was Little Country Church in 1979.) The Holy Spirit grabbed my lost soul and broken heart immediately—my life has been the Lord's ever since.

I moved to Reno two years later to help plant a church, and after a few years, I met my husband, who attended there, whom I've been married to for 38 years. We have two adult children and one granddaughter. God restored the years the locust had eaten.

The Lord let me know early on that my ministry would be "where the rubber meets the road." There was a time when I thought for sure we were called to the mission field. My husband and I visited missionaries in Ukraine with this intent. But my husband, with much prayer and wisdom, said "no" for many reasons. It was death to the vision for me. I've volunteered for many years in various areas of the church, but my mission field has been "where the rubber meets the road," working in the medical field, praying and sharing my faith with many hurting people over the years. I have also been able to go on many short-term mission trips.

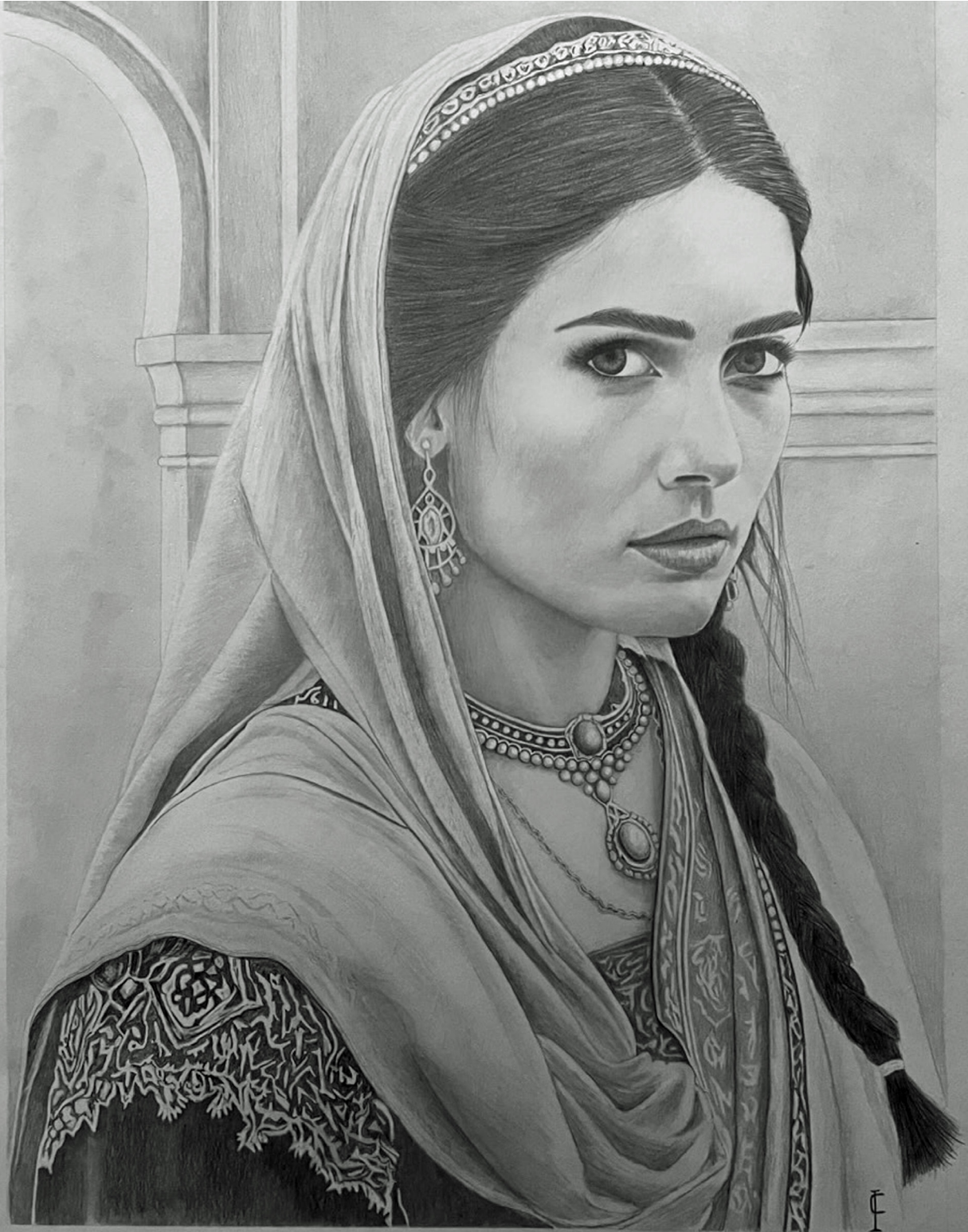
I'm in a new season now: retired, wife, mom, and grandparent, and I'm also still getting to serve at church. God is so faithful to continue to add to my faith daily by His continued grace. I've struggled with pride in the form of

insecurities throughout my life, yet the Lord is always just a cry away, forgiving, showing me His value, and building His workmanship in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:10).

Reflection Question:

What is your character story? What does your name mean?

Meet Esther



“And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful.”

Esther 2:7

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“...add to your faith virtue, to virtue, knowledge, to knowledge, self-control, to self-control, perseverance, to perseverance, godliness, to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
2 Peter 1:5-8

In our Christian growth, character matters. In asking myself how my character is perceived, maybe I do okay. Are the above qualities present so that I may abound and be fruitful in all things? The Amplified Bible says in this verse that these characteristics prevent us from being useless or unproductive as Christians.

These godly habits become our humble natural response as Christ’s love is perfected in and through us as we grow and develop. “The right thing to do with godly habits is to immerse them in the life of the Lord until they become such a spontaneous expression of our lives, that we are no longer aware of them.” (Oswald Chambers)

Reaction, when seemingly cornered, makes all the difference. Do I reflect my Lord Jesus like a beautiful flower opened to the sunshine (vulnerable and sweet), or do I close up and lash out like a thorn bush? I pray to respond in obedience as Queen Esther did, “for such a time as this,” to benefit God’s Kingdom.

Even though when Mordecai first asked Esther to go before the king, her response was fear for her life, she quickly responded with submission, asking the Jews in Susa to fast and pray (seek the Lord), and afterward, she would go before the king. She had a godly fear to obey even in the scariest circumstances.

As we examine Esther’s character this week, I pray we are open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and power in us to submit and become all God wants for each of us. May we develop a character pleasing to Him and hear His calling to us in love.

“I press toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

1. Please read Esther chapters 2-7 and write down anything that stands out about Esther.

What does the name Esther mean?

- The Persian meaning of the name is *star*.
- Esther’s Hebrew name is *Hadassah*, meaning *myrtle*. This meaning has more significance regarding her life calling, journey, and personality.

The myrtle is a significant bush in the history of Israel. David Guzik says “The prophetic symbolism of the myrtle is that it would replace the briars and thorns of the desert, so depicting the Lord’s forgiveness and acceptance of His people.” (Isaiah 41:19, 55:13, and Zechariah 1:8)

As we read through the book of Esther, we see the beauty of her personality and her significant calling unfold for God’s people.

2. Write out Esther 2:7.

We see here that she was lovely and beautiful. This is literally beautiful and lovely to look at (pleasant in form and features).

3. What was Esther’s family background? (from verse 7)

“This Jewish community had been forced to relocate out of Judah (586 BC) and didn’t decide to return with Ezra (527 BC). In the days of Mordecai and Esther, the land of Judah was regarded as a wild and backward place.” (Guzik, Blue Letter Bible) It would have been a very harsh lifestyle, and they had adapted to the comforts of Persia.

4. Esther 2:10 tells us that Esther had not revealed her people or family by the instruction of Mordecai. Why do you think he had instructed her this way?

There are many speculations. It was a dark time, and survival was key.

5. Have you ever hidden your relationship with Christ for your own preservation? Read Matthew 10:32-33 and write it out.

Although there are times when the Lord leads us to wait in strategic witness, always pray for wisdom and grace without fear. (God is much bigger than our fears—1 John 4:4).

As Queen, Esther lived in the capital city of Persia, Susa, the location of King Ahasuerus’ (Xerxes’) winter retreat palace. Esther was living in a morally compromised culture according to the Torah. There was a lot of drinking, anger, sex, and murder to which Esther was exposed, often in direct violation of Jewish (and moral law.) But God reaches out in this dark place and sees her heart, despite the compromised living conditions, that still believes and is willing to obey, to the glory of God.

Let's now identify and look at some of the godly character qualities in Esther that we see in scripture.

Beautiful (Esther 2:7)

Esther was known for her physical beauty. Esther was also beautiful spiritually, as we can see from her choice to choose her people and their survival over her own (Esther 4:11).

6. Please read Esther 1:11, 2:3 & 7, Proverbs 31:30, and 1 Peter 3:4. Write out the verse that most speaks to you about true beauty, and comment on what the Lord says to your heart.

Submissive (Esther 2:20, 4:14-16)

Esther was raised by her cousin, Mordecai. Even though he wasn't her biological father, she listened, respected, and obeyed his authority, regardless of whether it didn't make sense or wasn't safe.

7. Please read these verses and comment on how the Lord directs you: Romans 6:16, James 4:7, 1 Peter 2:13, 1 Peter 5:5.

Prepared (Esther 2:9 & 12)

The preparation for the possibility of becoming the queen is interesting, with six months of treatments with oil of myrrh and another six months with perfumes and spices. These were the preparations for beautifying women.

Myrrh was used to reduce inflammation and as a detox to kill bacteria and heal sores. The people lived in a hot climate and had chronic body odor. In addition, myrrh was used as a burial spice to counter the smells of death. It was also one of the gifts the wise men gave to Jesus when He was born.

The perfumes and spices were to restore and rejuvenate, similar to a spa treatment we might experience today.

8. How have you prepared each day for Jesus, your King? Read the following verses and write your response. Allow the Word of God to detox you through confession of sin (1 John 1:9) and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with regenerating purpose, beauty, and power—all for His glory. Psalm 91:1-2, Matthew 24:42-44, Matthew 25:1-10, John 15:4, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Peter 3:15, Revelation 19:7.

Courageous and Bold (Esther 5:1-3)

David Guzik says, “Esther showed courage in her willingness to appear before the king without being summoned by him. This took special courage because King Ahasuerus did not have a good reputation for treating the queen well.”

A “queen” of this time in Persia did not co-rule with the king. She was a possession, an ornament, not necessarily respected. (Jesus changed this outlook for women.)

9. How do these verses encourage your heart to be courageous for the Lord? Please write out the verse that most impacts you, and share with your group how this has strengthened you spiritually. Joshua 10:25, 2 Samuel 10:12, Psalm 27:14, 31:24, 138:3, 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

Wisdom and Tact (Esther 7:3-4)

In his commentary on Blue Letter Bible, David Guzik states, “Esther, even when she finally made her request, showed great tact. She did not immediately identify herself as a Jew, targeted for massacre.”

Esther was wise and patient as she planned for the first banquet and then the second. She gave time for the Lord to work. (Esther 6)

10. Read the following verses, allowing the Holy Spirit to search you and apply His wisdom and tact to a situation you are facing right now in your life: Psalm 51:6, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 2:2-5, Eph. 1:17-18, James 1:5, 3:17.

Seeker of God (Esther 4:15-16)

Esther’s story has a golden thread of devotion to the Lord. Her godly character is evident throughout. “Esther decided that she would go and make a bold appearance before the king, but only if she was supported by prayer and fasting” (David Guzik).

11. Please comment on your need for God’s presence and how you’ve seen Him work in a situation because you sought Him. Read the following verses, and include another scripture that is relevant to seeking the Lord: Psalm 27:4, 34:10-11, 57:2-3, Isaiah 55:6, Matthew 6:33-34, Hebrews 11:6.

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12. Please share about a person who has influenced you as an example of these godly characteristics and how they have encouraged you to continue seeking the Lord in your life.

13. How have these verses we've studied this week gripped your heart to desire to seek the Lord wholeheartedly?